West African migrant women in Australia: Stories of resilience and strength

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"There is a kind of strength that is almost frightening in black women. It's as if a steel rod runs right through the head down to the feet" – Maya Angelou

"I am the master of my destiny. I define my own future. I am not a victim. I am a conqueror" - Dr Tererai Trent

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Certificate of original Authorship

I, Olutoyin Sowole, declare that this thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Faculty of Health at the University of Technology Sydney.

This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis. This piece of work has not previously been submitted for a degree at any other academic institution.

Signature of Student

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Glorious God, wonderful God,

Miracle worker, King of kings,

Omnipotent One, I worship You,

Your Majesty is forevermore!

Dedication

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Mummy S.O Babatunde *[my 'Wura']* translated to 'my gold'. You were a woman among women and indeed a golden mother to your children and others around you.

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Outputs to date

Peer-reviewed journal article

Babatunde-Sowole, O., Power, T., Jackson, D., Davidson, P.M. & DiGiacomo, M. 2016, 'Resilience of African migrants: An integrative review', *Health Care for Women International*, vol. 37, no. 9, pp. 946-63.

Conference presentations and posters

Babatunde-Sowole, O. O., Power, T., Jackson, D., Davidson, P. & DiGiacomo, M. 2016, '[West] African women migrants in Australia: implications for health care', *39th Annual International Conference African Studies Association of Australasia and the Pacific (AFSAAP)*, Perth, Australia. (Oral presentation), December 5-7.

Babatunde-Sowole O. O., Power, T., Davidson, P., Jackson, D. & DiGiacomo, M. 2016. 'Overcoming trauma: West African women's experiences of healing in Australia', *International Council of Women Health's Issues Conference,* Baltimore, USA. (Poster presentation), November 6-9.

Babatunde-Sowole O. O. 2017, 'A qualitative exploration of West African women's approaches to healing post migration to Australia', *Research Student Forum* Faculty of Health, UTS, Australia, (Poster presentation), December 6.

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Media

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List of abbreviations used in this thesis

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
CALD	Culturally and linguistically diverse
IPV	intimate partner violence
NHMR	National Health and Medical Research
NSW	New South Wales
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UN-DESA	United Nations Department of Economics and Social Affairs
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USA	United States of America
UTS	University of Technology Sydney
UTS HREC	Human Research Ethics Committee

Glossary of terms

Adversity

Adversity is the state of hardship resulting from life challenges or suffering in relation to misfortune, trauma, difficulty or loss.

Asylum-seekers

An asylum-seeker is an individual seeking protection in a country other than their home country and is awaiting the grant of legal refugee status.

Attachment theory

Attachment theory is an enduring healthy physical and psychological connection that people form with significant others. The attachment instils a sense of self-esteem, value and self-confidence, which then provides appropriate support during stressful times even while far away from their significant others. Attachment theory is critical to human resilience as it provides a cushion effect in adapting during adversity and separation from the familiar.

Centrelink

Centrelink is a section of Australian Government operated by the Department of Human Services. The duty of this department is to provide social security payments and services for eligible Australian people.

Department of Community Services

The Department of Community Services protects vulnerable members of society, inclusive of children and young people. The department is responsible for the safety and wellbeing of children and young people with the aim of ensuring that they are protected from any form of abuse, harm and neglect. The department's protection includes providing shelter for the homeless, and to protect victims of domestic violence and sexual assault.

Immigrants

Immigrants are people who voluntarily leave their country of birth in search of education, employment opportunities and improved living conditions, for example, in another country.

Medicare

Medicare is the government scheme that provides Australian residents access to healthcare.

Migrants

Migrants are people that were born overseas and are living in another country, with the exception of diplomats and their families. 'Migrant' is the encompassing term under which asylum-seekers, immigrants, and refugees sit.

Refugees

A refugee is a person who has fled due to confirmed persecution in their home country and cannot return due to life-threatening situations.

Resilience

Resilience is the capacity to feel competence in the face of precarious adverse conditions and maintain equilibrium to achieve good outcomes rather than a later recovery.

Ubuntu

Ubuntu is the African philosophy and way of living. Ubuntu represents the communalism connectedness and community living in Africa and within African people.

Vulnerability

Vulnerability connotes susceptibility to some form of harm. For the purposes of this study, it is the degree to which the migrant woman is susceptible to the effects of migration adversity.

West Africa

Also referred to as Western Africa, this sub-region of the African continent is made up of the following countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Cote D'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo.

Womanism

African womanism is the African continental version of feminism, which according to its proponents, accommodates the African woman's sense of equality. The framework recognises 'family-hood' and consequently incorporates the African men in their understanding of solving African women inferiority status as bestowed upon them by the patriarchal society. In this thesis, African womanism denotes the voice of African women in presenting their experiences of migration and resettlement tenacities during the various adversities they might have encountered.

ABSTRACT

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Background and rationale

African migrants are increasing in number in high-income countries, including in Australia. Currently, there is limited research around the experiences of West African migrant women living in Australia, especially in New South Wales, and none using a strengths-based approach. As the number of African migrant women in Australia continues to increase, it is imperative that we understand these women's experiences of successful settlement and re-establishment in Australia. Consequently, the broad aim of this thesis is to understand the strength and resilience strategies that West African-born women drew upon in their early years of settlement and re-establishing themselves in Australia. This research also documents the strength strategies that West African migrant women utilised in preparing their children for life adversities and challenges as they resettled in Australia.

Methods

A systematic review of the literature helped generate a conceptual framework using the Bronfenbrenner ecological model (1979). As a positive approach to studying the population, Smith's strengths-based conceptual framework (2006), was applied and feminism principles were also incorporated to explore the intersection of race, gender and minority variables in the women's stories.

The study design and data collection process were qualitative storytelling. Stories from 22 West African women living in New South Wales, Australia, who voluntarily participated in the study, were thematically analysed. Ethics approval (Appendix D) was received for the study from the University of Technology Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee as well as written permission (Appendix A) to utilise the Migrant Resource Centre's facilities for study brochures and flyers (Appendix C).

Findings

The concept of resilience adapted in this study is defined as the capacity to feel competence in the face of precarious adverse migration living conditions and maintain equilibrium to achieve good outcomes. Themes and sub-themes that emerged from the women's stories generated data that supported the above definition. Past personal life and events were pivotal to the women's experiences and were portrayed in the first main theme: *connecting past life to the future.* Two additional main themes, *embracing the new reality* and *forming connections to build support*, underscored the socio-ecological factors that influenced the women's resilience and strength strategies.

All of the women experienced culture shock in relocating to a new country. Experiences of racism, discrimination and xenophobic attitudes were among women's negative experiences. Women's optimism and motivation were linked to securing a better life and future opportunities for themselves and their families, especially their children, and being able to support their families back in West Africa. The women's resilience and strengths were related to their religious beliefs and spirituality, communalism, optimism and hardiness.

Through insights from the women's stories, this study documents an often-neglected strength perspective of African people, thereby contrasting the vast negative discourse in the literature. An original and unique contribution to knowledge from the study includes the women's resilience legacy for incoming women migrants. This piece of work gave women a voice, which was achieved through the storytelling methodology and feminism framework adapted for this study.

Conclusions

Resilience has a significant impact for the resettlement, health and wellbeing of migrants. Findings from this study have implications for policy, practice and future research. Research findings identify healthcare workers' vital roles. The study outcomes indicate that healthcare and allied professionals are capable of supporting the improvement of African women migrants' health status and behaviours by capitalising on their resilience and strength, and utilising it for

their care. Health workers at the hospital and community level can make referrals to culturally appropriate resources and support for new migrants since health workers are, in most cases, the first point of contact. Findings also suggest the need for awareness and greater sensitivity to women's past experiences, and how that might shape their choices in accessing healthcare. The findings are useful for health and allied care workers in their care of both current and future African migrants, especially women. The thesis contributes a highly needed feminist study around African women migrants in Australia and, by extension, to other developed countries throughout the world.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

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"A mere trickle to begin with, the human flow through footpaths and surrogate roads would swell gradually into a torrent" (Soyinka 1989, p. 142)

Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of Africa, West Africa and the migration of African people to Australia. In addition, the chapter highlights the aims and objectives of the study and the research question guiding it. Finally, the chapter states the significance of the study and provides a succinct outline of the thesis structure.

Background

The process of re-establishing residence in a new country is laden with various challenges for migrants. The term 'migrants' is an all-inclusive term that encompasses immigrants or skilled and family unification migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers, as well as international students (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2012). This thesis is about West African migrant women in Australia, and their resilience and strength. It is about understanding their perils, and importantly, what makes them strong and resilient through such perils, while re-establishing their lives in Australia. In the attempt to re-establish life in a new culture, West African women drew on strength in diverse ways.

The 'resilience' focus of this thesis is unique, as an emphasis on resilience is slowly gaining ground in the migration literature. While there have been publications, honours and doctoral theses centering on West African migrant women in NSW, the current thesis brings significant innovation to the cohort by taking a strengths-based approach (rather than a deficit approach) and focusing on the resilience and strength of these West African migrant women.

The positive salutogenic framework rejects the dominant weak and ill-health discourses that dominate migration research. The salutogenic framework is a practical paradigm for health promotion rather than disease practice that

Antonovsky (1996) formulated as the best approach to health research and to all fields of healthcare. Antonovsky describes the orientation further as a health/disease continuum where effort is directed towards salutary factors that is, exploring factors that are beneficial and/or foster positive health and wellbeing. The salutogenic framework debunks the absoluteness of traditional medical deficit interpretations of health. Human beings are prone to stressors that can affect their health. A shift in focus from the pathogenic to the salutogenesis view of studying migrants' health and life stressors is thus reasonable because it highlights their capabilities, nurtures their growth of positive responses to challenges, and supports a process of optimising their health and strength (Antonovsky 1987; Bonanno 2004; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi 2014).

Migration has become part of the human fabric and has opened up the borders of the world. According to the United Nations (UN), globally there were 258 million international migrants in 2017, a 50% increase from 2000 statistics (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA) 2017), and rising. Women comprise almost half of the population number (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA) 2017).

Women's international migration activities increased because recent economic and social changes in both sending and receiving locations opened up employment opportunities for women migrants (Ghosh 2009; Saffu 2014). The composition of women's migration changed from the traditional discourse of family dependants who migrated only to join their husbands to independent woman in search of employment (Adelowo, Smythe & Nakhid 2016; Collins & Low 2010). Collins and Low (2010) discuss the trends of increased female immigrant entrepreneurship, which remains less reported. The change in gender composition buttressed the need for research around migrant women.

The United Nations also increased their resettlement of Women-at-risk to developing countries (Saffu 2014; Wachter et al. 2016). With increased migration comes an increasingly culturally, ethnically and linguistically diverse international population (Boucher & Gest 2018; Chui 2011; Kuo 2014; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2011). A total of

28.5 % of Australia's population growth originates from international migration, and a further 21% of the population have at least one parent who was born overseas (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2017a). Further, the 2017 net overseas migration of 245,400 persons clearly surpassed the natural population increase of 142,700 persons; therefore, immigration plays a significant part both in enhancing Australia's population and economic growth(Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2017b; Wright et al. 2016).

Contributing immensely to Australia's population growth are the ever-increasing numbers of migrants from Africa, particularly West Africa, with similar increases in other Western countries (Blankson, Spears & Hinson 2012; Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) 2014; Nwokocha 2010). In the process, African migrants contribute to the reversal of population decline in the Oceania region(United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA) 2017).

African migrants are one of the fastest growing populations in Australia (Abdelkerim & Grace 2012), and women constitute nearly half (46%) of this group (ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) 2007-2008). The number of African-born people migrating to Australia increased by 50% from 147,876 in 1996 to 248,699 in 2006 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2009). From 2006, over 50,000 further African-born migrants have called Australia home (Australian Human Rights Commission 2010).

Commonly, the literature about migrant women comes from a deficit perspective focusing on victimisation and problems such as isolation, depression, anxiety, dependence on partners and being more disadvantaged in employment than men (Nawyn & Gjokaj 2014). Previous research, however, indicates that many migrant women display resilience through their migration experiences (Lenette, Brough & Cox 2013; Loh & Klug 2012); however, discussion of migrant women's strength and resilience is largely neglected. The migration process is laden with emotional, social and cultural implications, especially for women, emphasising the need for considering factors such as gender, race and class.

Despite the increasing settlement of West African migrant women in Australia (ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) 2007-2008), to my knowledge, no documentation of resilience during the establishment of their post-migration lives in NSW exists. The study aims address this important research gap. This study deviated from the dominant discourse that focuses on the negative aspects of migration and identifies areas for focus and development. Exploring phenomena through a gender-based lens is critical in interpreting an individual's experience and describing the unique sociocultural context (Crotty 1998; Mekgwe 2008; Nintiema 2015).

Minorities are groups defined by the social majority (Liamputtong 2007). Migrants are in this minority category and are foreigners in their new homes. It is well documented that minorities have fewer employment opportunities, lower wages, are employed in unskilled and low-skilled jobs, and in some cases experience unsatisfactory levels of medical care as compared to non-minority group members (Dustmann, Frattini & Theodoropoulos 2011; Roberto & Moleiro 2015). African migrant women are not immune from these experiences. Rather; they are more affected than their male counterparts (Fleury 2016; Wachter et al. 2016).

Resilience is the ability to overcome life challenges and transform such challenges to positive growth (Bonanno 2004; Zautra, Hall & Murray 2010). Resilience is crucial to basic human existence and survival, and is particularly important for migrants to be able to overcome the cultural shock often experienced upon changes in environment, and for social cohesion and inclusion in their new country (Bansel et al. 2016; Woldeyes 2018).

Migrants may also have skills, knowledge and memories capable of easing the establishment of their life in a new country. The literature suggests that many migrants overcome migration stressors and achieve success and happiness for themselves and their families (Hutchinson & Dorsett 2012; Loh & Klug 2012; van der Ham et al. 2014). Many West African people are holders of tertiary qualifications and were in respected, high-paying jobs prior to migration (Banjo 2012). However, many West African migrant women face de-

professionalisation and devaluation of their homeland credentials and work experiences resulting in the need for them to retrain for other professions and chart new paths for themselves (Anjum, Nordqvist & Timpka 2012; Babatunde-Sowole, Power, et al. 2016; Banjo 2012; Ogunsiji et al. 2012).

African migrant women face triple invisibility in that they are black, women, and minorities or foreigners (Adelowo 2012; Showers 2015; Smith 2015a). The 'invisible' is described as someone who is unseen by society due to the systematically racist practices that refuse to fully acknowledge 'black' existence, perspectives and contributions culminating in their subjugated knowledge and voices being silenced and marginalised (Beck 2010; Gilpin 2002). In addition, African migrants appear physically different and are often easily identified as new arrivals because of their skin colour (Abdelkerim & Grace 2012; Abur 2017; Colic-Peisker & Tilbury 2007).

Initial entry of migrants to Australia was racially dictated in an attempt to preserve 'white' character (Fozdar & Banki 2017; Pietsch 2013) under the then White Australia Policy (Fozdar & Banki 2017; Pietsch 2013). This migration policy was able to curtail and exclude people from certain parts of the world, including people of African descent, while encouraging migrants of white-British descent (Udah 2017). While most of these racially-guided migration laws have been eradicated, migrants still experience some covert backlash from the era. The country remains rather Eurocentric both in outlook and identity (Fozdar & Banki 2017).

As a black person, the African woman faces her first invisibility just because she is black (Beck 2010; Smith 2015a). In addition, the visible, cultural and linguistic difference of African people makes them more vulnerable and indeed 'invisible' within the relatively dominant white cultures into which they often migrate (Abdelkerim & Grace 2012; Abur 2017; Adelowo 2012; Colic-Peisker & Tilbury 2007). Researchers have discussed discrimination and racism, known as products of invisibility, as issues that make it difficult for some African people in Australia to gain employment (Abdelkerim & Grace 2012; Abur 2017; Fozdar & Banki 2017).

The literature suggests that an African migrant faces invisibility because of the rejection of an African black person as someone who does not have anything to offer (Oba 2018; Udah 2017). This notion stems from the involuntary migration through the slave trade history of African people (Venters & Gany 2011); an atrocity that still affects today's African migrants (Piller 2016).

The effect of homogenising all people of African Ancestry from the Caribbean and the African Americans with the Indigenous Africans in the continent is the shelving of continental Africans' experiences to the discussion and focus of African Americans and the Caribbean experiences (Donkor 2000). While there is diversity among African migrants themselves, Indigenous Africans from the African continent, and indeed women, require a distinct platform for addressing their specific migration-related issues (Donkor 2000). Calliste (1993) discusses how Caribbean black people were recruited for manual labour in the steel mills, while Banjo (2012) and Udah (2017) discuss how several intersecting systems of oppression, such as black people being perceived as servants, inform the way African people are received as migrants into the Western world today.

African women's migration experiences have not been a focus for research mainly because of common patriarchal powers that do not allow women's voices to be heard or seen (Piper 2008). Reconfiguring gender relations and power inequalities is in recognition of what is referred to as 'bringing women's migration out of the shadows' (Piper 2005; United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) 2005). Women are generally marginalised in migration literature despite the enormous hardships they often face in resettlement.

This current thesis provides both visibility and a voice to the voiceless African women in NSW, to share their migration resettlement experiences, debunking myths and delineating their capacities and impacts on Australia's socio, political and economic growth (Saffu 2014). The strengths-based study approach of the current thesis helps de-medicalise the 'needy victim' often

attached to migration and women (Hayward et al. 2008; Lenette, Brough & Cox 2013).

This unique and novel study employed the strengths-based approach also because the dominant cultural approaches contain inherent biases that are inadequate for ethnic minority groups. The concept of power relations is well rooted in migration literature and this feminist view is vital to the current study. These are important considerations in health research as these factors contribute to marginalisation, alienation and limited access to healthcare. Centering this study on these women will provide insight into the vacuum of the gendered accounts in resilience literature (Lenette, Brough & Cox 2013).

In addition, most conducted studies around African people in Australia have been undertaken by non-African people (Drummond, Mizan, Brocx, et al. 2011; Drummond, Mizan, Burgoyne, et al. 2011) and internationally (Belgrave & Allison 2018). As the literature suggests, an insider may bring more in-depth understanding and richness to research endeavours (Saffu 2014; Wilkinson & Kitzinger 2013). African researchers conducting research about African migrant women will generally achieve the above positive outcomes. Mostly, past studies have been conducted either with refugees (Drummond, Mizan, Brocx, et al. 2011; Drummond, Mizan, Burgoyne, et al. 2011) or with immigrants (Ogunsiji et al. 2013).

The value of conducting research involving both refugees and immigrants have often eluded such research endeavours. The current thesis includes stories from both African refugee and non-refugee women, which provides a balanced view and insights into both groups. Such an integrated study is sparse, if any exist, among NSW African migrant women. Conducting research involving both groups is significant since the underlying reasons for migration in both groups is to seek better opportunities to achieve their life goals (Simich & Andermann 2014). As mentioned, the majority of African migrant women studies in NSW are deficit-focused.

Africa and African people

Africa is a continent that is bordered by the Mediterranean Sea to the north, Red Sea to the north east, the Atlantic Ocean to the south west and the Indian Ocean to the east (see Figure I) (Tucci & Rosenberg 2009). It is equidistantly divided by the equator and covers 25% of the total world land mass at approximately 30.3 million square kilometres (Ogutu & Kenyanchui 1991). The African continent is home to over 55 countries (Figure I), and the oldest continent ever inhabited by humans (Asante 1991), Africa is sometimes also referred to as 'Mother Continent' (National Geographic Society 2012) because African ancestors were the first human species to ever migrate and venture into exploration. As of 2017, Africa contains 16.59% of the world's population, second only after Asia (Statista 2017) and increasing.

Traditionally rich in culture, Africa is a land of great diversity, with numerous peoples, languages and cultures, yet bounded together by their Ubuntu culture. Aside from their traditional religion, African people largely practice diverse Christian and Muslim religions, with lesser percentages following Baha'i, Hinduism and Judaism (Isizoh n.d).
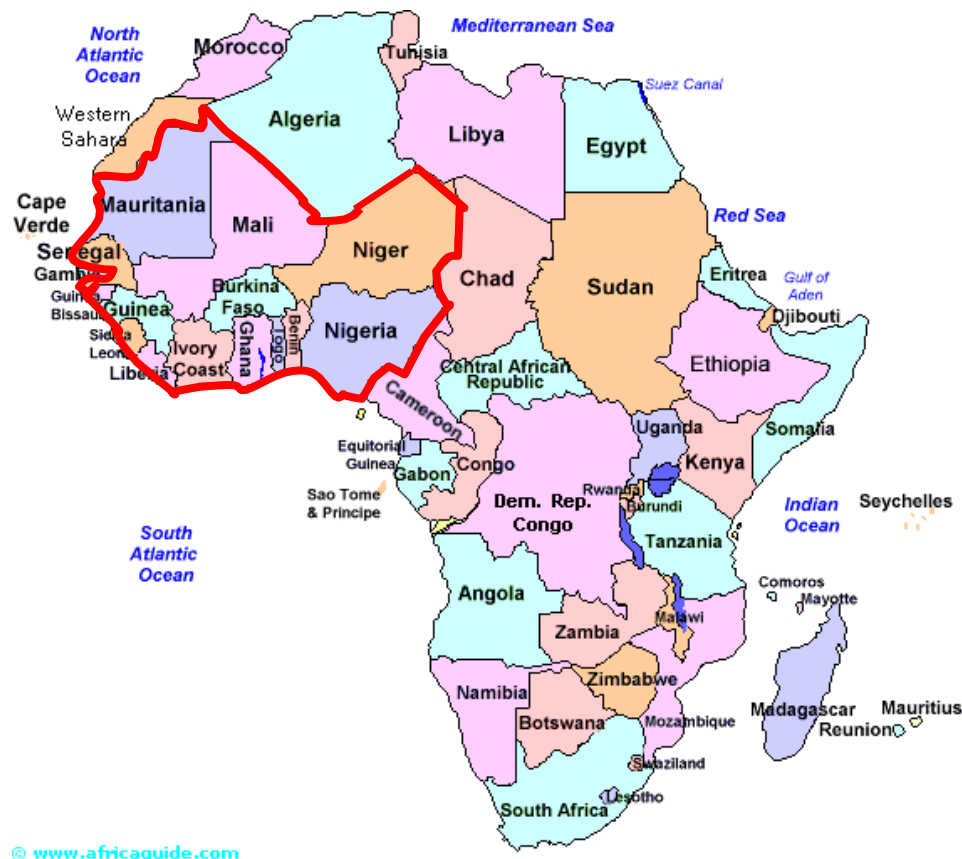
Figure 1: Map of Africa (Source: www.africaguide.com)

West Africa: Geography, people and migration to Australia

West Africa (outlined in red in Figure I) is one of the five regions that together constitute the continent of Africa (Okai 2001). With the exception of Mauritania, all the countries in the region are members of the Economic Community of West African State. West Africa, as with the other regions, are diverse in language and ethnicity; and stretches from the northern part of the Sahara Desert to the rainforest in the south (Green 2013). However, unlike most of Central, Southern and Southeast Africa, West African people do not speak the Bantu language (Shaw & Robert Jameson 2002).

The region of West Africa stretches towards the Atlantic Ocean on the west, Sahara Desert on the north, and among others, the Republic of Cameroon on the east. The most common religion in the northern part of West Africa is Islam, while Christianity is noted in the southern part (Riggs 2006). The region occupies approximately one-fifth of Africa (Speth 2010).

Any contemporary discussion of African migration to Australia cannot be separated from their earlier arrival on the First Fleet in 1788 (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury 2008; Dowling & Mee 2007; Pybus 2006a). Though just 11 in number, these first African founders contributed to the origin of the early colonial settlement of Australia alongside their Anglo-population convicts, soldiers and administrators (Pybus 2006a; Pybus 2006b). Further records of black Africans to Australia include the immigration program through the Special Commonwealth African Assistance Plan of the mid-1960s with the advent of students from the West African countries of Ghana and Nigeria (Okai 2001), many of whom could not return due to political unrest in their countries.

In recent times, as a result of an increase in humanitarian entrants from Africa and the wave of skilled immigrants, the number of African migrants in Australia has surged exponentially (Commonwealth of Australia 2011; Jakubowicz 2010). Many are women who benefited under the Women At Risk UN programs (Bartolomei, Eckert & Pittaway 2014; Vromans et al. 2018). The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2011, p. 243) defines women at risk as "women who have protection problems particular to their gender" and the category is commonly applied in practice by UNHCR as refugees who are single women and single mothers.

Aims and research question for the study

Increasingly, knowledge is being shifted towards a positive model across disciplines. As the numbers of African migrant women in Australia continue to increase, it is imperative that we understand the resettlement experiences of these women, particularly in relation to their resilience, courage and strength, and how it assists their successful re-establishment in Australia, to help shape policy and practice. To this end, this thesis explores the stories of resilience and strength of African women in Australia who originated from West Africa.

The broad objective of the study is to gain an understanding of the strength and resilience strategies that West African-born women drew upon in re-establishing themselves in Australia. Specifically, this study:

- ❖ Explores the aspirations and expectations held by West African women prior to migration to Australia;

- ❖ Develops insights into the women's stories of resilience and strength following migration to Australia; and

- ❖ Describes strategies that West African migrant women use to prepare their children for adversities and challenges.

The aims and objectives elucidated above shaped answers to the research question: What are the experiences of strength and resilience of West African migrant women living in Australia during the early years of their re-establishment (resettlement) in Australia?

Significance of the study

To provide the best possible care, nurses and midwives need to understand the people they care for. The collection and documentation of West African migrant women's stories of resilience and strength will allow nurses and midwives to initiate appropriate care, especially in the early years of their resettlement. This research may also inform practice and health service development (Hsu & McCormack 2012).

As previously stated, studies on the resilience of African migrants are scant, and no studies have been located regarding West African migrant women in NSW. Despite their increasing number in Australia, most of the available research on West African migrant women is deficit-based (Drummond, Mizan, Burgoyne, et al. 2011; Drummond, Mizan & Wright 2008; Ogunsiji et al. 2013). To provide a more balanced view, this study was a strengths-focused exploration of the resilience and strength in these women. The study also provided valuable empirical knowledge for healthcare providers, community care workers and people involved in decision-making around migrant resettlement in Australia.

Lessons learned from stories of resilience told by the women can be used in policy and practice to support future migrants from the region and diverse migrant women in their quests for successful re-establishment in Australia. The

outcome of the study will offer intimate insight into a group of Australian West African migrant women's migration and resettlement experiences. The study will extend knowledge around multicultural Australia about the resilience and strength capabilities and positive existential values of a growing African-Australian population. Additionally, the study will provide evidence for the utility of a strengths-based approach to help West African migrants recognise and draw on their own aptitude and resilience. The strengths-based study also provides a starting point in obtaining a better understanding and working relationship with migrants.

This study will add vital knowledge to the migration research field in Australia and globally. Migrant women have had to compete with highly-gendered arrays of vulnerabilities, and centering this study on them will provide insight into the gendered accounts of resilience that is lacking in the resilience literature. The study contributes to empirical ethno-cultural studies essential to our understanding of cultural diversity within multicultural Australia.

The thesis structure

This thesis is presented in eight chapters. In this first chapter, I introduced the reader to the context and rationale of this research. The chapter provided the background to the study, and insight into the landscape and the people of West Africa who constitute the study participants. The aims and objectives that provide answers to the research question were also discussed in line with the significance of study.

Chapter Two explores the available literature to position the study within the migration scholarship.

Chapter Three describes the methods and methodology used in exploring the aims of this research. The chapter delineates the frameworks that underpin the research and also positions the researcher within the study, as a West African migrant woman living in Australia.

Chapters Four, Five and Six provide answers to the research question and aims by locating the voices of the West African migrant women in Australia in

the centre of the analysis. Through the women's stories, I entered into their pre and post-migration experiences and the challenges therein, and explored how they were resilient through those challenges in order to resettle in Australia.

Chapter Seven situates the findings in the literature, since no knowledge exists in a vacuum (Asante 1990).

Chapter Eight concludes the thesis by presenting the strengths, limitations and implications of the research for nursing, midwifery, healthcare and allied areas, including recommendations for further research.

Summary

The current chapter provided the introductory background and a summary of the research. The next chapter reviews the available pertinent literature on key concepts to situate the current study within migration scholarship.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW (INCLUDING PUBLISHED PEER-REVIEWED JOURNAL ARTICLE)

Introduction

As described in Chapter One, resilience and positive adaptation of migrant women is vital, yet is often overlooked in the literature. The oversight continues while the pre-eminence in current research on the discourse of mental health issues and the challenges of resettlement continues. Chapter Two presents an integrated review of the literature that explores the resilience of the African people through the original published document below. Due to the lack of focus on African migrant women's resilience, which has justified the current thesis, the reviewed literature could not present a gendered view and, in some instances, people from other backgrounds were included because they were also refugees or migrants.

Resilience: the concept

The research into human resilience originated in the psychology of children and adolescents and how they achieved normal development despite being from disadvantaged and vulnerable homes. Seminal authors such as Garmezy (1971) studied children of parents with schizophrenia. He found that despite the children's high risk of developing the disease due to exposure from their parent, only 10% were affected. This work began the movement of identifying 'protective factors' for an individual that aid in preventing the negative impact of stressors/challenges and support positive development. Werner and Smith's (1982) longitudinal studies of school children in Kauai, Hawaii, identified protective factors as being derived from both internal and external sources and these included the family and environment.

Scholars have also explained the concept of resilience at the microsystem , mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem levels (Cicchetti & Lynch 1993) and the interdependence between levels. The micro-level relates to individual resilience when children were studied for displaying growth and strength

despite experiencing adversity such as living in dysfunctional homes or with alcoholic parents. The meso-system level centres on the family unit's resilience against stressful situations. The exo-system-level involves the community and the macro-systems level encompasses wider society.

Recovery and resilience are two different constructs. Resilience is the ability to maintain balance with no loss of control, whereas recovery implies a period of suspension to normal functioning (Bonanno 2004). In recovery, the individual succumbs to the adversity or challenge, to later gradually recover; a process that often takes a longer interval of time than the resilience trajectory. The speed of improvement is an important distinction between the two concepts (Norris, Tracy & Galea 2009; Werner 1989). Bonanno's (2005) approach in defining adult resilience via the lens of an acute phase of trauma is appropriate in explaining the migration risk-vulnerability-adversity continuum, and was projected in four prototypical trajectories (see Figure 2).
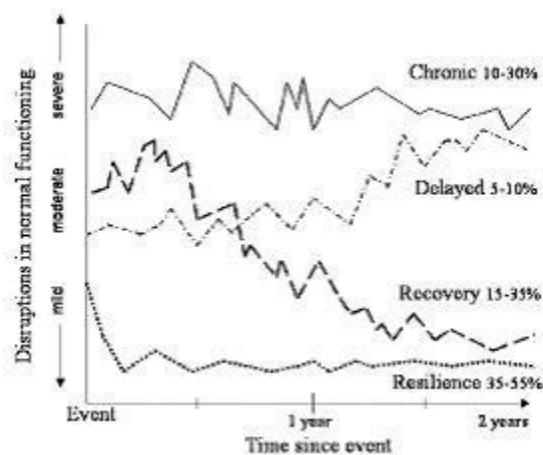
Figure 2: Example of trajectories of disruption in normal functioning during a two-year period after a potential trauma or adversity (Bonanno (2005)

In the migration literature, resilience has been described as depicting empowerment. Çakir (2009) examined factors and mechanisms of resilience among Turkish migrant women in the United Kingdom (UK). She found that resilience is the ability of the migrant to gain power and control as a response to changes, including finding opportunities in the changes for accomplishing

goals, at times at a higher level than earlier planned. The ability to achieve better outcomes than expected is one of the hallmarks of Masten's (1994) definition of the concept. Rashid and Gregory's (2014) study of migrant women in Canada describes resilience as reflecting internal and external protective factors that help people in resisting risk and enhancing adaptation. Internal factors include positive temperament and self-esteem while external factors include supportive social environments.

For the purpose of this study, resilience is conceptualised as the capacity to feel competence in the face of precarious adverse migration living conditions and maintain equilibrium to achieve good outcomes rather than a later recovery (Daniel 2007). Accordingly, successful re-establishment (process-outcome) into Australia and satisfaction is explored in women's stories by their ability to note the precarious events of their re-establishment and take timely action to prevent the risk from having adverse effects. The literature that describes the resilience of humans resonates with qualitative research. However, other forms of inquiry have been used. Next is a general review of the literature on resilience of African people.

The following section is comprised of the text of the peer-reviewed journal article depicting an integrative literature review conducted for this study. The published version: Babatunde-Sowole, O., Power, T., Jackson, D., Davidson, P. M., & DiGiacomo, M. (2016). Resilience of African migrants: An integrative review. *Health Care for Women International*, *37*(9), 946-963, from which lines were reproduced with permission of the publisher (Appendix K) can be found in Appendix J. The following section presents the content in its original form. The article was published by Taylor & Francis in *Health Care for Women International* on 06 April 2016, available online: https://doi.org/10.1080/07399332.2016.1158263:

In a world currently marked by dynamic demographic changes through international migration, it is important to understand how migrants adapt to migration and acculturation experiences and demonstrate resilience in their host countries. Until recently, there has been little focus on African migrant women's resilience, yet they are a prominent and influential group within their

communities. The purpose of this review was to ascertain factors and characteristics of African women's resilience in the context of migration. Understanding more about African women's resilience can be a valuable resource for health care professionals who can support health and well-being in women, their families, and new communities.

Emerging data over the past decades suggest that migration research could benefit from using a strengths-based approach, such as resilience, in understanding the experiences of migrants (Hutchinson & Dorsett 2012). Whilst there has been some documentation of resilience of migrant women in European and North American studies (Çakir 2009; Cakir & Yerin Guneri 2011; Chung, Hong & Newbold 2013), less is known about the resilience and strength of African migrant women. Migrants include refugees from war-torn areas and voluntary immigrants. Voluntary immigrants are essentially skilled migrants who leave their country in search of employment opportunities (Pottie et al. 2008).

The percentage of women migrating internationally is greater than their male counterparts. By 2009, women comprised over 60% of all migrants worldwide (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division, 2009). War and government instability in parts of Africa are increasingly leading to more women becoming international asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants to the Western world. The number of African people migrating to the United States of America outnumbered those from Europe, Asia, and Latin America (Blankson, Spears, & Hinson, 2012; Logan, 2009). The Canadian census in 2009 also showed an increased rate of African migrants (Statistics Canada, 2009). In the United Kingdom, the numbers of African migrants are even greater, perhaps due to its proximity to the African continent. In 2008, the African-born population in the UK was approximately 0.5 million at an 855 male to 1000 female ratio (United Kingdom National Statistics, 2009). A significant increase in numbers of African people arriving into Australia (Abdelkerim & Grace, 2012; Khan & Pedersen, 2010) and New Zealand may be due to the adoption of the refugee quota systems as well as a rise in skilled immigrant intake into these countries (Adelowo, 2012). Women

are also being increasingly resettled under the "Women and Girls at Risk" program in Western countries under the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) (Guerin, Allotey, Elmi, & Baho, 2006). Under this scheme, Europe, Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand agree to receive asylum seekers, of whom 47% of refugees in 2010 were girls and women (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2012).

Despite the increasing migration of African people, particularly African women, there is little research depicting their resilience. Resilience is crucial to basic human existence and survival; and for the purpose of this article, resilience is conceptualized as the ability to overcome life challenges and transform such challenges into positive growth (Gillespie, Chaboyer, & Wallis, 2007). The aim of our article was to ascertain factors associated with resilience and strength of African migrant women.

Historically, Africa and its peoples have been represented as a "dark continent," marked by disease, war, and famine (Obrist & Büchi, 2008; Poncian, 2015). Stigmatized conditions and practices pervade the literature describing African people. Such studies investigate the effects of infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS (Drummond, Mizan, & Wright, 2008) and female genital mutilation (Berg & Denison, 2013; Browne, 2014; Obrist & Büchi, 2008). Also frequently explored are chronic diseases such as obesity, cardiovascular disease (Drummond, Mizan, Burgoyne, & Wright, 2011; Hall, Thomsen, Henriksen, & Lohse, 2011), intimate partner violence (Akinsulure-Smith, Chu, Keatley, & Rasmussen, 2013; Ogunsiji, Wilkes, Jackson, & Peters, 2011), and mental illness caused by trauma and adversity during the migration process (Schweitzer, Melville, Steel, & Lacherez, 2006; Venters et al., 2011). Migration has also been documented as contributing to the incidence of postpartum depression among African migrant mothers in Australia (Murray, Windsor, Parker, & Tewfik, 2010).

In some cases, negative stereotypes about African migrants have resulted in barriers to health services. For example, African residents who were living in Victoria, Australia, were restricted from participating in blood donation because of the perception that the broader community of Africans carry blood-borne

diseases or have a tropical disease (Polonsky, Brijnath, & Renzaho, 2011). Such an outcome may restrict the possibility of successful treatment for patients of African descent who need compatible blood products (McQuilten, Waters, Polonsky, & Renzaho, 2014). Arthur (2009) also documented evidence of racism experienced by African migrant women in the United States. Researchers found that migrant women face more racism and discrimination than men and have less access to economic resources and English language skills improvement (Remennick, 2005).

In spite of the stress of migrating and adapting to living in a new country, it is vital to highlight that many migrant women are resilient as they re-establish their lives in a new culture (Kuo, 2014). In this article, we examine literature on resilience and how African migrants report their adaptation to a new culture. Our review includes both African women and men due to the dearth of studies on the resilience of migrant women. We argue that the ways in which resilience is enacted by African migrants, and their capability to face migration challenges, is critical knowledge for the international research audience. Resilience strategies enacted by African migrant women, in particular, represent a valuable resource for ensuring well-being in women, their families, and new communities.

Literature review method

We conducted an integrative literature review using a systematic approach and the preferred reporting items for systematic meta-analysis framework (PRISMA) (Moher et al. 2009) to identify factors influencing, and strategies for, developing resilience in African migrant women. For quality appraisal purposes, the included papers were reviewed for design, sample, setting, data collection method and analysis, clarity of writing, generalizability, and reflexivity. This approach has been used successfully by other researchers

(McGarry, Simpson & Hinchliff-Smith 2011; Robinson & Spilsbury 2008) as adapted from Mays and Pope (2000).

Search strategy

Between May and June 2014, electronic databases including Academic Search Complete (Ebsco), Scopus, Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL), Medline (Ovid), Psych Info, and Multicultural Australia and Immigration Studies (MAIS), were searched for peer-reviewed material published between 2004 and 2014. Boolean terms were derived in consultation with a health librarian. Our search terms were keywords and derivatives of "Africa*"; "women*"; "migrant*"; "immigrants*"; "refugee*"; strength*; and "resilien*". Additionally, we searched the grey literature with variations of the same keywords. The Social Science Research Network and the Google search engine were used to access grey literature. Additional material was sourced by manual hand searching of reference lists.

Eligibility criteria

Articles were included if they explored the resilience of African migrant women or their adaptive strategies. Due to the paucity of literature, identified articles reporting on both men and women were included, although we aimed to focus on African migrant women. We included papers written in English, published in peer-reviewed or grey literature (reports and theses), and containing participants aged 18 and over. All study designs were included. Studies were excluded if they mainly focused on psychopathology or trauma experienced by participants, or if resilience or strength was not discussed. We excluded conference abstracts, book reviews, and research depicting internally displaced people, African American, or African Caribbean populations.

Evaluation and analysis

We extracted data reflecting author/year, country/setting, population, study design, and aims from the collected literature and entered it into a spread sheet to facilitate analysis (Tables 1 and 2). We used a critical appraisal tool to systematically evaluate the peer- reviewed journal articles. As there are no formal methods for weighing appraisals in integrative reviews, none were

undertaken during this process. We used an adapted version of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (Bronfenbrenner 1979, 1989; Mental Health Foundation of Australia 2005) see Figure 3) to organise the findings and examine the interactive processes between migrants and their environment and between the risks and protective factors. Internal and external factors interact and influence resilience. Complexities in these interactive relationships depict the human environment, particularly for migrant people. The framework also depicts links between the person's inner resources, family resources, external systems, and the larger environment that are capable of affecting resilience and well-being (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan 2002; Wise 2003). The adaptation of the ecological framework is novel in the study of this cohort and migration literature.

Results

We included 15 articles in the review (Figure 4). The articles were primarily qualitative (n=14) and published in peer-reviewed journals (n=9). Six grey literature documents were included. All studies consisted of experiences and displays of resilience by study participants. The literature predominantly centered on experiences of refugees from East, Central, and Northern Africa. Some studies included people from non-African countries based on the view that they were also refugees. The sample sizes ranged from four (Lenette, Brough & Cox 2013) in an Australian study to a UK study of 62 African people (Anderson & Doyal 2004). There were 112 women documented as participating in these studies, although four articles did not provide numbers of women contributors. A methodological challenge during the search was the lack of clear definition of resilience; instead, it was often used interchangeably with coping, adaptation, and "helps." We did not reject papers that met inclusion criteria due to poor quality.

Table 1: Peer-reviewed summary table of included articles [n=9]

First author (year)	Country/Setting	Population	Design/Method	Aims
Anderson & Doyal, 2004	England	62 women from 11 African countries receiving HIV treatment in five specialist clinics in London	Qualitative-Self-administered questionnaire and in-depth semi-structured interviews	Investigated the particular needs and experiences of African women living with HIV in the UK
Bentley et al, 2014	USA	59 Somali Muslim refugees of East Africa	Quantitative - Questionnaire/Survey	Examined the influence of religiosity on the relationship between traumatic exposure and post-traumatic stress disorder symptom severity
Khawaja, White, Schweitzer & Greenslade, 2008	Australia	23 Sudanese refugees [12f]	Qualitative-Semi structured interviews	Examined the pre migration, transit and post migration descriptions of the participants to determine their difficulties and how they coped and adapted.
Lenette, Brough & Cox, 2013	Australia	4 single Sudanese refugee women with children from diverse African countries [Congo, Burundi and Sudan]	Qualitative–Ethnography and in-depth interviews	Explored resilience as a process during everyday activities among the women
Lloyd, 2014	Australia	20 refugees' majority from the North, East and Central African countries [13F]	Qualitative–Face-to-face semi structured interviews	Explored participants' experiences of new health environment in developing health literacy practice including how they construct and disseminate information.
Obrist & Büchi, 2008	Switzerland	20 [9f] sub-Saharan African people	Qualitative –Case studies and group discussions	Explore resilience as a process during everyday activities among the women

First author (year)	Country/Setting	Population	Design/Method	Aims
Orton, Griffiths, Green & Waterman, 2012	United Kingdom	26 Asylum seekers [16F] from 7 African countries	Qualitative - Focus groups and interviews	Explore experiences of life as an asylum seeker living with HIV in UK
Schweitzer et al, 2007	Australia	13 [4F] Sudanese refugees	Qualitative	Identify and explain the coping and resilience of participants.
Shakespeare-Finch & Wickham, 2010	Australia	12 [6F] Sudanese refugees	Qualitative-Semi structured interviews	What helped/hindered participants in adapting while in Sudan, en-route and in their Australia?

Table 2: Grey literature exploring resilience of African migrants [n=6]

First author (year)	Country/Setting	Population	Design/Method	Aims
Bailey, 2012	United Kingdom	Three women (representing African Women's Empowerment Forum [AWEF]	NA	Explore the sense of belonging and agency amongst a group of African asylum-seekers and refugees
De Tona & Lentin, 2010	Ireland	Three case studies	NA	Explore migrant women's organisations' contributions to changing the lives of migrant women
Mwanri et al, 2012	Australia	Recent African migrant intakes	NA	Discuss author's perspective and literature on community resilience with focus on recently arrived African refugees
Hashimoto-Govindasamy & Rose, 2011	Australia	Sudanese refugee women	Qualitative-Ethnography using group interviews	Evaluate a Sudanese women's exercise program from the perspective of a community development strength-based approach
Adelowo, 2012	New Zealand	15 African immigrant women	Qualitative-Interviews	To explore the women's stories of adjustment to New Zealand including barriers and how they navigated
Webb, 2013	Perth, Western Australia, Australia	11 Rwanda refugee University students [4F]	Qualitative-Interviews	Explore the meanings ascribed to the available social support by Rwanda refugees during their transition to the University.

Findings

Strategies for resilience

Internal factors

The internal or personal factors are represented in the microsystem level of Bronfenbrenner's framework. These are thoughts and behaviors as well as personal values and skills of the participants (MHFA, 2005), which are used to maintain equilibrium and achieve positive outcomes during the migration and resettlement challenges.

Personal qualities and inner strength of the participants were depicted in different ways. For example, cognitive strategies were used by North African Sudanese men and women (Schweitzer, Greenslade, & Kagee, 2007). For these people, achieving cognitive resilience was explained in relation to educational and employment accomplishments.
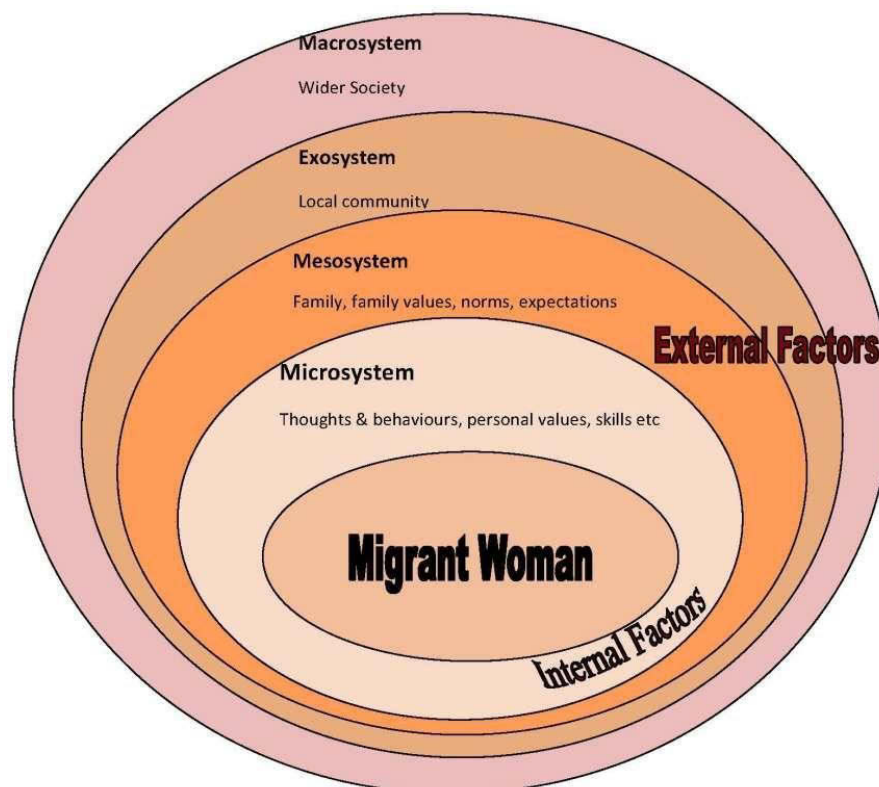
Figure 3: The levels of influence affecting resilience in African women.

Khawaja, White, Schweitzer, and Greenslade (2008) explained that the North African participants used cognitive strategies to mentally reconstruct the migration stress in relation to their current achievement and growth and acceptance of difficult situations while having an aspirational focus.

Sudanese refugees reported enacting social comparisons to assist in adapting to life in Australia (Schweitzer et al., 2007). The participants were able to appreciate freedom in Australia when comparing their own situation with others still in Africa and refugees currently being held in Australian detention centers. Other researchers highlighted personal resources such as hopes and goals, having a positive attitude, using spirituality or religiosity that involved prayer and faith, and the individual's sense of growth and strength (Adelowo, 2012; Anderson & Doyal, 2004; Khawaja et al., 2008; Orton, Griffiths, Green, & Waterman, 2012; Shakespeare-Finch & Wickham, 2010).

Spirituality and faith

Spirituality and religiosity were vital sources of strength and resilience in many of the studies. This included faith in a "Higher Being" or in traditional myths and folkloric beliefs (Adelowo 2012; Obrist & Büchi 2008). In one study, participants undertook religious activities that included cleansing rituals during travels to their homelands to protect their health and for continual strength to overcome their migration challenges (Obrist & Büchi 2008). Shakespeare-Finch and Wickham (2010) found that refugees' belief in God through prayer and faith helped them to stay strong and endure trauma and resettlement stressors in Australia. As one of the participants said, "I'm praying rather than just get sad" (Shakespeare-Finch & Wickham, 2010, p. 38). Likewise, women's reports of their HIV status revealed extraordinary resilience in the face of disease and residency status (Anderson & Doyal 2004). The women in the Anderson and Doyal (2004) study drew strength from their religious and spiritual beliefs in staying strong through their HIV experiences. Schweitzer and colleagues (2007) found that spiritual beliefs also instilled a sense of control and will to live in Sudanese participants.
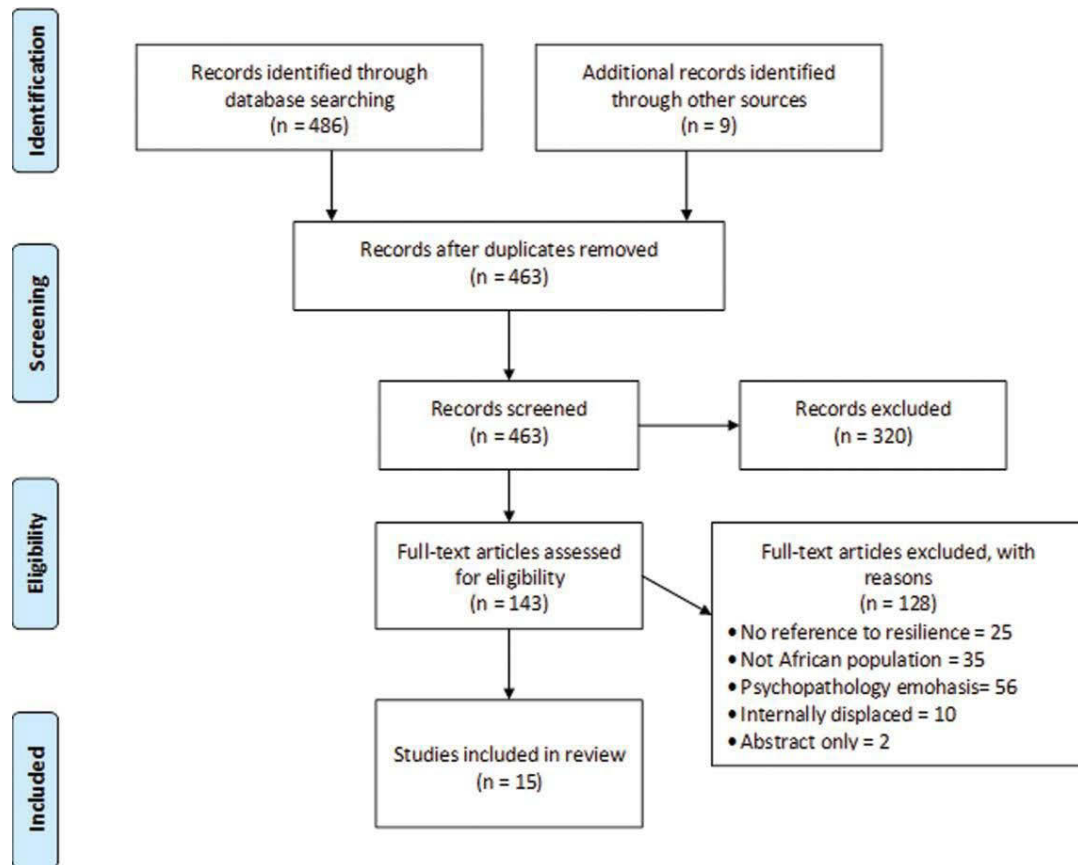
Figure 4: PRISMA flow diagram depicting literature search and screening process.

Researchers from the United States suggested a possible difference in the way that spirituality or religious beliefs impact on migrants (Bentley, Ahmad & Thoburn 2014). In their quantitative study of 59 Somali refugee Muslims from East Africa, Bentley and colleagues (2014) found that participants' religious practices did not protect them against post-traumatic stress disorders resulting from experiencing war and torture prior to migrating to America. According to the authors, the relationship between trauma and religiosity was important in the studied group; however, the quantitative study design limited capacity to collect contextual information that may have explained responses.

External factors

The external factors are represented in the model as the meso-, exo-, and macrosystems level characteristics (Figure 3). These levels involve constructs of family and associated values, norms, and expectations (MHFA, 2005). In addition, the factors involve the local and wider communities of the migrants,

which they used to help maintain equilibrium and achieve positive outcomes during the migration and resettlement.

Communalism is central to Afrocultural ethos (Mbiti, 1970). The West African axiom, "I am because we are" and "since we are, therefore I am" (Mbiti, 1970, p. 141) illustrates the essence of communalism. It indicates interdependence and that the individual is responsibly linked to others in their social milieu (Boykin et al. 1997). Communalism was a prominent factor highlighted in the reviewed studies. The sense of communalism was intertwined with the support that some of the participants received in achieving resilience to adapt to life in their new country. Despite being from different African countries, being African was a communal bond. One Sudanese participant stated, "So many different people came from Africa… We become brothers, so everything we just cooperate together" (Shakespeare-Finch & Wickham 2010, p. 38).

Communalism was also used by the African women in a New Zealand study (Adelowo, 2012) who reported developing resilience by remaining connected to their home countries, as well as associating with other migrant women in New Zealand. Additionally, the women utilised support from families, established connections at work, and accessed available New Zealand government support. Some of the participants stayed in touch with their homeland, not only for support but also to fulfill their social duties of providing financial and material aid to those remaining in their countries of origin (Adelowo 2012; Obrist & Büchi 2008).

Food represented communal ties, and eating African dishes was another way of keeping their memories of home alive (Adelowo 2012; Obrist & Büchi 2008). Others indicated that being connected to the local ethnic community groups and churches provided support during difficult periods (Adelowo 2012). Many of the women recognised that the relationships they developed with people in their new country reduced their feelings of isolation.

Participants' use of technology was another reported form of communalism (Adelowo 2012; Khawaja et al. 2008a; Obrist & Büchi 2008). Strategies for resilience in the context of migration challenges involved making efforts to stay

in touch with friends and relatives, through communication technologies like short message service (SMS), email, and Skype. Striving to live in harmony with others and accessing carer support as provided by the government were other documented resilience strategies (Adelowo 2012; Anderson & Doyal 2004; Orton et al. 2012).

Communalism was also implicated in knowledge levels among some African refugees. The 20 participants in Lloyd's (2014) study, who were mainly African refugees living in Wagga Wagga, Australia, displayed communalism in building understanding about health in their new country through knowledge and information pooling. Knowledge and information pooling is a process whereby the fragments of knowledge that the migrants possess are pooled together to create a more comprehensive picture of a situation and are shared (Lloyd 2014). Lloyd (2014) highlighted that the process was a meaningful, purposeful, and culturally congruent collective adaptation strategy in the use of health services and health literacy.

Empowerment

The ability of the migrants to become empowered in their lives individually and as a community, relative to the stressors and trauma of migration, was vital. The African migrants' resilience drove them to establish associations for networking to resist marginalisation while encouraging their integration into the new country's culture (Bailey 2012; De Tona & Lentin 2010). Mwanri, Hiruy, and Masika (2012) also highlighted the need to empower new African refugees as a community to build their resilience, and they further discussed how an empowered community offers their individual members the opportunity to use their skills and resources to collectively meet community needs (Mwanri, Hiruy & Masika 2012).

The external sources of strength and resilience also included social support. Participants in several studies reported sourcing support from family, making friends, and becoming a part of the local community, and through acculturation or financial settlement assistance provided to them by government (Adelowo, 2012; Schweitzer et al., 2007; Shakespeare-Finch & Wickham, 2010). The strong sense of determination and optimism in 11 Rwandan refugee university

students, however, shaped the way in which they viewed the available social support differently (Webb 2013). Seeing themselves as regular students requiring no special treatment on the campus, these Rwandan refugees resisted using and becoming dependent on the accessible refugee support within the university.

Researchers described developing resilience as a dynamic process because it is inherently social, involving not only a person's inner resources but also external resources ((Lenette, Brough & Cox 2013; Obrist & Büchi 2008). Lenette and colleagues (2013) discussed the resilience of the four Sudanese single parents in their study as being person–environment connected. The resilience discussion in all of the reviewed articles depicted that the internal and external factors were interwoven rather than operating in isolation. This attests to the usefulness of the ecological framework for this review (Adelowo 2012; Lenette, Brough & Cox 2013; Lloyd 2014; Schweitzer, Greenslade & Kagee 2007; Shakespeare-Finch & Wickham 2010).

Discussion

In this review, we have highlighted the resilience of African migrants, which is vital given the increasing international migration to other countries around the globe. The evidence can be used to assist health care professionals working with African migrants to develop resilience in Western countries. Nearly all of the included studies in this review were heterogeneous in terms of populations and gender, which limits the application and generalisability of results. Most of the reviewed articles were published within the previous 5 years, which underscores the relatively recent emphasis on resilience of African migrants.

We learned from the reviewed literature that African migrants' resilience involves cognitive strategies and communalism. These elements are consistent with previous findings in the migration literature. Emphasising the importance of support through a qualitative study, the domestic women workers from the Philippines in van der Ham, Ujano-Batangan, Ignacio, and Wolffers' (2014) study identified social support as a significant factor in the development of their personal strengths and resilience to migration

experiences. In addition to receiving support from friends and family, people access support from their ethnic communities to overcome challenges. Correa-Velez, Gifford, and Barnett (2010) discussed the desire of the refugees in their study in integrating with their ethnic community as a form of support because it boosted their levels of morale and well-being. The refugees were 97 youths living in Melbourne, Australia, originating from 11 different countries including 68% born in Africa, 27% born in the Middle East, and the remaining 5% born in Eastern Europe and Southeast Asia. They were all attending English language schools as recently arrived refugees.

In a qualitative study of immigrant women's resilience in Canada, Rashid and Gregory (2014) found that immigrant women used cognitive strategies and personal resilience to overcome migration adversities. All four women were professionally educated prior to migration, but two of them could not secure employment that aligned with their educational qualifications. Consistent with the literature in this review, the women in Rashid and Gregory's (2014) study engaged in further education to improve their employability by undertaking language and computer skills for improved career prospects.

Religious beliefs and spirituality have been reported as useful in overcoming diverse issues in migrants' lives. As explained in the literature, women see faith and spirituality as a strong source of resilience because it creates a base upon which to plan their futures and provides the capacity to make meaning of their migration settlement challenges (Gladden 2012; Kalathil et al. 2011). Religion has been well documented as a common source of resilience for African refugees (Sherwood & Liebling-Kalifani 2012). Religiosity and spirituality, which is often demonstrated through personal beliefs and value systems, were also evident among the Mexican Latino immigrants in the United States in achieving positive resettlement and acculturation and reducing acculturation challenges (Sanchez et al. 2015). The importance of religiosity and faith in shaping and building the resilience capacity of African migrants cannot be overemphasised. Health care workers may be well positioned to support migrants' integration of experiences and adjustment (Gladden 2012).

Empowerment is a key outcome of resilience. Similar empowerment for migrants was explicated in a study that explored the lives of Turkish migrant women who positively reestablished themselves into a new culture (Çakir & Yerin Guneri, 2011). Additionally, it has been documented that African women are strengthened and empowered if given the opportunity to verbalise their experiences or emotions (Clare, Goodman, Liebling, & Laing, 2014; Sherwood & Liebling-Kalifani, 2013). Likewise, listening to African migrant women's stories is foundational in planning social change for tackling the gender inequalities and health problems that the social status of these women may entail (Pavlish, 2005).

In their study that looked at the protective nature of Afrocentric worldview while comparing the perceived stress and psychological functioning of 112 African American young adults, Neblett, Hammond, Seaton and Townsend (2010) found that spirituality, positive affect, and communalism (Afrocentric worldview) operate as sources of resilience and achieving adaptive outcomes to stressful situations and other negative circumstances.

Successful communication is vital for the effective use of health care and knowledge transfer among migrants to achieve positive adaptation. The use of knowledge pooling in achieving resilience is an important aspect of the findings. The stress and adversity of reestablishment into a new culture served as a motivator for information seeking for the participants in Lloyd's (2014) study. The resilience of African migrants in the literature reviewed has demonstrated the diverse contribution from various fields in achieving resilience of migrants. For example, as explained by Hersberger (2011), the contribution of library and information services to resilience is vital. In recognising people with negative life experiences, Hersberger (2011) believes that library personnel's knowledge of the concept of resilience can advance the services provided to their patrons whose negative experiences can impact the information that they seek. In another paper, the authors emphasised the power of knowledge and information for new settlers into a new country, especially because of the information landscapes that may not only be new, but could also be complex and difficult to navigate (Kennan et al. 2011).

Information that new settlers may seek includes how to access basic needs such as housing, employment, education, and health. In this scenario, the library and information services become useful. The information may also assist the new arrivals to become information rich and socially included in their new countries.

In accordance with the conceptual framework, considering the migration experience within the context of the host culture is important in the lives of African migrants. Essentially, our review has drawn attention to the paucity of research centering on Australian-dwelling West African migrant women's resilience. Discussion of the strength and resilience of voluntary migrants has, thus far, been minimal. Most research we located during our review focused on refugees. For example, Sudanese refugees are well studied, likely because of lengthy periods of conflict that resulted in the displacement of many into the developed world. The North African Sudanese, however, are not a homogeneous group (Tempany 2009). Additionally, the amount of study on the North African Sudanese group might have skewed the research worldview of the African people. The majority of research on refugees, in general, centers on psychopathology rather than resilience in their migration stories (Hutchinson & Dorsett 2012).

Kanyoro (2002) suggests that the empowering of the African migrant community is important. Referred to as community hermeneutics, it is a process of creating community awareness about concepts such as patriarchy that are capable of diminishing African women from using agency to achieve resilience in difficult times (Kanyoro 2002; Pavlish 2005).

We applied an adapted Bronfenbrenner ecological model in this review to demonstrate how supportive environments contribute to the inherent resilience in African migrant women as well as the significance of context in achieving migrant resilience (Bronfenbrenner 1979; Graham et al. 2011). The interdependence of each systems level—micro, meso, exo, and macro—can facilitate healthy environments for human resilience; therefore, the resilience of migrants rests heavily on the strength of all elements of the system. The ecological model has strengthened this article by highlighting the importance of

the government in providing services and resources to migrants in their resettlement, which can help to reduce blame on the migrants for their circumstances by others (Pulvirenti & Mason 2011). Additionally, our use of the framework attests to the fact that migrant resilience is achieved with support of external sources including the wider community beyond just friends, families or their own ethnic communities (Pulvirenti & Mason 2011). The adaptation of the Bronfenbrenner framework to this review also increases our understanding that the strengthening of human relationships within a nurtured environment is a positive step towards achieving and increasing resilience of migrants. Nurses, midwives, and allied workers caring for migrant women, therefore, could consider adopting the framework to inform their contact with migrant people.

Limitations

This review is a general discussion of African migrants. Further research into people from specific regions of the African continent may assist in exploring convergence and divergence of issues presented. Although the population of interest in our study was women, the paucity of literature necessitated the inclusion of studies that included men. We were unable to examine just the women's experiences separate to those of men, which disallowed a focus on the gendered experience of migration. For future research, it will be valuable to explore literature on African men's resilience and compare and contrast outcomes with women. A number of articles were excluded due to their focus on psychopathology. Additionally, due to our requirement that papers be written in English and the focus be on migrants entering developed/industrialised nations of the world, other relevant works may have been excluded.

Conclusions

Women derive a number of sources of support from families, communities, and the wider societies around them. This review highlighted the ways resilience is enacted by African migrants and their capability to face migration challenges. The importance of African migrants' resilience to the welfare and healthy

settlement of their families into a new culture, and indeed the benefits to the new communities cannot be over emphasised.

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Summary

This chapter has looked in depth at resilience, the definition that is embraced for this study and a published review of the literature demonstrating the available knowledge on the concept, with regard to African people. In the next chapter, the methodological approach and the conceptual framework that underpins this study are presented.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

"Good science emanates from solid philosophical base" (Packard & Polifoni 2002, p. 163)

Introduction

In the preceding chapter, the available literature relating to the topic under study was critically examined and appraised. The gaps in the research were identified and the aims of the present research presented. In the current chapter, I discuss and justify the philosophical worldviews, the methodological framework, and the methods for data collection and analysis processes utilised in exploring the strength and resilience of West African women in Australia as they re-established life in a new culture. The ethical considerations and rigour underpinning the study are also addressed.

The philosophical worldview

The term 'worldview' or paradigm (Huitt 2011) refers to "a basic set of beliefs that guide action" (Guba 1990, p. 17). A worldview encompasses the framework or structure of research that is generally acknowledged as the standard or inherited set of assumptions about a subject or phenomena (Creswell 2012; Highfield & Bisman 2012; Sefotho 2015).

According to Thomas Kuhn (1970), paradigms or worldviews are distinct and culturally based. The basic sets of assumptions about worldviews in the diverse research are driven by the ontological, epistemological, axiological, rhetoric and methodological stand of the inquiry (Creswell 2012; Creswell et al. 2007; Guba 1990; Guba & Lincoln 1989; Lincoln & Guba 1985b).

It is imperative for researchers to commence research with a guiding philosophical paradigm as it dictates what and how questions are asked as well as how they are interpreted (Kuhn 2012). This research is grounded in both qualitative constructivist and Africentric worldviews using the qualitative storytelling approach within the constructivist worldview wherein Guba further propagates a naturalistic process of inquiry when exploring the diverse constructions humans have in their social world (Guba 1990). Africentric

worldview is known as Ubuntu. Ubuntu in simple terms means "I am because we are" (Mbiti 1970).

"There is no single interpretive truth" (Denzin & Lincoln 2011, p. 15)

The Afri/Afrocentric, henceforth Africentric, and qualitative constructivist worldviews, including the research approach and frameworks embraced in this research, are complementary to one another and well suited to the current study. As the literature explains, the proponents of the Africentric and womanism strand of feminism maintain their preferences for qualitative approaches such as storytelling, interviews and other narrative methods (Ampofo, Beoku-Betts & Osirim 2008; Langmia 2011; Mpofu, Otulaja & Mushayikwa 2014).

As fittingly appropriate in the current study also, scholars further state that the human natural world can be researched from multiple ontological and epistemological perspectives (Hart 2010; Mpofu, Otulaja & Mushayikwa 2014; Sefotho 2015). In such multiple worldviews there is space for comprehending nature from indigenous and Western science lenses; thereby upholding multicultural science assumptions (Mpofu, Otulaja & Mushayikwa 2014; Sefotho 2015). Additionally, as Muwanga-Zake (2009) posits, the use of the Africentric paradigm with the Western paradigm improves the validity and usefulness of outcomes.

The Africentric worldview is what the literature calls the blueprint African people live by, providing a way to understand the world (Butler 1992) and to adapt to life's situations (Neblett Jr et al. 2010; Nobles 1980). Understanding or making meaning of the world around them as well as adapting to life's challenges are the essence of resilience and strength, further justifying the worldview for this study.

Constructivism involves generating knowledge from human experiences with the aim of describing and reconstructing people's understanding (Creswell 2012; Highfield & Bisman 2012). The overall aim of this research was to

explore the stories of resilience and strength of West African migrant women living in Australia, the outcomes of which will help shape care around them. The proponents of constructivism ideology believe in the existence of multiple and holistic social realities as opposed to the positivists one true reality (Andrade 2009; Doucet, Letourneau & Stoppard 2010; Guba 1990; Lincoln & Guba 1985b; Mollard 2015). Qualitative methodology is appropriate in studies where gender is underscored because it gives voice to women and allows women to be valued as much as men in a research process (Flick 2009, 2014; Lenette 2011).

The claims highlighted about the qualitative constructivism paradigm align with the Africentric worldview. According to Mkabela (2005), the principles underlying the Africentric paradigm are consistent with qualitative research, consequently recognising the active participation of the researcher in knowledge generation. In the Africentric worldview, as in qualitative constructivism, the researcher understands the phenomena under study from the actors' perspectives, as they take part in the lives of the actors in the attempt to understand how the actors see things (Mkabela 2005).

According to the proponents, Africentricism opposes theories and worldviews that dislocate African people in the margin of human thought and experience. The Africentric approach is appropriate in African people's research to re-humanise the 'dark continent full of disease' literature by white dominant researchers and their Eurocentric misrepresentations of African people (Oba 2018; Pellebon 2007; Walcott 2003). The proponents also highlight multiple realities of phenomena and a holistic orientation to studying phenomena (Asante 1991; Gumbo 2014; Mkabela 2005), which apply in the process of adequately exploring West African women in this research.

The Africentric worldview, as in qualitative constructivist research, embraces an immersion, as opposed to scientific distancing of the positivists in studying phenomena around African people (Mkabela 2005). Being immersed with the participants is important because women cannot be separated from their cultural values; both qualitative constructivism and the Africentric worldview consider immersion as paramount in order to avoid the positivists' value-free

scientific knowledge generation (Leitch, Hill & Harrison 2010; Sefotho 2015). In other words, knowledge in qualitative constructivism and Africentric worldviews is value-related, thus retaining the status of participants in this study as women is vital (Flick 2009, 2014). In a nutshell, there are a few qualitative methodology features that are culturally relevant to the study participants that justify its appropriation together with the Africentric worldview in this study.

Qualitative methodology also embraces multiple realities. These approaches are appropriate in the study of African women's strength and resilience because their experiences are diverse; each of the women are at different levels of re-establishment in Australia, their trajectory of migration differs markedly, and each has different reasons for migrating out of their African countries. The Africentric worldview is just as useful as qualitative research in making sense of the everyday experiences of the women in this study. The two worldviews were complementary in studying the everyday experiences of the challenges, struggles and difficulties of the West African migrant women in this study, and how they were resilient through it all, by allowing understanding of their stories within their social context (Mkabela 2005).

In making meaning and interpreting their social world, constructivists and the Africentric worldview use humans as instruments. The two approaches also use multiple construction of meanings whereby the researcher explores complex perspectives that the scenario provides, but not by reducing meanings into a few or into categories (Creswell 2009; Doucet, Letourneau & Stoppard 2010; Howells & Fletcher 2015).

Qualitative methodology was also preferred in this study as stories of West African women cannot be adequately reduced to quantitative numeric data processes (Smith 2015c). Reducing resilience to measurable outcomes of risk and protective factors does not provide a broader dimension of the concept this study aimed to achieve. As Lenette (2011) suggests, critical qualitative perspectives help yield more textured descriptions and complexity of resilience. The nature of the paradigm indicates that data in the form of stories are made by storytellers; they are not pre-given, but are interpretive results (Thomas et al. 2014; Wolcott 1994).

To understand this better, nothing can actually be viewed as data within a qualitative constructivist perspective without recognising the involvement of a researcher who takes and makes notes of some things in preference to or exclusion of the others (Grbich 2012; Wolcott 1994).

In qualitative constructivist research, the researcher "become[s] the storyteller, inviting the reader to see through your eyes what you have seen" (Wolcott 1994, p. 28). The constructivist worldview also highlights the influence that culture has on individuals, including the way it gives a definitive view of the world to individuals (Denzin & Lincoln 2011; Thomas et al. 2014). Culturally in Africa, stories are freely told under the moonlight in front of houses and courtyards. Yet, the storytelling style of qualitative constructivist epistemology would serve the purpose of the storytelling necessary in this study of West African migrant women, since they now live in the Western world where the phenomena of challenges and difficulties through resettlement as a migrant into a new culture are being explored. This 'context' is paramount in both qualitative constructionism and Africentric paradigms (Muwanga-Zake 2009).

The Africentric worldview, or Ubuntu, means that people are people through other people (Louw 2006) and with these words, the African sociocultural content and philosophy stipulates communalism. The Africentric worldview represents the collectiveness or the importance of agreement (Booysen 2016). To reach an agreement, there is extensive discussion between the people involved. Ubuntu as a research paradigm presents the research process with a human face, as also embraced by the qualitative paradigm, while ensuring the researcher and the researched are on the same platform (equal level), an equality that interlocks with the feminism strand utilised in this study. The African ethos of collectivism attests to the fact that there is no absolute knowledge because there is communal involvement in knowledge construction and acquisition (Ntseane 2011), a process similar to the qualitative research process between the researcher and the participants (Denzin & Lincoln 2011). Qualitative research believes that there is no single truth, which implies that there are interpretive activities (Denzin & Lincoln 2011). The qualitative paradigm interpretive process helps to bring into limelight the subjugated

knowledges of the African people; in this instance, African migrant women personally relating their stories through the use of Africentric worldviews (Oba 2018) and qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln 2011). The interrelationship and co-construction of knowledge processes resonates with the storytelling method utilised in this study. African traditional means of communication is the storytelling that occurs between the teller and the listener. In this study, the storytelling method is about voice and power, and aligns with one of the aims of the study by listening to women's own stories of resilience and strength during resettlement.

The ultimate aim of the Afrocentric paradigm is people's liberation, by generating knowledge to free and to empower (Ntseane 2011). It resonates with the framework of womanism [feminism] embraced in this study. Moreover, both Africentric and womanism paradigms resonate with the opportunity that the women in this study had in telling their own story of migration by themselves, rather than through the lens of their male partners. As Mazama (2001, p. 399) argues, such a process is for the generation of "knowledge that opens the heart". The use of storytelling also celebrated this with the women.

Further, the women in the study, as well as the researcher, hold an Africentric worldview; thus, it was appropriate to apply the Africentric worldview in the study (Gumbo 2014). Mazama (2001) indicates that it is only through a people's worldview that what constitutes as problem can be ascertained. The experiences of the women in this study and what represents challenge, and indeed how they exercise strength through such challenges, is sensibly understood through their world, the collective and humanism (Africentric-Ubuntu) world of living. This worldview provides an appropriate paradigm through which women's migration, struggles, challenges and triumphs can be represented and understood (Ntseane 2011). As Ngara (2008) posits, African ways of knowing not only reflect the African worldview but they also define the African personhood. African ways of knowing include etiquette, survival and welfare through stories, songs, poems, taboos, tacit knowledge and proverbs. Taboos in the African philosophical worldview originated from people's tacit knowledge. Tacit knowledge involves intuitions and hunches acquired by

people through their informal experiences (Muwanga-Zake 2009). Intrinsic knowledge in African philosophy is also embraced in the qualitative methods and the constructivist worldview used in this study (Lincoln & Guba 1985b).

The philosophical worldviews that underscore the paradigms embraced in this research are specifically explored through the following concepts of knowledge: ontology, epistemology and methodology, as delineated by Lincoln and Guba (1985b) and the axiology as explained by Creswell et al (2007).

Ontology is "the study of being" (Crotty 2003). Guba and Lincoln (1989, p. 83) clarify ontological views as responses to questions such as 'what is there that can be known? or what is the nature of reality?' Using ontology involves asking questions such as 'what are the distinctive features of one thing to another thing', it is connected with 'being' and what that is (Converse 2012). The ontology in research refers to the purpose upon which the research study is undertaken (Sefotho 2015); consequently, the philosophical base of ontology helps shapes the questions that give illumination to the reality under study; that is, the research objectives (Grix 2002).

In this current study, the women's storied interviews gave clarity and understanding to the aims, purpose and objectives, which was to explore the West African women's resilience and strength during their resettlement in Australia. The ontology of the qualitative constructivist paradigm states that there is no single reality to a phenomena of inquiry, rather there are multiple realities that are socially constructed (Andrade 2009; Denzin & Lincoln 2011); in this piece of research, between the women and the student researcher.

The West African migrant women participants in this study migrated to Australia at different times and through different trajectories that, expectedly, shaped the distinctive stories that each of the women contributed (De Villiers 2005; Speziale, Streubert & Carpenter 2011). The multiple layers of realities of strength and courage shown by the women during their resettlement years was examined in the context of their experiences (Vardhan 2015) since context also has great influence on experiences (Lincoln 1995) in constructing a subjective truth about reality.

Epistemology resonates with the meaning-making activity of the individual mind. Epistemology is the study of knowledge and focuses on the questions of what can be known and who can know it (Converse 2012). Epistemologically, constructivists take a subjective position since it is the only way to unravel the constructions held by individuals, and in this case the individual West African migrant women that participated in this study (Guba 1990). Guba's explanations further clarify that the realities about the adversities, the challenges faced and the subsequent strength about re-establishment in Australia that exists in the minds of the knower, that is, the West African migrant women in this study, can only be accessed through the subjective interactions between myself, as researcher, and these women. Findings about the strength and resilience of the West African migrant women in this study are based on the outcome of the process of interaction, the relationship formed between myself as the researcher and the women who contributed their story to the research. Qualitative research is located within the epistemology of constructivism (Liamputtong 2016), as earlier discussed

Axiology is the scientific nature of human value and value judgments (Creswell et al. 2007). Researchers embracing the constructivist worldview recognises that their background shapes the interpretations they make, hence they position themselves within their research in recognition of how their interpretation flows from their own biographical data of personal, historical and cultural experiences (Creswell 2012). In the Africentric view, axiology also refers to the researcher's reflexivity and respect for the cultural knowledge with which they engage (Gumbo 2014; Kovach 2009; Summers 2013). My story as the researcher is detailed later in this chapter.

Methodological component of a philosophical worldview

Constructivist and Africentric worldview goals are to identify multiple constructions or realities and transform them into consensus (Guba 1990). The worldview of constructivists embraces the importance of meaning and the hermeneutical dialogical process. Methodologically, constructivist researchers therefore neither "predict, control or transform the 'real world" (Guba 1990, p. 27) as do positivists (Denzin & Lincoln 2011; Lichtman 2014). Rather, as their

name implies, they reconstruct *real world,* where it exists, which is in the minds of the constructors (Guba 1990, p. 27). Constructivists achieve the reconstruction of the human world by keeping the flow of communication between the constructors for improved discussion (Guba 1990). "The craft of a qualitative sociologist is not an objective methodology but of *hermeneutic practices* that allow the researcher to understand the indigenous world near to the way that it appears to the people themselves" (Liberman 1999, p. 53). Africentricism is holistic too, and embraces all its collective and communalism knowledge, in contrast to individuality, therefore it is open to multiplicity of the qualitative constructivist (Gumbo 2014).

The Africentric worldview in this study helped place in context the shared experiences of African people at all levels and facilitate a pull of information from the African context for the philosophy that culturally supports (Oba 2018) how the researcher came to make meaning of West African migrant women's resilience and strength experiences. Passed down through generations, the following aspects constitute Africentric worldview: spirituality (belief in a being or force greater than oneself); collectivism (emphasis on cooperation); time orientation (equal importance attributed to past, present and future, and time flexibility); orality (preference for receiving stimuli and information orally); sensitivity to affect and emotional cues (acknowledgement of others' emotional and affective states); verve and rhythm (rhythmic and creative behaviour); and balance and harmony with nature (balance between one's mental, physical, and spiritual states) (Belgrave & Allison 2006) as cited in (Neblett Jr et al. 2010).

The age-old oral tradition of stories and storytelling (Livo & Rietz 1986) are well rooted in the African culture (Finnegan 2007). The women in this study are not only migrants from the age-old tradition, but women who are also the established master storytellers in African oral traditions (Banks-Wallace 2002; Peek & Yankah 2004). Qualitative storytelling is appropriate to this study because of the values of stories as cultural anchors to women's lives (King & Ferguson 2011). As Bettina Aptheker (1989, pp. 44-5) states:

> women use stories in their everyday lives and especially as a way of doing emotional work … some have been stitched into quilts or planted in gardens or painted or sculpted or written in letters and journals … women's stories invoke distinct meanings distinct special and temporal arrangements. They have been crafted out of artefacts of daily lives, beckoning us to see.

The current study explored how the West African migrant women craftily use stories in emotionally recalling and sharing those aspects of their lives as it relates to re-establishment of life in Australia. Further, the study explored how the women use their stories to tell of their challenges and triumphs in living in a new culture.

Qualitative storytelling allowed the researcher to hear the women speak in their own voice as I was invited into the ways that the women utilise language (Asante 1991) and the experience of re-establishment to shape meanings according to their own terms (King & Ferguson 2011). These qualities are relevant to the objectives of this study. Doing fieldwork in qualitative storytelling research involves utilising the skills of respect, being an attentive listener, empathising and creating good rapport, often within a short period of time (Balls 2009).

What are story, storying and storytelling?

Humans began telling stories as soon as they start to speak. Stories not only work *with*, but also work *for* and *on* people (Boyd 2009). Stories are mediums of preserving culture; they are ubiquitous and they exist in our cultural and social milieu (Polkinghorne 1988). The process whereby we structure experiences into story is known as storying (Livo & Rietz 1986), and it helps us make sense of human behaviours (Banks-Wallace 2002). The art of storytelling is common in cultural and social activities that Africans are involved in during different aspects in their daily living (Boyd 2009; Champion 2014). Storytelling predates the written form and it usually comes in oral form and sign language (Boyd 2009). The art of storytelling was a vehicle in teaching and used both to impart moral lessons and in consoling people within the community. Both the storyteller and the listener are actively involved in the storytelling processes.

As a researcher, I was seeking insight into the African-Australian women's strength, tenacity and resilience through the storied accounts of the West African women living in NSW, specifically Sydney, Australia. Stories convey how and why life changes, often commencing with a situation in which life is relatively in balance until there arises an event capable of disrupting normal life balance. Dealing with the personal conflict between subjective expectation and cruel reality is paramount to resilience, and explains the intersection between storytelling and resilience frameworks in researching the West African women who participated in this study. Stories and storytelling have been used in qualitative research at diverse levels to advance knowledge, including [women's] health and illness (Babatunde-Sowole et al. 2018; Liamputtong 2016; Nwoga 2000; Power et al. 2011; Williams-Brown, Baldwin & Bakos 2002).

African storytelling: Origin

"It is my wish that the voice of the storyteller will never die in Africa, that all of the children in the world may experience the wonder of books, and that they will never lose the capacity to enlarge their earthly dwelling place with magic of stories" (Mandela 2002, p.14)

'Nommo' in an Africentricity world is the power of the spoken word with which we generate and create reality (Asante 1991). Nommo is the rhetorical power of speech, song and myth exemplified in the oral expression of the African people through drums, storytelling, sermons, raps, gospel songs and poetry, and praise singing (Oyebade 1990). It is the power of word in African society that generates peace and stability in chaos or disharmony situations (Oyebade 1990). Through the Nommo power, African people build their community in community rather than individuality. Nommo is strong and seen as the origin for the storytelling oral traditions of the African people. The Ubuntu tenets that shape the Africentric worldview of the study participants are socially learned through oral and spoken words such as storytelling (Kamwangamalu 1999). According to James (1990), African writers and indeed the African people's language is fashioned by their culture and sometimes by the reality that their mother tongue is not English. The stories contributed by the women in this study are explored in line with how their culture and language shape their

responses to discourse and their exercise of strength during resettlement in Australia.

African women and their roles in storytelling

"The grandmother storyteller is somewhat akin to Gramsci's 'organic intellectual'— an embodiment of the experiential and collective wisdom of her community for whom colonialism is not the beginning nor the end of history. She speaks, and continues to speak in spite of the march of 'modernity' that attempts to make her invisible even as it feeds on her heritage" (Alidou 2002).

The use of storytelling in studies with African women is well documented (Williams-Brown, Baldwin & Bakos 2002). The storytelling methodology is well suited to explore African women's migration and resettlement in Australia because African women traditionally hold a significant role in storytelling and in the passing of communal knowledge from one generation to another (Oyinsan 2011). The oral tradition of telling stories is a norm within African women (Banks-Wallace 2002; Wilentz 1992). Generally, the oldest woman, often a grandmother figure within the house or in the vicinity, is the master storyteller (Alidou 2002; Osteneck 2011).

In examining the gender and the narrative spaces in Africa, Alidou (2002) elucidates on the central positions of the African women during storytelling through the Hausa cultural lens. In traditional Africa, grandmothers are great storytellers. They do so through expressive faces, their eyes, their voice and the ways they use their hands. The aim of the grandmothers' stories includes mentoring, instructing, criticising and praising as well as entertaining the young. The other responsibilities grandmothers have through storytelling is that of transmitting information on survival and reasoning competences to youths, and teachings on the cultural norms, African worldview, standards and ethics acceptable in traditional African society (Adelowo 2012; Alidou 2002). The women use communal understandings through their experiential knowledge in maintaining the connection between cultural histories of the past and present (Kassam 1996; Oyinsan 2011; Tshane 2013). Women are the first schools for children, and the nurturing capabilities of women are viewed through their initial storytelling prowess around morals' imagery and humour in building up their young (Alidou 2002; Oyinsan 2011). Other scholars have

explained the consultation strength in African women as keepers of oral traditions. Peek and Yanka (2004) describe the queen mother in the Asante tribe of Ghana as someone who has a court wherein she is consulted about the country's monumental facts.

The above historical details about African women and storytelling are pertinent because those insights can shape the women's stories in the study, and are valuable in understanding how they use the knowledge or strength of women as storytellers to tell their own stories of migration and their experiences of challenges and triumphs.

Conceptual frameworks

The conceptual frameworks used in this study are the womanism strand of feminism, and strengths-based positive psychology and resilience.

Womanism framework

To achieve the research aims and objectives, I employed the use of womanism, a conceptual strand of feminism as proposed by Nigerian Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, because it functions as the unifying umbrella for the women of Africa in their effort to successfully maintain their humanity (Mekgwe 2008). African womanism rejects the abuse of female sexuality and bodies and denigration through some men's creative writings. Feminism uncovers and discovers the authentic details of West African women's lived experiences hitherto been "hidden, inaccessible, suppressed, distorted, misunderstood, ignored" (Weiler 1988, p. 62). African feminism also struggles against colonialism and domination, racism and economic exploitation (Walker 1983).

The term 'womanism' was coined to respond to the inadequacies of feminism in representing the black African woman's experiences and struggles for equality. Womanism embodies the true nature of the African woman; her role and contributions in the development of her people. The African womanism strand of feminism challenges oppression of women, but does not alienate their men nor reject their African culture (Mekgwe 2008). Mekgwe defines African feminism as "a discourse that takes care to delineate those concerns

peculiar to the African situation. It also questions feature of traditional African values without denigrating them, understanding that these might be viewed differently to the different classes of women" (Mekgwe 2008, p. 167). Womanism is preferred by the continental African people because it maintains respect for the family unit both at home and in diaspora (Akujobi 2004). How the women in this research speak out for the sake of other African women who may migrate to Australia in future is paramount in this research.

The strengths-based conceptual model (Smith 2006) and the womanist perspectives guide the study design. Together with the use of storytelling methods, they describe the West African migrant women's strength and resilience during re-establishment of their lives in Australia. Smith's (2006) strengths-based conceptual model of counselling echoes or resonates with the viewpoint of contemporary migrant scholars that focusing on migrant peoples' positive experiences is not only important, but expedient towards their healthy re-establishment into a new culture and country. Strengths-based counselling or a positive model of care is explained as "a paradigm shift in psychology from the deficit medical model to one that stresses clients' strengths" (Smith 2006, p. 134), and is about building strength in the individual, instead of embracing the medical model. These frameworks are explored succinctly within the constructivism paradigm.

Resilience framework

Adversity exemplifies difficult and challenging times in people's lives. A resilience framework is established on positive concepts of health (Dunleavy, Kennedy & Vaandrager 2012). Originating from positive psychology, the resilience framework has contributed an immense grounding into how adversity is viewed (Roberto & Moleiro 2015; Seligman et al. 2005). Various definitions of the concept include Ungar (2008, p. 225) that, "in the context of exposure to significant adversity, resilience is both the capacity to navigate their way into psychological, social, cultural and physical resources that sustain their wellbeing and their individual and collective capacity to negotiate for these resources to be provided and experienced in culturally meaningful ways".

The conventional ecological resilience framework does not accommodate the plurality of meanings that people undertake in the process of self-constructions of resilience because it is in the positivist school of thought (Howells & Fletcher 2015; Lenette, Brough & Cox 2013; Lenette 2011; Roberto & Moleiro 2015). The theory underpinning resilience shifts away from risk-vulnerability-deficit models towards a focus on triumphs, resistance, and the ability to thrive in the face of adversity. Defining the framework of resilience, Pan et al. (2008) explain that a subgroup of a high-risk population can both develop and retain a normal healthy psychological functioning with no evidence of psychopathology. This could be interpreted as the individual's ability to control adverse situations by accessing resources that are available; most important of which is having caring and supportive relationships with others that can help nurture internal and external factors.

The approach can capture the diverse meanings that the women in this study hold about their migration and the resources used in achieving strength against challenges (Roberto & Moleiro 2015). Given the focus of the study, the relevance of adapting the resilience framework is imperative. Additionally, the resilience framework recognises the creation of knowledge to be context-specific. As Doucet, Letourneau and Stoppard (2010) explain it, the therapeutic relationship between researcher and the researched is obvious in the client-patient relationship. It is through this that women identify with their reality and the meanings they attach to the reality.

The positive resilience framework helps clarify that while life adversities may have heightened the potential for psychological and or negative responses, the individual, such as the West African migrant women in this study, who may find themselves in such situations, often report positive experiences (Luthar, Lyman & Crossman 2014). Consequently, the ability to exist despite life adversities should not be overlooked. The aim of the framework is to focus on adaptive rather than maladaptive details, and on strengths rather than on weaknesses (Lloyd & Hastings 2009; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi 2014). The aim of this research is to explore the strength exhibited during the challenges and difficulties of re-establishment among the West African migrant women in

Australia. As a novel study, the research focused on the West African women's strength stories during the time, rather than their weaknesses or negative effects of the experience that already pervades the literature.

METHODS

The research methods utilised in conducting this research is described next under relevant sub-headings.

Setting

In a qualitative storytelling constructivist approach, a natural setting is deemed appropriate for the collection of data (Guba & Lincoln 1994). The natural setting is described as the context where the participants usually operate. Additionally, the inquirer and the inquired into establish the context of their inquiry and the knowledge created is better absorbed within such context, not in isolation of it (Creswell 2013; Erlandson 1993; Silverman 2013). The importance of a natural setting context is further heightened through the constructivist's qualitative beliefs that undesirable results may unfold as humans construct their worlds (Guba & Lincoln 1989; Howells & Fletcher 2015).

The study setting for this research was Sydney, NSW, Australia because it has a significant number of African people. Studies have shown that over a third of migrants live in a capital city(Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2012).The story of the West African migrant women who participated in the study was collected at a location of their choosing; many chose the comfort of their homes. This setting was socio-culturally appropriate for the study cohort and congruent with the paradigm employed for this study. Appreciating a study within its natural occurrence has the added value of establishing the transferability of its findings, which is core to naturalistic paradigm.

The appropriateness of utilising qualitative methods in resilience research was aptly captured by Ungar (2003, p. 85) because they are "well suited to the discovery of the unnamed protective processes relevant to the lived experience of research participants; provide thick description of phenomenon in very specific contexts; elicit and add power to minority 'voices' which

account for unique localised definitions of positive outcomes; promote tolerance for these localised constructions by avoiding generalisation but facilitating transferability of results; and, require researchers to account for their biased standpoints".

Storytellers

A blueprint for inviting participants for a study not only serves as a reasonable guide, but also enhances the richness of the data collected from suitable members of the group under study. In the ensuing segment of this thesis, I elaborate on the various ways that I engaged with the storytellers. The hermeneutic-dialectic approach as explained in the constructivist methodology approach (Guba 1990), is relevant here. The hermeneutic input is the interpretive power in the worldview and the dialectic involves the comparison that brings out the convergence and divergence in order to generate conceptual themes through higher level of synthesis (Guba 1990; Guba & Lincoln 1989).

Inclusion criteria for storytellers

I designed inclusion and exclusion criteria to undertake this section of the data collection process. Women aged 18-years or older who were born in a West African country and migrated to Australia as a refugee or skilled migrant more than 12 months prior, were invited to participate in this study. The women had to be able to speak and read English for ease of communication, and be willing to participate in the storied interviews. The criteria assisted in addressing the research aims and objectives. English is the official language in many parts of West Africa; therefore, language did not pose a barrier to recruitment.

Sampling techniques used in inviting storytellers into the study

A common method for selection of study participants in qualitative inquiry is purposive sampling (Borbasi & Jackson 2011; Guest, Bunce & Johnson 2006; Sandelowski 1995), because qualitative research sampling is focused on the richness of information towards realising the aims and objectives of the study (O'Reilly & Parker 2013; van der Putten 2008). The purposive sampling means that people invited into the study have had exposure to, or experience of, the phenomenon being explored (Marshall & Rossman 2014; Ryan, Coughlan &

Cronin 2007). The sampling technique adopted for this study was therefore purposive (Flick 2009, 2014). Through purposive sampling, the researcher was able to sit down with the women and listen, and was able to identify the similarities and differences as the participants constructed their real-life stories. Once the recruitment commenced, additional participants were sought through the snowball recruitment technique, whereby the women used the brochure in inviting other women into the study (Abrams 2010; McDermid et al. 2016).

The snowballing technique is a valuable method of accessing closed communities such as migrants (Chotiga, Crozier & Pfeil 2010). To mitigate possible selection bias of snowball sampling, I used multiple entry points to place the study flyers, which ensured access to a greater proportion of the African community (Kristensen & Ravn 2015; Sulaiman-Hill & Thompson 2011). All but one of the women who were invited agreed to take part in the study. The only woman who could not commit to participate declined because of her busy schedule. This woman's inability did not affect data as saturation was reached before collection was ceased. The day, time and venue of the meeting were as chosen by the women. I introduced myself as a PhD student and explained the study, and ensured women read the consent (Appendix F) and information sheet (Appendix C) prior consenting to participate.

Mode of inviting storytellers

The study was carried out within the womanist and resilience storytelling frameworks with the aim of representing the voices of the women and their stories in an authentic manner. The method of inviting storytellers into the study was by placing study flyers in Migrant Resource Centres across the suburbs where African people mostly reside in Sydney. The process was supplemented with the snowball sampling technique. Supplementing the sampling process enabled me to reach women who may otherwise refrain from answering advertisements for participating in studies, and prevented the high chance of them not granting interviews to complete total strangers (Banjo 2012; Chotiga, Crozier & Pfeil 2010). Additionally, with the consent of church pastors and wives, the flyers for the study were placed at religious organisations to increase outreach to the women.

There were 22 individual West African migrant women storytellers who participated in the study. The women voluntarily contributed their stories after consent and gave me permission to audio-tape the discussions. Congruent to constructivist worldviews, the fairly small sample of women in the study does not equate to the volume of the thick data generated.

Method of collecting stories in this study

The collected stories that culminated into the data for this study (Creswell 2012), were generated between June and September 2015. The women provided demographic information (Appendix H) prior to commencing the story collection. The demographic information assisted in positioning each of the women's migration stories within their individual experiences (their job, their homes) and their cultural (ethnic) and historical (time and place) contexts (Clandinin & Connelly 2000; Creswell et al. 2007). Storied interview conversational style was the method used to collect data. The use of storied interview as a format in collecting and generating data for this study fostered a conversational atmosphere whereby the women were able to pursue issues raised to logical conclusions. It was a process that offered the researcher the opportunity to pick up threads of unanswered guided prompt questions (McDermid et al. 2016; Peters 2010).

In collecting the data for this study, the women were asked to 'tell their story' of migration, which encompassed the challenges encountered and the strength associated with the re-establishment of their lives in the new culture in Australia. Consequently, the women were asked to tell all of their stories, especially as they related to the study aims, by paying particular attention to times they had to be resilient and strong. The storytelling interview method used was a conversational style face-to-face interview that involved open-ended guidance in eliciting the women's stories (McDermid et al. 2016; Peters 2010) – a process that allowed women control over how the session proceeded and impulsive responses.

With the women's consent, all of the interviews and stories generated were digitally recorded and later transcribed verbatim by me. The open-ended story

guide (Appendix H) included questions such as: "Can you please tell me about your migration and the reasons for leaving your home country? Can you tell me about when you first got to Australia? During difficult times, what helped you get through it?" The use of this method ensured freedom in the discussion (Mapedzahama et al. 2012).

Probing questions (Appendix I) were employed (Patton 2015) to help the women maintain the continual flow of their storytelling. It is not uncommon for people to tell stories, and with a little encouragement narrative accounts of experiences can be generated in research interviews (Elliott 2005; King & Horrocks 2010). The use of interviews has been associated with encouraging study participants in the telling of uncut stories rather than an abridged story (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009; Morse 1988).

Twenty-two individual storied interviews were collected, and each session ranged from 60 minutes to 120 minutes. At the consent of the women, and in order to ensure the collection of a full and complete set of data, all the storied interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim (Holloway & Wheeler 2013; McDermid et al. 2016) by the researcher, which promoted consistency in the elicitation of information and the assessment across interviews (Brod, Tesler & Christensen 2009). The storied interview sessions continued until no new information emerged, which signalled data saturation (Fusch & Ness 2015; Morse 1995; O'Reilly & Parker 2013).

Positionality

"It is a near impossible task for researchers to totally reject their values when they engage in research" (Sefotho 2015)

The interconnectedness of a researcher to the data generated, including the analysis and the whole research process, is well documented (Pezalla, Pettigrew & Miller-Day 2012). As primary instruments, it is near impossible for qualitative researchers to totally ignore their values as they engage in research, since they carry their values with them throughout the course of the research (Sefotho 2015). To this end, scholars have discussed the importance of reflexivity as an integral part in not only managing, but also becoming self-aware in all areas that define the research process (Berger 2015; Bott 2010).

In addition, we understand that "feminist researchers recognise the bidirectional nature of research. I am subject, object, and researcher. My participants are subjects, objects, and actors. To assert otherwise is to be disingenuous about the process of research, especially qualitative research" (Deutsch 2004, pp. 888-9). This current research is no exception especially that as the student researcher, I share some similarities with the women who participated in the study. Research ideas seldom arise as a matter of surprise to the researcher.

My story

I am an immigrant, a nurse and a midwife who migrated some years ago to Australia from one of the West African countries. Prior to migration, I graduated with a Bachelor in Language Arts Education from a Nigerian university and was a high school teacher, caring for others through imparting knowledge to school students. My caring zeal has pushed me further into nursing, midwifery and health disciplines, where I currently care for people's health, especially the health of women.

As a certified nurse and midwife, I have clinical skills and experience in diverse specialties such as cardiac, orthopaedics, anaesthetic and post-operative recovery room nursing, antenatal care of well and sick women, delivery room as well as post-natal care of women and their families. I remain as a casual staff member in the women's health clinical area.

Being an immigrant, I have first-hand experiences of the two cultures, and also in resettling into a new culture that has its merits and demerits. I wondered if, and indeed how, other West African women living in Australia were able to settle through similar challenges and difficulties often encountered by migrants in a new country. I felt the need to document such strength and resilience that the West African women utilised in successfully starting a new life in Australia to help future West African women coming to Australia. More importantly, I felt the need to document the strength and tenacity of these women in their re-establishment of lives in Australia coming through a positive model and perspective as I was dismayed by the negativity in the literature. Such documentation would be an added advantage in the care of migrant women at

all levels as they encounter the various Australian systems – health, education, psychology, and finance amongst others.

Transcription, interpretation and analysis of the collected stories

Transcription ensured the spoken voices of the women are were converted to written form for data processing (Willig 2013). Information only becomes useful to people after adequate analysis of raw data (Suri 2011) and generation of themes. The six steps of thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006) was employed because it was appropriate for the study design and also a useful framework for a neophyte researcher in developing the skills of research and analysis. In addition, thematic analysis is paramount in reducing a large dataset, as in the current study, to a manageable text. It allows for thick description of experience, is capable of highlighting similarities and differences in experience, can generate unanticipated insights, and, accommodates social and psychological interpretations (Braun & Clarke 2006).

Data transcription, interpretation and analysis

Thematic analysis was undertaken immediately following each interview (Mauthner & Doucet 1998). The analysis resulted in overarching themes from the transcripts that helped capture the strength and resilience embedded in the women's stories (Braun & Clarke 2006). The interviews were transcribed by me and subjected to multiple reading times prior to coding and categorisation (Mapedzahama et al. 2012) to support the Africentric perspective embraced in this study and in alliance with the analytical frameworks exemplified above.

Thematic analysis processes helped ensure credibility through the provision of sufficient details that established the emergence of the findings from the raw data. It was vital for me as an African researcher using storytelling method and womanism theory to help readers both to hear and to feel the women's voices. Verbatim quotations from the women's stories are used to illustrate themes and to elevate women's voices beyond just a written text (Elliott 2005). The above analysis is the classical general inductive process of analysis where findings arise directly from the analysis of the raw data, not from a priori expectations or models (Corbin & Strauss 2015; Thomas 2006).

Some analysis occurred iteratively during the data collection (Sandelowski 2004); however, the main analysis strategy as guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of clear and concise analysis guidelines for conducting thematic analysis are an added strength to the audit trail of this study. The phases as used in this study are outlined below.

Braun & Clarke (2006) six phases of data analysis used in this study

The first phase of analysis encompassed the transcription and listening to the audio while checking transcripts to allow familiarisation with the data (Braun & Clarke 2006). I then saved and printed copies for reading to achieve a general insightful understanding into the topics or ideas that were embedded in the interview transcript. The verbatim recording helped the transcription remain 'true' to its original form and nature (Braun & Clarke 2006). The transcription also included the occasional noticeable non-verbatim bodily gestures, sighs, smiles and audible laughter.

The generation of initial codes dominated the second phase of analysis with particular attention to prior lists of concepts noted in phase one (Braun & Clarke 2006). The raw data were explored for texts that present a meaningful way of representing the phenomena under study. The constant comparison and appraisal generated the initial coding that represents the West African women's stories projecting the women's focus in telling their stories.

Third, Braun and Clarke's steps propose the search for themes by which the codes earlier generated are arranged continuously until emerging themes from the study are identified (Braun & Clarke 2006). Themes in a dataset capture the salient things around the research question and aims. In a theme, there are patterned responses noted within the data. Themes can be theory or data-driven (Braun & Clarke 2006). The themes in this study were data-driven; I did not construct themes, I identified themes that emerged from the study (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane 2008).

For the fourth stage, Braun and Clarke encourage the review of themes so far generated by ascertaining that the emergent themes combine firmly in reference to the coded extracts and the entire data (Braun & Clarke 2006). The

process is a refinement and solidifying phase for the emergent themes whereby some are dropped or collapsed due to overlapping. This reviewing process ceased when there was no further substantial information to add. The derived themes should fit together to portray a story about the dataset (Braun & Clarke 2006) as collected from the West African migrant women that constitute the participants in this study.

Defining and naming the themes is the process of producing a thematic picture of the data analysis, which shaped the fifth stage of Braun and Clark's analysis process. Consequently, there was constant refinement in order for the details of each theme to shape together for the reader in grasping complete insight and analysis of the women's stories, while generating clear definitions and names for each theme so identified (Braun & Clarke 2006).

The sixth phase of Braun and Clarke's thematic data analysis is producing the report. The report as it applies to the current study was produced using convincing examples from the data to support the analysis ensuring also that they could be related back to the research questions and literature, thus generating an academic and intellectual report (Braun & Clarke 2006).

Rigour and trustworthiness

The rigour and credibility of this study is evident throughout, from the abstract to the methodology, and with the inclusion of an audit trail to the methods section (Welch & Jirojwong 2014).

How has rigour been achieved in this study?

Rigour is the *trustworthiness* of a piece of qualitative study in its attempt to remain true to research aims (Speziale, Streubert & Carpenter 2011). It encompasses the accuracy and precision of how a researcher represents the reality of the researched including adequately describing the methods and decision-making process that shapes the study (Lichtman 2014; Speziale, Streubert & Carpenter 2011). Being an 'artistic endeavour', scholars believe that the process of assessing the quality of qualitative research should entail a soulful and imaginative approach (Houghton et al. 2013; Sandelowski 1993). Being a constructivist qualitative piece of inquiry, and in achieving the above

processes, the four steps of judging the soundness of qualitative research by Lincoln and Guba (1985b), that is, credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability, are considered below. Credibility and dependability both shape the quality in qualitative data, while transferability, as the name implies, helps demonstrate the likelihood of research findings in one setting being transferred to the next setting and groups (Polit & Beck 2006; Polit & Beck 2014).

Credibility

Credibility in qualitative research stands for the value and the believability of the research findings to ascertain that the results are authentic and valid (Houghton et al. 2013; Korstjens & Moser 2018; Lincoln & Guba 1985b). A qualitative researcher achieves credibility by staying true to the participant's understanding of phenomena (Creswell 2012). Credibility deals with the researcher's prolonged contact with the researched and the researched field to gain full understanding of the phenomena being studied (Houghton et al. 2013; Lincoln & Guba 1985a; Shenton 2004).

In this study, credibility through prolonged engagement was achieved during the data collection process by building rapport with the women and through the use of probes to provoke detailed data and iterative questioning. The result of the prolonged engagement with the field resulted in data saturation whereby no new emerging data was evident (Houghton et al. 2010; Kerr, Nixon & Wild 2010; Shenton 2004). Further prolonged engagement with the data was achieved through rigorous handling and immersion in the collected data (Borbasi & Jackson 2011).

The West African women's willingness to participate and option to withdraw at any time are additional forms of data rigour that ensured genuine and honest contributions from participants towards research credibility (Lichtman 2014; Shenton 2004). My background knowledge of the culture of the women as a West Africa woman myself is an invaluable asset to the credibility of the research. In addition, credibility was achieved through accurate transcription and the retaining of essential meaning of the women's stories after prolonged engagement with the data (Houghton et al. 2013). The data were reviewed by the team to ensure agreement on the emerging themes and to achieve

credibility. The thick description of the phenomenon under study helps ensure credibility. The researcher recorded field notes on first impressions of each story collection session to help contribute to emerging theories and unfolding patterns from the data (Scheyvens 2014; Shenton 2004; Stanley & Nayar 2014). The keeping of a field journal is postulated as an important process of being self-aware in achieving a credible qualitative study (Silverman 2013; Stanley & Nayar 2014).

Triangulation is about understanding diverse perspectives, and using triangulation towards the credibility of a qualitative research is widely advocated in the literature (Houghton et al. 2013; Tobin & Begley 2004; Yin 2016). According to Houghton and colleagues (2013), triangulation helps in data confirmation and in ensuring that data is complete. In this study, I used investigator triangulation(Tobin & Begley 2004) by working in partnership with my supervisors to ascertain faithful representation of the women's stories with the interpretations so given.

The process of member checking is generally supported in the literature in order to achieve credibility and rigour in qualitative research (Creswell 2012; Houghton et al. 2013; Shenton 2004), but there are scholars who hold different important views also (Power et al. 2012; Reissman 2008), leaving researchers with the decision of whether or not to return transcribed and analysed data to participants to verify. In this study, while clarifications of audio-taped information was attended as deemed fit (Creswell 2012), transcribed and analysed data were not returned to the women in recognition of the storytelling data collection method used.

Stories are time and context bound, and capable of strengthening research data against retrospection (Chase 2005; Sandelowski 1993). Consequently, I did not utilise the participant check process in order to retain originality of the stories as first told. Since truth is relative, reality can change and new levels of meaning added from new knowledge gained through temporal distance (Doucet, Letourneau & Stoppard 2010; Sandelowski 1993). Exact words of the women were transcribed and preserved as quotes in the findings chapter, excluding identifying data. The meaning of the women's stories take priority in

the multiple reality constructions that shape constructivist philosophical worldviews. Though de-identified, one other quality of credibility is the participant's ability to note their own experiences (Guba 1981). In retaining the authenticity of the meaning and giving precedence to the women's stories, it is possible for each woman in the study to be able to identify or relate to their own experiences and contributions to the study. The credibility steps taken in this research also augment the dependability quality of the study findings since both measures are inextricably linked.

Dependability

Dependability is the truthfulness of research findings (Polit & Beck 2014; Shenton 2004). Dependability is the ability of the researcher to be transparent so that the reader can clearly comprehend the research outcomes, and it is a process that ensures auditability and reproduction of the work (Ryan-Nicholls & Will 2009; Silverman 2013). I achieved dependability in this study through regular review of data collection and analysis with my supervision panel (Lincoln & Guba 1985b). All steps of the study, which includes the justification of methodology, accessing the women and the analysis process used in eliciting themes from the women's stories, were clearly defined and documented so that an accurate audit trail was generated (Guba 1981; Houghton et al. 2013; Silverman 2010). An audit trail is the clear path through which decisions are made throughout the research, known to the reader so the reader can flow in thought with such decisions in understanding the piece of research being read (Morse et al. 2002; Silverman 2013).

Confirmability

Confirmability is the qualitative researcher's external objectivity to *data*. Confirmability refers to the neutrality in the way the data were interpreted and as a constructivist, how the data were reconstructed (Houghton et al. 2013; Schwandt 2007). The concept of confirmability is closely related to dependability, and is both a process audit trail and reflexivity of any qualitative inquiry (Houghton et al. 2013; Shenton 2004). In this study, an audit trail was achieved by keeping a journal of data collection processes, the original data and versions of data interpretations.

Further contributing to confirmability is that the documents will be stored for five years in conjunction with the UTS Research Code of Practice, after which they will be destroyed (UTS, Ethics 2013). As well, my supervisors' substantiated direct quotations from the women's stories are used in supporting the emerging themes and sub-themes (Polit, Beck & Hungler 2001; Yin 2016). The step is a way to reduce my own remote unwarranted influence on the women's stories. Additionally, the theoretical audit trail (Ryan-Nicholls & Will 2009; Shenton 2004), which speaks to how the concepts in my research question were developed into the whole research journey process, is traceable through the duration of the project. With the detailed audit trail steps provided, this study is reproducible (Speziale, Streubert & Carpenter 2011), though the context-specific of qualitative narratives may limit the exactness of data interpretations and conclusions.

Transferability

Transferability is fundamental in health research to inform and improve practice (Polit et al. 2001). Transferability denotes the scope and boundaries of a research finding, thus represents the measure by which findings can be applied to similar situations and populations (Shenton 2004; Speziale, Speziale & Carpenter 2007). It depends upon the degree of similarities between two contexts (Koch 1998). The background data that provide the context of study and the detailed description of study phenomena facilitates transferability of the proposed study (Guba 1981; Shenton 2004). According to Houghton et al. (2004), thick description of the original context of research will help readers to make informed decisions on transferability of findings to their own specific contexts. Consequently, for transferability of the current work, I have ensured a comprehensive documentation of stages involved in this study (Lincoln & Guba 1986; Scheyvens 2014).

The philosophical worldviews and theories underpinning the study, demographic data of the women, and mode of inviting storytellers into the study as well as the setting are all detailed in this thesis. In addition, the data analysis and emergent of themes are also carefully delineated. Further, the population in this study are not only women, but also migrants and minority

members of the Australian population. There is clear feasibility for the transferability of the findings in this piece of work to other African migrant women and/or other migrant women of different ethnic backgrounds; all being minority and women. Scholars admonish that after documenting the thick descriptions, another researcher may not necessarily produce the same results due to setting, history and selection effects (Lincoln & Guba 1985b). The reasons advanced are the subjectivity epistemology and the relativist ontology that shape people's constructions of reality in the constructivist paradigm used in this study (Lincoln & Guba 1985b). This is a way of recognising the uniqueness of each researcher's data and capabilities.

This study recognises the importance of rigour in qualitative research but also acknowledges the argument that rigorous research holds no value until its social influence is established and its worth is felt within the professional body (Barusch, Gringeri & George 2011). The methodical detail demonstrated in this study is a testament to its contribution to education and the research field in general about the resilience and strength of migrant women globally, but in particular, the West African migrant women population of Australia (Barusch, Gringeri & George 2011). Finally, all steps were clearly defined and documented so that an accurate audit trail was generated to enhance the study's integrity for replicability (Guba 1981; Lincoln & Guba 1985a).

Ethical considerations

Ethics involves the morality of human conduct and the protection of human rights (Hewitt 2007; Miller et al. 2012). Ethics in research encompasses the moral planning, choices made and accountability of the researchers regarding the needs and research goals and the rights of the researched (Miller et al. 2012; Orb, Eisenhauer & Wynaden 2001). It is a prerequisite in research with human beings that we minimise harm and risks while maximising the benefits of participation. This study is focused on women as participants and the literature is replete with the marginalisation of women. While the aim is to explore the women's resilience and strength, this study respected the rights and choices of the women.

Furthermore, the participants were migrants within Australian society. There is overwhelming evidence that this group has been exploited in the past, many with past painful experiences that have been inadequately handled during research. Consequently, the process of curtailing further atrocities while achieving constructive outcomes represents the ethical considerations of all research endeavours.

The Australian Government's National Health and Medical Research Council [NHMRC] (NHMRC 2011) directives for research conducted in Australia specifies the protection of the welfare and rights of study participants. This study upheld the NHMRC call by seeking and receiving UTS HREC approval (Appendix D). The wealth of experience of my international team of supervisors in researching vulnerable populations was an added ethical resource that shaped this study. The supervisors brought their robust expertise in women's health research and cultural issues in nursing to play in enriching my limited practical knowledge in researching minority groups. That said, as a PhD student I was able to ethically work with my supervisors in my prior research with minority women.

In the ensuing pages, I will elucidate the ethical consideration steps taken in this study to ensure the safety of the women who participated in the research. (Paoletti, Tomás & Menéndez 2013). I also obtained approvals from managers and directors of the Migrant Resource Centres for access. Additionally, consequent to the written letter (Appendix B) I was allocated a staff member by Settlement Services International to provide psychological support as required by the women, which was in addition to the list of free local counselling services that I provided each of the women. To my knowledge, none of these facilities was required for use by the women.

Autonomy

Autonomy is the human aptitude to think, make decisions and take action based on a freely made decision (Townsend, Cox & Li 2010). Autonomy in research is the process of gaining consent from study participants and involves sensible balancing between under and over informing (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009). It is a process of providing adequate information for people to read and

comprehend in order to make their own decision (Hawley 2014; Hewitt 2007; Townsend, Cox & Li 2010). This particular principle embraces the individuality in decision-making barring such decision's unwanted effect on others (Silverman 2013). Autonomy is a way of demonstrating respect to others. Researchers respect participants' individuality by providing adequate information about their study for convincing informed decision-making (Townsend, Cox & Li 2010).

The information should include all possible risks and benefits and the honest or sincere rights to discontinue at any stage of the study with no consequences of such decision-making. Additionally, researchers must both be kind and respectful of their study participants (Lahman et al. 2011; Orb, Eisenhauer & Wynaden 2001). The inclusion criteria in this study stipulate that women must be the Australian licit minimum age of 18-years to ensure their consent to participate is a well-informed step. The first step with each woman in the study was to orally explain the written information sheet (Appendix E) about the study and the requirements to participate, which aided their decision-making towards signing or not signing the consent form (Appendix F). Both the information sheet and consent form were written in layman's language devoid of any academic jargon.

Prior to signing a consent form, the women's voluntary participation was emphasised and I ensured that they understood their rights to withdraw at any stage with no explanation or consequences (Denscombe 2014). The autonomous ethical principle was further enhanced because there was no prior relationship between the researcher and the women. There was also no form of inducements, other than the researcher expressing appreciation to the women for their time and for their stories as contributed to the study. An accepting, respectable and comfortable milieu was created to preserve dignity and ensure that the women did not feel negatively judged while also giving women control.

Beneficence

The ethics of beneficence underscores the researcher's aim of doing good to the participants. The process calls for the researcher to have the welfare of the

study participants as a priority in any research endeavour. The main aim of this study was to highlight the strength and resilience as utilised by the West African migrant women in their re-establishment of life in a new culture, that is, Australia; often overlooked in research. The research is with the good intention of giving the West African women voice and power to tell their own story of migration rather being continually viewed via the macho-lens. The area of focus is an uncharted territory in the limited study available on the cohort.

Understanding the women's migration story, adversity, challenges and their resilience during re-establishment of their lives into Australia, has the potential to benefit future women from the same region and for the Australian Government in channeling its resources appropriately. Inextricably linked to the above is the principle of non-maleficence, which stipulates to 'do no harm', thus the ethical responsibility of avoiding harming the study participants (De Angelis 2010). Consequently, researchers are encouraged to be cognisant of potential distress involved for both the researched and the researcher in recalling past hurtful stories, especially those with sensitive memories (Elmir et al. 2011; Orb, Eisenhauer & Wynaden 2001).

The collection of the stories of the women for this study was not expected to be harmful for them. That said, there was the possibility for any of the women to become overwhelmed with emotions while touching on past hurtful and upsetting memories about the challenges and adversities they experienced through the whole journey of successfully re-establishing in Australia. A list of local free counselling services (Appendix G) for use as required was provided to each of the women for this purpose. The list included prior arranged direct access for the women to access psychological support personnel via Settlement Services International, if needed.

None of the women required the various support provided as none exhibited signs of distress. As scholars have documented, the telling of their stories to a researcher is capable of creating a resilient spirit in the participants and feeling validated (East et al. 2010). With previous experience of researching the cohort, I also provided empathy and emotional support as needed during the data collection process. I recognised that their stories were gifts to me;

therefore, I paid utmost attention. As a student, I de-briefed with the supervisory team regularly, each of whom has experience conducting research with women and potentially vulnerable populations. In the event of vicarious trauma, the UTS counselling service was available for me to access as a student. I did not require the service.

A further step towards ethically sound research is the use of pseudonyms to ensure the women's confidentiality, anonymity and privacy. The issue around confidentiality in research is the guarantee that no participants will be identifiable in any knowledge outputs from the study. Additionally, references to actual names, places and events by the women as noted during transcription were removed or substituted with assumed names or notation, to prevent readers who may have known the women's story before, from identifying any participants in this study. The step did not compromise the authenticity of the stories.

It could be rightly said that achieving total anonymity is remote with studies where the researched and the researcher co-created the data (Silverman 2013; Townsend, Cox & Li 2010). Yet the use of the pseudonyms and strict limit on access to data are other ways to ethically do no harm to the women who participated in this study. Additionally, only the student researcher has access to the women's details. The women were advised on the use of the information that will be generated from the study data, which will include a PhD thesis, article publications as well as presentations (National Health and Medical Research Council 2011). In agreement with the UTS HREC conditions, the de-identified data will be initially stored in a secure office at the UTS, and destroyed after five years.

Justice

According to (Hewitt 2007, p. 1153), "concepts of justice are explained in terms of what is deserved by each individual, and to what each individual is entitled, without partiality and with the aim of delivering equitable treatment". Justice therefore implies fair treatment. In relation to research, it represents equal share and fairness to all by the researcher. The researcher can honour the principle by avoiding exploitation and abuse of the participants, and ensuring

the participants share not only the burdens of giving their stories as gifts to the study, but also the benefits that ensued from the study. In the current study, justice encompassed fair treatment of individuals (Hawley 2014; Orb, Eisenhauer & Wynaden 2001). In so doing, everyone is valued; therefore opportunities are equally open to all in achieving their objectives.

In the current study, all women were treated equally first by accommodating all those who fit the inclusion criteria and who willingly showed interest in participating in the research. I gave each woman the opportunity to decide a convenient venue and time for our meeting, and audio-taped their stories. As beneficiaries to the outcome of the study, all participants are eligible for notification of any publications from this research. There were no other incentives or reimbursements.

Summary

This chapter presented the philosophy, methodology and theoretical frameworks that were culturally congruent in studying the multiple realities of the stories of migration of the West African women in this research. The Africentric paradigm, womanism strand of feminism, and resilience theory were elucidated. The Africentric paradigm in the qualitative lens provides collective construction to knowledge. Womanist/sm, on the other hand, idealises a world where equality is ensured by challenging the oppressive state of the African women as inclusively addressed by African men and women; and giving voice to African women. The resilience theory or strength perspectives ensures that the women's migration story is told by them to enable them to have a voice and present themselves in the unique way that they want to be heard; focusing on their strength and resilience through the challenges of resettlement.

The number of West African migrant women in Australia continues to grow, and little is known about the group empirically to guide the care and provision of adequate support. The current novel study aims to highlight the strength of the women through the adversities and challenges they experienced as they re-established themselves in Australian culture. A storytelling approach as understood through the constructivist positive psychology and feminist

principles was employed to guide the study. Ethics, which is the morality of human conduct to honour the privacy and autonomy of participants in any research endeavour, was highlighted. In reaching the next stage of this research, the research findings, the current chapter documented an audit trail to guide readers' understanding. The ensuing chapters contain themes from women's stories with supporting excerpts from the texts.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESILIENCE OF WEST AFRICAN MIGRANT WOMEN IN AUSTRALIA: CONNECTING PAST TO THE FUTURE

"The greatest thing about us is our capacity to overcome, to endure, to transform, to love and to be greater than our suffering" (Author unknown)

Introduction

This study aimed to gain an understanding of the strength and resilience strategies that West African-born women draw upon in re-establishing themselves in Australia. Re-establishing in this context refers to a process of transition by establishing life again or anew. The new migrant often must re-learn how to communicate and behave in their new country; from language, including accents, pronunciation, intonation and style for those who already speak English, to social norms (Angel & Angel 1992).

In this thesis, the term 'migrants' is used as the umbrella term that encompasses *voluntary* and *involuntary* migrants and includes asylum-seekers, immigrants and refugees. Both types of migrants were represented in this study. Methodological considerations were discussed in the context of qualitative storytelling, resilience frameworks and Africentric Ubuntu worldviews in Chapter Three. Resilience is enacted when there is exposure to risk and adversity, and this was strongly evident in the women's stories. It was important to understand the 22 women's accounts of adversity to appreciate how resilience was developed throughout their experiences.

Twenty-two West African women migrants participated in the research by sharing their stories as shown in Table 3. The ethically appropriate demographic details (Gibbs et al. 2007) are also provided in Table 3, and further personal data provided by the women enriched this study and improved its transferability (Malterud 2001). Participants were equally represented, with 11 voluntary and 11 involuntary migrants who had lived in Australia for between two and 32 years. Their age ranged between 24 and 60 years. While some of the women migrated to join their spouses, others were independent

migrants. The women were representative of two common religions in the region – Christianity and Islam. The women were representative of most of the African countries in the region who lived in Sydney at data collection. They were mostly married, some were war widows and there were two youths. Many of the women were college/tertiary-level educated prior to migration. At data collection, all the women were educated to minimum of TAFE certificate levels.

Table 3: Demographic characteristics of the women

Pseudonym	Age range	Country of origin	Marital status	Highest educational level in country of origin	Educational attainment since migration	Length of stay in Australia	Mode of entry into Australia
Alexis	31-35 years	Sierra Leone	Married	High school	Assistant-In-Nursing (AIN)	4-8 years	Refugee
Beverly	41-45 years	Liberia	Married	University student	Current university student	8-12 years	Refugee
Christabel	51-55 years	Sierra Leone	War widow	Tertiary	TAFE	1-5 years	Refugee
Divine	58-62 years	Liberia	Single parent	Teacher training	TAFE Certificates	8-12 years	Refugee
Esther	54-59 years	Sierra Leone	War widow	High School	TAFE Certificates	11-15 years	Refugee
Faizah	36-40 years	Nigeria	Married	Tertiary	TAFE	12-16 years	Voluntary
Gina	34-38 years	Ghana	Married	Secretarial study	Pre-degree	5-10 years	Voluntary
Helena	35-40 years	Sierra Leone	Married	Elementary school	TAFE Certificate	5-10 years	Refugee
Isabella	32-36 years	Sierra Leone	Single	High School	Current university student	15-20 years	Voluntary
Jemima	38-44 years	Sierra Leone	Married	Tertiary	Social Work Degree	11-15 years	Refugee
Keiko	47-52 years	Ghana	Married	High school	N/A	4-8 years	Voluntary

Pseudonym	Age range	Country of origin	Marital status	Highest educational level in country of origin	Educational attainment since migration	Length of stay in Australia	Mode of entry into Australia
Lois	46-52 years	Sierra Leone	Divorced		Tertiary – Bachelor completed	11-15 years	Refugee
Malia	52-58 years	Ghana	Widowed	High School	TAFE – (AIN)	12-17 years	Voluntary
Nita	23-28 years	Liberia	Single	Elementary	Current TAFE student	7-12 years	Refugee (war orphan)
Olivia	48-52 years	Ghana	Married	High School	N/A	0-5 years	Voluntary
Peaches	31-35 years	Nigeria	Married	Tertiary - Graduate	Nil	4-8 years	Voluntary
Queen	41-45 years	Ghana	Married	Tertiary	Nil	5-10 years	Voluntary
Rita	31-35 years	Ghana	Married	High School	Tertiary – Bachelor completed	10-15years	Voluntary
Samantha	23-28 years	Sierra Leone	Single	None	Current university student	10-15 years	Refugee as a child
Tatiana	48-55 years	Nigeria	Married	Tertiary	Current university student	20-25 years	Voluntary
Ursula	51-55 years	Nigeria	Married	High School	Tertiary - Graduate	30-38 years	Voluntary
Violet	38-45 years	Liberia	Divorced	Elementary	Certificate training	4-10 years	Refugee

TAFE is an acronym for Training and Further Education. TAFE is the largest provider of vocational education and training in Australia

The 22 West African women's stories reveal important insights into what helped shape their strength, tenacity and resilience in their day-to-day challenges of re-establishing their lives in Australia. Table 4 summarises the thematic analysis that will be presented across these three findings chapters.

Table 4: Themes and sub-themes

Themes and sub-themes		
Themes		
Connecting past life to the future	**Embracing the new reality**	**Forming connections to build support**
Sub-themes		
Growing up in home country and enjoying everyday life	Appreciating a new life and future	Remaining close to family in Africa
Experiencing hardships and dark times	Overcoming difficult encounters	Recreating an extended family
Moving on and demonstrating hardiness through the dark times	Parenting in a new country	Drawing inspirations, becoming selfless
	Realigning the self and lifestyles	

West African women's experiences as storytellers in this study

Prior to discussing the themes and sub-themes in depth, an account of the women's experiences of being storytellers and their motivations for participating in the study are described.

The women felt positive in the belief that their experiences could help shape the resources for future West African women in their resettlement to Australia. Malia and Gina asserted:

> *I am happy to give you my story today to help in your study; to help our women too, otherwise I don't give my story to just anyone like that … I am very happy with today and talking to you.* [Malia]

> *I am happy sharing my story with you today, especially if it will help others.* [Gina]

Some of the women were surprised at the opportunity to talk and be listened to. They were grateful to be heard. As Keiko stated:

> *While we were talking, I learnt many things from your occasional questions. Some of the questions you used I have never thought of them. It has opened my mind to some things; also, I have never come across African people [researchers] sitting down and chatting to us about our stay, our experiences in Australia; challenges. This is my first time. It is very good. I didn't know that there is such opportunity for us Africans to talk about our experiences, challenges, life in Australia too.* [Keiko]

The views raised above may be an indication of the fact that migrants' voices, indeed migrant women, are often unheard. Samantha explained that the purpose of her participation in the study was to help her "African sister".

The women also expressed their elation in seeing an African sister like them active in areas such as research and believed that whatever is achieved is in the name of all, as African diaspora:

> *The first thing I appreciate in today's interview is seeing an African lady trying to pursue higher education to become another good figure for Africans; the African people will benefit. I know the ones who go high in education is someone who brings good things to the community. I don't think you will be selfish; you go high up so that other people will benefit. The only thing is that I am encouraged and hope to find some more other people who are doing what you are doing. I appreciate you.* [Divine]

Expressing satisfaction and sense of collectiveness in seeing an African woman pursuing higher education is consistent with literature in functioning as a source of empowerment for African women (Falola 2013; Ilo 2015). Participating in the study and being able to engage with a fellow African person in the researcher role was greatly valued by the women.

> *I appreciate it because even though you are from Africa, you are able to go through university and do this research. I really appreciate it. I am so happy, and I felt good to have talked with you today.* [Violet]

Feelings of nostalgia and catharsis were also evident. While happy to be one of the women in the study, Ursula was nostalgic in having to visit her past but felt reassured by the fact that her strength continues to grow on a daily basis. Giving her final thoughts as a storyteller in this study, Ursula stated that:

> *It took me back to the old memories; but I have had a good experience by talking to you today; the old memories of the good and the bad. I am still getting stronger and stronger every day because of the way we live; it's up to individuals to pick themselves up.* [Ursula]

Similarly, Faizah appreciated the opportunity of revisiting the past, re-connecting and awakening to herself again. Commenting on how she felt as a participant in the study, Faizah said that it:

> *… reminded me of some of those things that I have been through which is alright because it helped me not to forget what I am here in Australia for, my focus, and my dreams. This interview just brought me back to that place, helped me also to release myself.* [Faizah]

Olivia was grateful for the opportunity to tell her story because she:

> *… liked it. It's enlightening for me to put in my mind that whatever I am doing, there is something better ahead of you. The session with you today just reminds me that whatever I had passed through is gone and that I am moving forward.* [Olivia]

Finally, women expressed hope for constructive outcomes from the study that would influence current government policy for new migrants. Beverly was keen to be a participant and commented:

> *The only thing is if this particular research was meant to be to the level of the government so that the government can know exactly how and what we feel when we arrive in Australia; especially with the story of my niece's experiences that I shared with you regarding the educational system ... I believe that if this research was on a bigger level with the government, it would have been very good.* [Beverly]

Beverly hoped that future refugee children would not continue to experience the same process that their own children went through upon relocation to Australia.

In exploring the first main theme: *connecting past life to the future*, I found that women reflected on their resilience by contextually relating their West African past to the new life and reality they had to live. *Connecting the past to the future* was clearly represented in the women's stories. The 22 women in the study found it imperative to tell their stories chronologically, which allowed them to decide what marked the beginning of their story. This enabled them to connect their past to their current and future lives as they attempted to create a whole story around their resilience experience during resettlement in Australia. From this initial theme, three sub-themes were identified: *growing up in home country and enjoying everyday life, experiencing hardships and dark times* and *moving on and demonstrating hardiness through the dark times*, as presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Connecting the past to the future

Theme 1	Sub-themes	Concepts and ideas
Connecting past life to the future	Growing up in home country and enjoying everyday life	• Life stories before war
	Experiencing hardships and dark times	• Life during war and camp periods
	Moving on and demonstrating hardiness through dark times	• Resilience stories pre-migration and in transit to Australia

Growing up in home country and enjoying everyday life

This sub-theme introduces the reader to an important part of the women's stories of resilience and strength. Women recollected through their stories accounts of warmth, affection and positive perceptions of their West African original homelands, and it was clear in their stories that some of the women did not want to migrate. An understanding of how the women grew up within their own African culture provides the impetus for appreciating their resilience and strength in Australia. Hearing women recollect about their lives prior to adversity was significant because it provided context to the women's later experiences and aspirations. The women recalled healthy childhoods, strong family bonds and positive social environments:

> *To be honest I was really, really enjoying the way I grew up with my people, because my father had a school, so, we never pay school fees. My father built a school, built a mosque; I never pay school fees for my kids … I was really happy.* [Esther]

Nita recounted her childhood memories and insight about growing up within a healthy working-family system. Like other stable families around the world with working parents, Nita recalled her own parents with pride:

> *My dad was a school principal and my mum was a teacher.* [Nita]

Beverly recalled with pride the benefits she experienced from growing up within a stable family, prior to the war in her country:

> *Parenting plays a major role in everyone's life; how you were brought up. My father didn't usually just take decisions by himself at home; at our grown-up ages, he always consult with us, the children, before taking any final decisions.*

> *That has given us, the children, and the power to know our rights and to also know what to do in the future.* [Beverly]

Beverly continued to discuss her plans for growing up and enjoying normal life pre-war when she said that:

> *… when I was back home in Africa, I was actually planning to study accounting.* [Beverly]

Queen migrated to gain international nursing experience, and reminisced on her life prior to migration:

> *I worked full-time as a registered nurse and I also worked in the family pharmaceutical business. When I finished work, I will be in the pharmacy shop taking care of sick people … I have two house-helps at the time … house-help are people employed to help with house chores and cares around the family.* [Queen]

Concerning the attachment and value for their West African country and life lived there, Helena also stated that:

> *I love my country and I love to stay in my country, but because of the war and because there is nothing back home …* [Helena]

The women did not want to forget their lives and positive images before the war because they were significant to their existence. They recounted the love for their way of life inclusive of occupation. Contrary to Divine's war experience and 10 years of refugee camp experiences, she said:

> *Before coming to Australia, I was working with children in my country, before the war; long! long!! time ago. I was working as a nursery school teacher, but first as a primary school teacher; so I was working with the Education Ministry.* [Divine]

Some of the women did not only hold regular jobs before the war, they were functioning members of their society in other respects. As an activist, Christabel took pride in describing her role in the politics of her country, alongside her day-to-day secretarial job:

> *I was a strong member of one of the political parties in [country/xxx] … I was the women's ring leader for the [xxx Party] in [xxx] country.* [Christabel]

Gina grew up in the midst of a loving and extended family that she cherished so much. Gina's fondness, however, extended beyond the family. She expressed her admiration and love for Africa. She longed to return and contribute to the re-building of the continent. Gina stated:

> *I want my Africa. I call it my Africa because I really love Africa. I'm here [Australia] because my husband is here. I never thought of travelling outside Africa anyway. In my life I wanted to have a good job. I wanted to have a*

husband and a family; travelling overseas was never in my plan, but I'm grateful to be here too. [Gina]

These stories show the sense of belonging to a place and home. It highlights that the women had strength and motivation prior to relocating to Australia.

The women's stories generally reflected satisfaction and comfort in their West African countries. Some enjoyed relative wealth and social status and they all enjoyed good health. All the women ruminated over their growing up in countries that they cherished and were proud to call home. However, they all also understood that their lives must move on given that changes in their homeland situations could no longer provide the safety and security of a 'home'.

The discourse under this theme highlights the importance of attachment theory to the concept of resilience. Through attachment, the women's growing up helped them construct an emotional bond with their roots and they were consequently able to develop self-confidence and a sense of security. Such attachment served as buffer for these women in their later years to endure separation and adversity when life challenges occurred. The theme of growing up amidst family in their homelands highlight the indispensable nature of one's family unit and background despite external variables.

Experiencing hardships and dark times

The West African women's stories reveal their lives before resettling in Australia and indicate various reasons for migration. The experiences shared by several of the women were raw and compelling, as these women endured and survived great adversity. Included also are the stories of the voluntary migrant women and the differences in their trajectories that shaped their experiences. Many were forced out by war and those experiences greatly affected them.

While some of these women had themselves been raped and abused, others had experienced their loved ones being kidnapped, raped, killed or maimed. Some others made the decision to migrate because of a perceived lack of basic human rights, thus, decisions to migrate were mainly for additional

opportunities for a better life. While all the women consciously made the decision to live in an entirely new country like Australia, the refugee women migrated with little or no input in their choices of destination because the decisions were made for them in the context of extreme trauma and when they were at their most vulnerable.

> *I have a relative in America who filed for us to come and be resettled there because of the untold suffering that were going on in the refugee camp. But then we were there in [xxx/country] for close to five years waiting for the program to be settled in America … So many government agencies from different countries that then came in to the camp to assess the lives of the people. Amongst those governments [officials] were the Australian Government and that was how they saw the untold suffering of the people and they decided to assist us by accepting the request of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to resettle all of us.* [Beverly]

The refugee migrant women discussed and reflected how their normal lives became torn apart due to war in their West African countries. These were dark times for them because their lives were transformed and the capacity to control their circumstances drastically altered. In spite of this adversity, all participants celebrated the fact that they had not only lived through, but also overcame the experiences of war. They recalled times of hardship such as walking through thick dangerous bush for days and weeks while fleeing the violence and living through deplorable conditions in various refugee camp sites where there was a lack of basic life amenities. These refugee women had to run from their country in order to escape the violence that erupted with the war.

> *First, we ran away from [xxx/country] … We went [ran] into the bush, walk up to the border; then after, we went to [xxx/country]. It was in the night time when they attacked us … We walked in the bush during the night time; all night and day and morning time.* [Alexis]

There may be implications for healthcare after women survive these types of experiences. Relative to phenomena in this thesis, the above excerpt highlights the women's strength to overcome adversity through their ability to make decisions to flee, hide in bushes to survive the rebels' intent to kill, maim and/or rape them. Adding a further insight into Alexis's story (above) of how life turned from normal – happy and productive – into a dark and painful one, Nita highlighted the life lived during the long bush walk to safety:

> *There was no clothing, we just have to keep walking to survive ... for food, we were walking through the bush, so its whatever you can find in the bush that you eat; just keep walking; the same clothing has to be on you all the time; shower isn't something you would ever think of at that moment.* [Nita]

Esther likewise shared how the harsh conditions affected her family's health. Because of the long walk in bushes, her daughter developed pneumonia, which meant that she failed health checks when the approval for resettlement came through for the family. Consequently:

> *We stayed one more year before we come to Australia after the UN approval because the doctors were treating her, for her to be cured before we can come to Australia … Yeah! So, when she was ok, they allowed us to come to Australia. So, we arrived in Australia in 2003 instead of 2002 because of my sick daughter"* [Esther]

The women discussed how the sudden nature of the war in their homelands culminated in displacement and fragmentation of the family. Going about a normal daily life, Nita was a child when the war erupted. According to Nita:

> *While both of my parents were at work, the nanny that used to look after me; when the war broke out; she couldn't go and look for my family. She also has her own kids and other kids that she had to look after; and there was no way she could have left us behind to go and look for all our families; because everybody was running away when the war came.* [Nita]

Reflecting on her own family losses, Helena recalled the chaotic environment that ensued:

> *We lost my younger brother during the war; he was about six-years-old. When the rebels attacked, everybody was trying to run into the bush; you see, my brother was very young and there were gun shots, everybody tries to run; mother, brother, sister. He was very young and small. So, he fell in front of the door and was caught by the rebels' commando.* [Helena]

Most of Divine's family were killed, including her brothers and uncles. Consequently, they had no choice but to run away from the rebels who were continuously chasing people with the aim of killing and perpetrating atrocious acts. Like Divine, many other women explained how lawlessness, killings and fighting replaced their normal life. The women's stories contain stories of physical as well as sexual violence. Esther's story epitomises many of the women's experiences:

> *When the rebels entered [country] and we started running but they catch me, my husband and my kids; they raped me and my two girls and beat my husband to death; in my presence; they tied me that time. That time I had three girls, but they rape two because the last one was still young. And at that time I got pregnant [because] we were with them for some time [and] I delivered the baby on the way.* [Esther]

After being held by rebels for a considerable period, Esther stated that she delivered the baby on the way towards running away again to the neighbouring country after escaping from the rebels' prolonged capture. They were able, as

a family, to escape because, as Esther explained, the rebels had to run away as they were being chased by West African Army rescuers, who were trying to restore peace.

All these experiences may have significant impact on the health of these women in their new country. Clearly, these are examples of what happened and tested these women's enduring strength –- abuse, violence, brutality and therefore trauma as a result of the experiences. Discussing her experiences, Lois explained how she was at work when all that was 'normal' life instantly fell apart and fragmented her family:

> *I was based in our capital city. I work there as a police officer… I was on duty when the rebels attacked the capital city and lots of police officers were killed and they burned down the police station … most of my colleagues were killed in a very fierce battle … we battled from 12am in the night till 1pm in the afternoon of another day … my husband was on duty also but he was killed by the rebels during the siege … the foreign peace-keeping troupes took me to [country/xxx] with their war-boats, they took us to their base, and the helicopter took us to [country/xxx]. When I arrived in Guinea, it was then I recognised that my children were left behind because at the actual time that it was all happening, I was just trying to save my own life.* [Lois]

The natural instinct of self-protection made some feel guilty, especially for women who identified as the carer for their household. Family fragmentation was experienced at diverse levels. Initially, this fragmentation occurred while fleeing the chaotic war. The fragmentation was also experienced as a result of African family living, which dictates assuming responsibility and care for aged people. In cases where the elderly were unable to relocate due to old age, women discussed how adult children of the elderly had to remain with, and care for, such older people. While discussing the absence of her husband at the birth of her first child and his inability to support her, having escaped to a neighbouring country due to war, Jemima said:

> *He [my husband] was still in [country/xxx] because his family was still there, at the time. Like in war … at times you make that decision to leave and it depends on your situation. His parents were old; so, he had to stay behind with them because he couldn't flee with them.* [Jemima]

The trauma and feelings of helplessness they experienced was revealed through their narratives. According to Christabel:

> *The war in our country was really terrible because the rebels were chopping off people's arms, they opened up pregnant women's stomach … take out the baby;*

they kill the mother and the baby, and then they also set fire to houses, burn houses. In some homes when they get there and meet people inside, they will ask everybody to stay indoors; if you make any attempt to run outside, they will shoot you on site. So, then they will sprinkle petrol right around the house and then lit fire on the house; so, everybody inside the house are burn[ed] dead … They raped women also. [Christabel]

Gina described how she encountered tribal hatred in transit to Australia, from her own tribesman. Nita explained that her auntie's spouse was killed during the war in her West African country, as part of tribal cleansing:

When the war came, they [the rebels] had to ask a few questions, there was a tribal dispute; like they would ask what tribe are you and there were certain tribes that were not allowed to pass through to where we were going, they get killed." [Nita]

Recollecting these traumas was a way to return to their normal lives. Escaping from the war zone did not end the dark times and hardships experienced in the lives of many of these West African women. Having been part of the ones who escaped the war in their countries, many of them sought shelter in neighbouring countries, where campgrounds were provided for refugees. The campgrounds became a temporary home for considerable periods:

I fled from [country/xxx] because of the civil war that was taking place in my country at the time. I first went into the neighbouring country of [country/xxx] … and I stayed there for about four years before I came to Australia. [Jemima]

Divine reported spending 12 years in one refugee camp site, and Beverly stated:

We were there in the refugee camp for close to five years waiting to be [re]settled. [Beverly]

All the women discussed their experiences of transition. Coming from a communal background and being relocated alongside people from other African nations, the experiences of a life of isolation from the mainstream population of their refuge country was reported as difficult and isolating. Beverly explained:

It was challenging because [as a] refugee, as you may have known from its definition, you are treated differently, sometimes they look at you like a trouble-maker; therefore, rejected member of the society. So, while we were waiting, we were settled on a little camp land area in [country/xxx] that was very far away from the rest of the [country/xxx] society at large, because we were refugees. [Beverly]

Some of the camps lacked even basic amenities. These refugee women were in a precarious situation; the women found refugee life unacceptable, yet, they were powerless to change it, as they were refugees in another country. According to Samantha:

> *It was not a pleasant place, you know, it's just camp; bush! You refugee and you live in tents. Life on the camp was hard; it's like running away from the gun – by the rebels, into the bush, in [country/xxx] camp. So, you don't know what wild animals are there that can come and attack you, maybe at night. So, it was like; you don't know what the future holds*. [Samantha]

Though these women were now taking refuge in a different location from their war-torn countries, their feelings of apprehension and unease remained as many of the camps were located very close to the conflict and were not safe.

> *Still these rebels attacked the borders, which was even harder for people [the refugees] because we were not sure if the rebels were going to come to our own border area because there were two camps so there is always fear. You are not sure if the rebels were going to attack the [xxx/country] borders from your own end of the refugee camp, so! There is the fear that oh! Is it our camp next … because they [the rebels] have already started attacking the borders.* [Samantha]

Other women recalled feeling threatened that rebels had infiltrated the camp as refugees. For such reasons, there was confusion:

> *… because you can't distinguish between rebels and refugees. So, it was very scary for me to stay there.* [Lois]

The experiences related by these women meant a life of constant fear, with unsettled minds and the need for constant vigilance within the supposed haven of refugee camps. The experiences of living in refugee camps and similar places has shaped an uncertain future for these West African women; but one that had fortified their spirits. There was also the threat of exploitation. Nita narrated how help being given by men carried an expectation of sexual gratification:

> *As a child, no-one believed whatever you say, so if I come and say that I've been raped, no-one believed what I said because at the end of the day; I'm a child …* [Nita]

It is important to recognise Samantha and Nita's voice and contribution as it represents the experiences of the dark times of children in refugee camps. Today, to such women, it means that their identity and innocence were stolen from them.

Beverly explained the suffering that she, like many other women in the study, faced as a refugee in campsites after displacement and seeking shelter in neighbouring countries:

> *We did not have access to lots of things – schooling, whatever you think are necessary for human life and also walking far distances, I mean miles, we went without food for days, so many things that human beings should have easy access to, we didn't have such; we didn't even have safe drinking water …* [Beverly]

Refugee life exposed them to diseases and ill-health. Living in open fields and close to open lavatories exposed the women and their families to diseases. Additionally, some women experienced gonorrhoea from sexual abuse. Esther summed up such experiences, which, at times, prompted a few of the women to decide on becoming city rather than camp refugees.

> *Some of my friend[s] who stayed on the refugee camp were sick; like really, really sick from malaria, gonorrhoea.* [Esther]

Christabel discussed the fear that these women experienced which robbed them of their identity, including their language, a potential source of strength during dark times:

> *One or two days you will hear gun shots; the people always fighting themselves. So, it seems as if we were not safe there in [country] also … As soon as they know that you are a [xxx/nationality], they believed and referred to you as rebels. So, it came to a time that as [nationality], we were scared to speak our language.* [Christabel]

Yet, as indicated by these women, returning to their own West African country remained elusive because:

> *… when you listen back home in [country] all you hear is that war is still going on, people are still fighting and killing.* [Divine]

Participants conveyed clear differences between the pre-migration experiences of the voluntary and involuntary migrants. The refugee women's experiences of hardships and dark times summarily explains that they un-ceremoniously fled and camped in other countries in fear for their lives. Alternatively, the voluntary migrant women's hardships reveal that they experienced undesirable lives inside their own West African country where there was no war. These difficulties related to lack of employment and

deprivation of basic human rights educational opportunities. According to one of the voluntary migrants, there were so many problems in Africa:

> *For instance, after trying your best [struggling] to finish university, you won't get job. Even when you get the jobs in Africa, three-six months; they may not pay you. Even nurses in my country. We have a friend; she is a nurse; so, I talk to her because she is still in [country], and so she tells me everything that is happening. The girl reports not being paid for three-six months, and I also listen to the news; you know; all these challenges that we are faced with in Africa.* [Keiko]

Their stories call attention to the political state of affairs in their countries as an extension of their challenge. They longed for their land to be healed. The challenge that these women faced were often more than physical and noticeable events but ones that were also situated within the socio-political environment that forced them out of Africa. Their stories display a hope for a better future not only for them, but for their original homes.

Peaches is a young mother to three children whose eldest child was seven-years-old. Peaches explained how lack of employment and safety issues led to her and her husband's decision to move to another African country in search of better opportunities. The experience from her first move was not what she had anticipated. Peaches spoke of her experience:

> *We lived in [country] for about four years. Though African country, but there was the language barrier because English is not their first language. They tend to have these xenophobic attitudes towards people who are not from the same country as them. One of the hardest thing; so if you are not a medical doctor, pharmacist or lecturer, you probably won't get a job, just go and find some business to do; not because the job was not there but their jobs were kept for their citizens, their own people.* [Peaches]

Living as an African person in another African country obviously does not always guarantee acceptance, especially in countries where they did not speak English. Despite being amidst new compatriots, they felt isolated because their new country was not receptive to them. Experiences, such as those described above, were discussed by the voluntary migrants as reasons to grasp all opportunities to be able to resettle in a country where stable education, jobs and salary payments including human rights are upheld. The refugee women reported being discriminated against by the local women. Identified as being different by their language, they stated that the local people often increased the price of goods. As refugees, they felt persecuted and

harassed by the local authorities, being required to pay their way in the form of bribes. Jemima indicated that they were often asked:

> *… for identity cards [ID cards] … and when you don't have their ID, you have to pay them money.* [Jemima]

Attending an international sporting program in Australia was an important avenue that Faizah used to secure better employment opportunities. During the program, Faizah was offered the prospect of becoming an Australian athlete, which she viewed as an opportunity to live her dream of being a first-class athlete. Faizah said that:

> *… the offer was better than the offer that I got back in Nigeria.* [Faizah]

Looking for better life and job satisfaction, including receiving wages on a regular basis, was one of the reasons that motivated Queen to follow in the path of another friend-colleague from her West African country to Australia. Clearly, seeing others achieving success when relocating to Australia was a source of optimism and strength for women like Queen, despite resettlement challenges along the way. In her own words:

> *A friend introduced me to what is called skilled migration in the year 2006-2007 when she left her nursing job in [country/xxx] to Australia. So, when she introduced the program to me, I was interested and so that my friend got me into the skilled migration.* [Queen]

A similar optimistic spirit guided Tatiana and her family to relocate. Seeing a friend's educational and resettlement success boosted the resilience and perseverance towards their own achievement. Tatiana recalled her family's migration story to Australia:

> *I personally heard little about Australia before coming. My husband only had a friend here who introduced him to Australia … and so my husband decided to come and study here.* [Tatiana]

The experiences of family fragmentation were evident in both groups of women's stories, albeit with significant differences. The voluntary migrant women explained how they had to leave their families in Africa or were themselves initially left in Africa by their husbands prior to ultimately being reunited in Australia. With frustration from years of trying to migrate to join her husband proving difficult to achieve, Gina painfully decided to leave her two-year-old son with her grandmother after failed attempts by her husband to include their son on a visa. According to Gina:

> *When my husband initially filed the papers, I wasn't pregnant then; so my son was not part of it and when he was trying to add my son on; the more he tried, the more they did not believe us.* [Gina]

It was evident that circumstances leading to family fragmentation were more painful for some than others. The refugee migrant women, having been forcefully displaced, did not have the opportunity to bid their families farewell; rather, they had witnessed loved ones being killed or maimed. They knew that they may not be able to visit their relatives again.

Ursula became a West African migrant woman in Australia after travelling the breadth of the world as an adopted daughter of an ambassador. The last posting for Ursula and her family was Pakistan, prior coming to Australia. Ursula described the experience of being spat upon at a Pakistan park:

> *… because of the dark skin that we Africans have …*

and how they were also called names suggestive of a filthy and unclean people, including trying to:

> *… touch your skin to see if the dark skin colour would come off.* [Ursula]

These experiences may have helped in preparing some of the West African women in this study for similar challenges they would encounter in Australia.

Moving on and demonstrating hardiness through the dark times

The women discussed how they endeavoured to live a reasonable life in Australia, as close as possible to their pre-war lifestyle in their African refugee countries. The sense of ingenuity, resourcefulness and creativity was active in these women. Many, having lived in refugee camps for long periods, developed strategies towards surviving loneliness and being isolated from loved ones, and indeed had been able to live and survive in a different country. It was important for the women to maintain the community spirit that they were used to prior to the war in their country. The communal spirit was a way of having support around them during trying times. Nita was a war orphan who could not appreciate the opportunity of leaving her dark past and facing a new life enough:

> *What I mean by family is that, you know when you move to a new place, you create that sort of bond-ness to say this is my family. You don't have to be from the same Mum and Dad, but just someone that you can call a family; to say if I have a problem; then I can go to that person or contact that person.* [Nita]

Given the importance of communalism and having someone close to them nearby, some of the women described walking the length of the camps to search for lost family members. In one such attempt, Lois was able to be reunited with three out of her six children:

> *People were then saying that a new big boat has just arrived, so I went there and was lucky to see him; all the three eldest came together. They were in a big refugee population that arrived [in] [country/xxx].* [Lois]

The women's courage and resilience over challenges was evident in how they overcame violence in the camps. Some reported having to become resourceful in different ways because it was important for them to remain healthy and well-nourished in anticipation of a better future. They were hopeful of restoring a peaceful normal life. Resilient acts during extreme adversity prior to their migration were evident in their stories. For example, despite being raped in the campsite by people she had learned to trust after becoming orphaned through the war, Nita explained:

> *But the whole thing also is that [in the camp] … as a child, I got raped so many times from family friends. What I mean by family friends is people that could help us*. [Nita]

The women reported that life in the refugee camps was spent mostly in cold tents. Inside the tents, there were no beds to sleep on, except for a tarpaulin that they lay on the floor at night. During the rainy seasons, snakes and insects entered their makeshift tarpaulin beds. They persevered by:

> *… putting ashes around to kill worms from where we sleep.* [Divine]

This ability to create a safe living environment in deplorable situations demonstrates hardiness during dark times prior to their migration to Australia.

Despite the experiences of the war and living in the camps for long periods, achieving continuity in their children's education was important to these West African women. Some of them explored the opportunity of self-teaching their children to maintain educational standards. Christabel reflected on her children's education while in the refugee camp:

> *My children attended home school. Some of us came together, and we do home schooling for our children … When we were in Guinea, my children attended home school … we just teach them at home. So, no! There were no particular school for them, we did home school; myself and some others and we just teach our kids at home.* [Christabel]

Over time, the women came to accept that life as they had previously known it, was over and they had to look ahead to a new life. Letting go was difficult, but they realised they had to move on. Yet they experienced long stays on refugee status awaiting assessment and visa approval by Western countries. Beverly reflected on the decision to leave and the fear of the unknown:

> *Even when we were leaving the camp in [country/xxx], we wept so much. But at the end of the day, there were war going on that even if we stayed, there will be no life for us. So even coming to a new place, country; we have no idea how where we were going to, is, or will be.* [Beverly]

Moving on also meant facing new experiences, some of which were frightening. Divine had never flown before and was scared by the size of the aircraft. She drew on her religious beliefs to give her the strength to face this:

> *I just felt that it is God that is bringing us, we are safe and He will bring us safely, and He did.* [Divine]

The women repeatedly described tapping into their inner spirit and beliefs prior to their migration.

The ability to source income meant a lot to these women because they were able to provide for themselves and their children. It is one valued existential quality which ensured independence and capability to live a functioning life. Becoming entrepreneurial in order to financially support themselves was seen as one of the ways that the women were able to rise up and take control of their lives. For example, Esther and her daughters sold water on the streets of their refuge country:

> *I started selling water – me and my kids, and we sell water together to survive.* [Esther]

Being able to accept their new refugee status in a country where the host citizens could be hostile was crucial to these women. At times, these women explored the extremes, such as having to beg for money on occasions when finances were strained. Along with exploring other means of remaining strong, Esther articulated:

> *I used to wash clothes for ladies from house to house with my hands and they pay me … yeah!* [Esther]

Helena plaited hair for the people in her refuge country in houses and in markets:

> *I have to go … and do hair for those women … I just keep doing the hair, and at times, they give me 10,000 or 15,000 franc with that; I buy some food; go and eat … so I do that every day … so I was strong through going every day to just get something and buy food for the day.* [Helena]

The women described the experiences as finding life all over again and it was obvious that they were determined to overcome challenging situations.

Nita was a war orphan who experienced so much as a result of the war. Yet, she remained strengthened as she fought for a brighter future. Becoming an entrepreneur and being resourceful in generating funds to improve her life was important to her. In her own words:

> *To get anything at all while we were on the camp, you have to sell something. So, we started a little business by trying to fetch water and trying to sell water on the streets, and the little profit we make; we have to go to school because we didn't have any education provided for us in the camp. So, we were trying to get a little bit of education by ourselves, so we tried really hard.* [Nita]

Lois was fortunate to have met her friend's spouse who had come from Germany to transact business in the refuge country where Lois was living. With determination to live life as normal again and continue to be a responsible mother to her children, Lois defied the challenging odds that life had presented from war displacement. Lois became resourceful by buying material and sending it to her friend to sell for a higher price in Germany. Lois benefited from this transaction and was gracious because the money formed part of what she was able to use in the care of herself and her children while awaiting resettlement into a Western country:

> *My friend sold the material, then she sends me $500 and that $500 was like million dollars to me. I don't even know where I found myself [elated] on that day that I receive the money.* [Lois]

The above instances display the women's need to become entrepreneurial to meet their financial needs in times of crisis and challenge. The women's actions were evidence of their resilience and strength. It was clear that the women refused to be overcome by their challenges. The ability to source income meant a lot to these women because they were able to provide for themselves and their children.

The need to go through a process of readjusting to post-war living brought about the interweaving of the essence of communality to spirituality. At times, this required a change in faith and practice. The process led to successful networks and belonging, which helped the women remain strong while in the refugee camps. Articulating this view, Nita stated:

> *On the refugee camp, a lot of people were Muslims. Everybody was Muslim! Muslim!! Muslim!!! So, I became a Muslim from there; whereas I grew up in English Christian home. My mum, dad were both born as Christians.* [Nita]

Achieving a sense of belonging was vital to Nita who was unable to locate her parents and siblings and remained a war orphan.

Networking and socialising with their own people was also evident in the stories discussed by the voluntary migrant women. The women fled their homeland's poor government systems, which had led to lack of jobs, school closures and a deteriorating educational system; poverty, poor, unmaintained and deteriorating infrastructures like roads, schools, hospitals, and power supply; and deprivation of basic human rights and lack of safety. Women, such as Peaches, described handling language barriers, loneliness and isolation in their new country by taking comfort in the ability to socialise and enjoy communal living because:

> *… there were lots of [country-folk] there too, in [xxx/country]. So, we had our own community.* [Peaches]

It was clear that these women valued the ability to continue to enjoy their communal life and maintain a social network of other African people, even as they continued to draw strength from life challenges.

Viewing adverse experiences through a positive lens was another demonstration of strength that was evident in the women's transition stories. Esther described going to the UN to follow-up with resettlement opportunities. Discussing her general impressions about herself and family's process of resettlement in Australia, Samantha highlighted the courage and strength that they had in the unique opportunity to be distanced from the source of their pre-migration adversities because security meant a lot to her and her family. Sharing her thoughts about the decision to accept the UN's offer to be relocated to a country unknown to them, Samantha stated:

> *We were not much of worried, but a lot of joy because we were coming out of that place – the refugee camp sites. Yeah! In [country/xxx] and [country/xxx]. So we didn't have too much worry of how; but we were happy that we were at last going to find a safety, that, at least we can rest and we know that; because we've never heard of war for the new place, Australia, and because they also said that Australia is far away and that it's a continent of its own; and people always say that, it's the last continent so we thought; then ok! They, the rebels, can't reach us there; that's how I personally thought. It's too far for them.* [Samantha]

Moving away to another African country in the hope of a better quality of life was one of the earlier steps taken by the voluntary migrant women to find solutions to the problems they perceived in their countries. Peaches and her family felt strengthened by enduring the challenges they faced while residing in another African country. To Peaches, going back to her home country that she had fled was not an option. She described doing volunteer jobs to create opportunities for herself in the tight employment market, which was solely reserved for the locals:

> *I started a different way where I had to make some sacrifices that I had to first do volunteer jobs … I wasn't paid for the job for couple of months … and because I did well, then the person was able to refer me for a job that opened up … so I had to make those sacrifices … I also tried different things, it wasn't in my microbiology area alone that I looked for job and volunteer for instance in teaching, I was just exposing myself to whatever job was available … but eventually I did get something in my own field of microbiology.* [Peaches]

Being treated as outcasts and referred to as rebels by the citizens of the countries who had received them as refugees did not deter participants from retaining a positive worldview. This optimism reflected the spirit that was fundamental to living life post-war for these women. Consequently, rather than dwelling on disappointment, they appreciated the opportunity for a new lease on life and what had been made available to them to support their existence. Samantha described her feeling:

> *At least we are under the protection in the camp even though I am not in the capital city among the citizens of Guinea but at least I am still inside the borders of Guinea at least I have soldiers around me in the camp.* [Samantha]

Many of the women reported how their faith allowed them to believe in a better tomorrow despite having a difficult life as refugees. Jemima stated that she went through the challenges of a long stay as a refugee in Guinea:

> *… by my faith in God, to see me through; so, God always send me help when I required help. So, I had people who were assisting me.* [Jemima]

Esther discussed how her entire family not only prayed but also fasted to get their visa approval for resettlement overseas because of the life of a refugee that most often was described as deplorable and stressful:

> *Every one of us were fasting because we were so happy … pray for success of the visa interview. And we go [went] for the interview and luckily all of us passed – myself, my three children, my two brothers and one of my sister[s]. So, the next day again we fasted, we prayed.* [Esther]

Some of the women were hopeful of a brighter future in any other Western country. However, while still in the camps, the refugee women in the study were mainly looking forward to the opportunity of being resettled in the United States of America (USA) because they already had family members who had been resettled there. While discussing her initial fears on how she and her children became refugees in Australia, Divine recalled:

> *When these UN [officials] came and my name appeared to go to Australia, I just feel that, that is where God wants me to go because I never thought of Australia; to apply to Australia or to ask anybody from Australia to send for me. It came about because of the prayers that I made to God.* [Divine]

As the women explained further, their spirituality and faith, practiced through going to church and regular prayers because the war was still going on in their own country, was referenced as:

> *… how I draw my strength.* [Lois]

Experiences of adversity and trauma due to war, involuntary long and gruelling journeys, and hostile conditions in improvised shelters and unstable socio-political situations in their African countries appears to have only made these women stronger. Irrespective of where they had experienced the difficult, hurtful and challenging pasts, these women emerged equipped to be able to handle challenges that developed, gained strength, resilience, endurance and wisdom. This is evident in the following excerpts:

> *I believe all those things that had happened to me is experience. I have learnt from it and I have put it aside.* [Isabella]

> *I would say my experiences; I don't think it has affected me in a negative way. It just made me mature and be able to face challenges as they come every day. So, looking back now; I am actually very! very!! grateful to God that I went through all that because now that I have got kids and all that; I can actually look back and say; oh! If I've been through that, I can go through this.* [Faizah]

Summary

The theme in this chapter depicted the West African women's foundational stories that culminated in the full understanding of their resilience and strength. The West African women reflected on their resilience and contextually related their West African past to the new life and reality they had to live. The women's stories revealed their lives prior to migration and how these experiences connected and shaped their sense of resilience in embracing their new reality. Chapter Five will describe the theme that depicts the women's new reality.

CHAPTER FIVE: RESILIENCE OF WEST AFRICAN WOMEN IN AUSTRALIA: EMBRACING THE NEW REALITY

"Remember, remember always that all of us, and you and I especially are descended from immigrants and revolutionists." (Franklin D. Roosevelt)

Introduction

In the previous chapter, the women's stories revealed their lives prior to migration. Further review of the women's stories revealed how the resilience of the West African migrant women against resettlement challenges in Australia was connected to their determination to embrace the new reality of living. While their migration and resettlement processes brought about many changes to their lives, their view is that their migration to Australia opened new opportunities for them and they were determined to embrace these opportunities. In embracing the new reality, they describe persevering through difficult encounters and how they realigned themselves and their lifestyles while re-establishing themselves in their new adopted country. This second theme comprises four sub-themes and concepts (Table 6).

Table 6: Embracing the new reality

Theme 2	Sub-themes	Concepts and ideas
Embracing the new reality	Appreciating a new life and future	• Focus on migration aims and dreams and potential positive outcomes
	Overcoming difficult encounters	• Surviving culture shock • Availability of cultural artefacts • We are all migrants • Balancing African and Australian cultures to their advantage
	Parenting in a new culture	• Adapting to mothering in Western world
	Realigning the self and lifestyles	• Career change and professional retraining • Accessing available financial and material resources/support • Health and wellbeing • Find meanings in situations • Accepting and valuing emotions / feelings

Appreciating a new life and future

Migration across borders represents a significant transition, and these women reported on how they had aims and dreams that became a yardstick for their resettlement in a new culture. After years of refugee camp living and deplorable conditions as described in the previous chapter, many of the refugee migrants clearly envisaged the possibility for a better life.

All participants, including those who had moved through various refugee camps, were able to see the opportunities that lay ahead of them when they arrived in Australia. Reflecting on her initial feelings upon arriving in Australia from a life of war and camp living that went on for close to a decade, Beverly recalled:

> *When I first enter Australia, I just felt like it was a bright chance for me to start a new life. When I said that, I was thinking of the fact that close to 10 years, I have been on a refugee camp. We did not have access to lots of things – schooling, whatever you think are necessary for human life. So, arriving in Australia, I thought I have hope, somehow close to my destination for the fact that … there were now so many opportunities [in Australia] like going to school, having a job and even having your children enrolled in school and healthcare. You know; all those facilities, I thought and see them as a good thing that I will now get to my dreams of being happy in life.* [Beverly]

Samantha valued the diversity of ethnicity in Australia:

> *I think one thing that strike me was the multiculturalism of Australia; yeah, because it was beyond my expectation anyway, because I thought it was just white people but in my surprise, I saw different faces at the airport; so, which I was even more excited about because then I felt like oh yes, I find a home.* [Samantha]

To these women, such insights into a brighter and successful future for them and their families were strong reasons to remain resolute in overcoming the daily challenges of life. The prospect of life in Australia was juxtaposed with life as a refugee where there was no clear future. As Lois and Helena stated:

> *When I was in [country/xxx] … there was nothing else to do in [country/xxx], no jobs, no employment; sitting down doing nothing.* [Lois]

> *Because it's another man's country [when a refugee], we don't have jobs; we don't have anything to eat …* [Helena]

They were filled with optimism for what they felt would be a beautiful future for them and their children. Some women were further reassured that the life ahead would not pose any inconvenience, especially in their ability to relate with the people of Australia on arrival. There were expectations, excitement and hope for a bright future and to be able to live normally again:

> *I was excited. Every one of us was exited to leave [country/xxx] and come to Australia … Yes … so we were all excited to be out of there.* [Jemima]

Functioning roads and school systems contributed to the women's appreciation of a new life in Australia because amongst other aspects of life, they discussed the value of the education of their children and appreciated the international recognition of the future for their children by having their education in Australia.

In appreciating their new life and future, the women were able to see their immediate resettlement challenges as minor in the larger scheme of things. As Jemima stated:

> *I think … coming from a third-world country with difficulties where there is poverty where there are lots of struggle and all of that, the idea of coming overseas … to a first world country makes you feel happy.* [Jemima]

Elaborating further, Peaches valued access to essential amenities:

> *Talking in terms of facilities – electricity, roads and so on; it's better here in Australia than [country/xxx]. Africa is a third-world country as compared to first world countries in the West, so I do appreciate those facilities here in Australia.* [Peaches]

In addition to appreciating the future opportunities, some of the voluntary migrants clearly indicated their aims and purpose in coming to Australia. Such dreams helped the women to remain focused as they maintained their self-belief and found inner strength to endure resettlement challenges. Gina stated, "We are here to achieve success".

Gina's view was corroborated by Queen, who stated that her dream since training as a nurse in her West African country was to have international nursing experience. To this end, she reported how she grasped the skilled migrant opportunity when it was introduced to her by a friend. Queen explained that she was delighted to travel across the Indian Ocean to achieve her professional dreams. Despite the need to do some retraining on arrival in Australia, women like Queen remained focused on their dreams and were determined to accomplish them. Despite the tedium of the retraining, it was appreciated because:

> Initially I thought it wasn't right for them to do that [retrain me because I was a registered nurse], but when we went for the practical in their hospitals, I realised it was a good course because too many things and so many gadgets that we didn't use in [country/xxx] … so I didn't know those gadgets, technology like ECG [electrocardiogram]. They were using computers to find laboratory results and as a nurse you have to know all that but we don't do that in Ghana so the bridging course was a preparation point. It was stressful, but it was good that we had it. [Queen]

Queen's post-training job experience in Australia was a further avenue to appreciate her new life in Australia:

> There were so many practical lessons that I learnt from the nursing home. For this I [am] thankful to have been in the nursing home first before going to the hospital job. [Queen]

They reported the opportunity to achieve their life dreams as shaping their capability of staying strong against challenges as they resettled in a new country.

Many of the women appreciated their new life and the future ahead created by living in a civilised Western world. Their reasons for migration included giving their children better opportunities and a better life, as well as themselves. For some women, reuniting with family was a powerful motivator. Olivia, recalling why she had migrated to Australia, stated that she was happy to have left her

West African country and be reunited with her spouse who had earlier migrated because:

… he [my husband] wanted good future for the family. [Olivia]

Rita indicated that although her father was already residing in Australia, she "came to Australia purposely to study … so I came as a student", while Tatiana mainly wanted to be reunited with her husband who had arrived earlier:

> *… as a student, then I and the kids joined him later as dependent relations.* [Tatiana]

Grateful to have survived the war in her West African country, Helena indicated that she was:

> *… really happy that I find myself here in Australia because it was not easy for me in my country.* [Helena]

Helena was optimistic and confident that she would achieve a successful resettlement by following in the footsteps and the advice of her sister-in-law who had earlier migrated on humanitarian grounds and had facilitated Helena and her partner's relocation to Australia. According to Helena:

> *My sister-in-law, asked [told] me to go and do course, so that I can work in this country … I listened to her, which was why I did the cleaning course.* [Helena]

Because her sister-in-law achieved successful resettlement and refused to bend under resettlement challenges, Helena followed her lead. This assisted Helena to remain optimistic and achieve her dream of becoming an entrepreneur. Today, Helena owns her own beauty shop and African products outlet:

> *I was doing the cleaning job for five good years, so after the five years; I was able to get this my salon; when somebody else said, she has to sell her shop. So, I bought it. I am here. I am managing my life … I'm really happy that I find myself here in Australia.* [Helena]

Esther was not aware that her cousin was relocated to Australia, yet she was optimistic when she met her family and saw that they were doing very well:

> *One of my cousins was in Wagga and she had told the refugee support group to bring me to Wagga instead of Tasmania. She [the cousin] told them [the refugee support group] that I have a child who has cold so I want her to come to Wagga … So when they changed our destination from Tasmania to Wagga Wagga, I was really surprised. But then when we got to Wagga Wagga, I met my cousin and her family, when I saw them, it felt like I'm in heaven.* [Esther]

These women's stories highlight the importance of access to functioning facilities; basic human needs such as education, healthcare, food and water;

improved security; and opportunities to work and be paid in facilitating strength through resettlement challenges. Isabella, a voluntary migrant as a teenager, was cognisant of opportunities that women from her country have in Australia. While discussing the educational opportunities, Isabella referred to the low literacy of other refugees:

> *Those [xxx/country] Africans coming into Australia as refugees [many] has never read and write before.* [Isabella]

Samantha reflected on not having education prior migration. Reiterating Isabella's views, Samantha explained that there are many documents and forms to fill in as new members of Australian society, but many West African migrants lacked the ability to complete these:

> *Not all the people that comes in are educated, some people have no education.* [Samantha]

In her view, both young people and adults coming to Australia should seek education:

> *I know they have adult education here in Australia. They should be encouraged to do that education because the little you know is better than nothing.* [Samantha]

Samantha's view here represents the importance of being able to function independently. Jemima related her Australian resettlement experiences with some other women in her community around literacy. Being a school teacher before the war in her country, Jemima appreciated her quick advancement to university on arrival to Australia because she had previous educational training. Jemima reflected specifically on the less educated people within her community who faced considerable challenges:

> *Well I was fortunate to be literate when I arrived in Australia, so I was able to complete forms by myself. I did not require someone else to fill out my form.* [Jemima]

Consequently, in her work with newly arrived refugees and migrants, she stated that she always encouraged them to get an education not only for jobs, but to be able to function within Australian society:

> *Just making sure we make good use of the educational opportunities that are available here in Australia to help in life. It's vital in every area of aspects of life.* [Jemima]

To ensure that her daughter remains literate so she can function within Australian society and to maintain employment, Ursula discussed how she supported her educational achievement:

> *If you get all your education intact and ready, when you get married and your husband says that you should stay at home and look after the kids … you can easily say, ok! But after one or two kids since you've already have all your degrees, it's easy for you to just refresh and start working. If you want to go back to school at that time, it takes ages to complete such education and maybe in the long run, you might get more babies … and might have to put the education aside again … and may never finish it … So for my daughter, currently she's doing her media and communications masters.* [Ursula]

Alexis was also able to express the differences she noticed between her life in Australia compared to Africa:

> *The life is good here [in Australia]; it's not like back home. Life is very good here in Australia because we Africans are poor. Here is better life … like the hospital here in Australia is good; their medication is very, very good, not like Africa. In Africa if you are sick, you are going to pay a lot of money ... even the medication there in Africa is very expensive … My life is moving smoothly … I have my citizenship, I am well settled.* [Alexis]

These women appreciated access to education. Some of the refugee women in the study may have remained illiterate if they had not been forced to seek refuge in a Western country like Australia where literacy is highly valued.

Evidence of achieving migration aspirations are highlighted in the following excerpt:

> *Altogether, I would say that my living in Australia is super good because I can now talk. I can express myself now … I used to be a very quiet shy person.* [Gina]

The issues around personal safety were also discussed by the women. While Australia is not immune to crime and safety concerns, the women still envisioned it to be safe. They appreciated the opportunity to live in Australia and contrasted it to high rates of youth unemployment and social inequalities that plagued many of their West African countries. These social issues had led to less security in many of their West African countries, aside from the effects of war, and had acted as motivation for the women to resettle in other countries, like Australia:

> *Foday Sankoh just said that [our nation] was going for war, so that was why he brought the war into the country so that after the war, the country will become good; but up till now, even after the war, the country is getting worse. Now you*

can hear about Ebola too in [country/xxx] … we can't see how true it is because there is no sign that the country is developing; still it's going backwards. [Helena]

The women's stories conveyed their ongoing connection with their West African homelands. They hoped for restoration of peace. Inherent in many of the women's stories was evidence of a type of strength that represented community extending to motherland. Therefore they questioned the essence of war, and indeed the continued problems in the country. Communal resilience and activism are less present in Western society, which values individualism and cannot therefore be elicited nor treated through deficit approach.

Overcoming difficult encounters

For the West African women in this study, being strong and resilient in the face of re-establishment challenges was viewed holistically. To these women, their resilience to challenges and adversity meant that their physical, social, mental and emotional being remained intact. In this sub-theme, various concepts and ideas are discussed.

Surviving culture shock

Arriving in Australia was a great relief for the West African women in this study. With diversity in their expectations, including the process of comparing their African values to Western socially acceptable norms, these women experienced culture shock during their initial arrival in Australia. The courage to overcome this cultural shock was rooted in their determination to resettle and benefit from the opportunities available in their newly adopted country.

Having gone through the periods of war and refugee camp experiences, Jemima described what could be termed insights into the minds of many of the refugee women prior migration:

> *You think as soon as you arrive there [Australia] all of your problems are gone; like you are going to get a better life and your problems will be over …* [Jemima]

The West African women in the study celebrated victories over difficult encounters. They explained how they faced systems and cultural differences with everyday resilience. Esther's family's first encounter with a winter climate was immediate upon arrival to Australia. They were unprepared for the drastic

temperature difference, which left Esther questioning their need to move to Australia:

> *When I first arrived Australia and I had [felt the winter weather] the cold. I said, Oh my goodness; why! Even when we first came out of the airport in 2003, my brother said to me, can you check my body to see if I still have clothes on because it was too cold? Every time we have the heater on; we have the blanket, the electric blanket. So we used to sleep on that.* [Esther]

In addition, the women discussed challenges with verbal and body language. They had not expected to encounter challenges with the English language they shared with Australia:

> *I know they speak English in Australia and that [country/xxx] was colonised by the British, so English is our official language … I did not think I was going to have any problem.* [Jemima]

Despite expecting an easy communication process with the people of Australia on arrival, some of the women discussed language and communication barriers that involved accents and colloquialisms. Gina made reference to two such experiences:

> *When I came, even though I did English in Ghana and we used to speak English in [country/xxx] … but sometimes when they Aussies speak, I can't even understand what they are trying to say because I can't get their accent properly by then.* [Gina]

Another occasion was at her university registration day when:

> *The first year administrator that was talking to us, was so fast plus the accent. I can't even understand what she was saying.* [Gina]

Other women, such as Christabel added:

> *… the language barrier, you know. The accent here in Australia compared to where we came from is quite different; and we speak our local language 'krio' [an English-based creole Sierra Leonean language] more back home.* [Christabel]

Isabella referred to the accent issue and how it cannot be changed:

> *The accent was there, no matter what. I still have the accent …* [Isabella]

These women discussed that they were not deterred by their experiences, but emphasised their ability to move past them. While adding her insight into the language issue, Divine explained how she and the other women overcame the language barriers:

> *When we came to Australia, our English was different. They took us to a place where they teach us how to talk in a way that you can communicate in such that the people you meet in Australia understands you. So, we practice that, and that was good.* [Divine]

The women used available resources and were able to describe avenues through which such communication challenges were resolved, instead of focusing on their difficulties. The West African women, like Divine, explained the Australian Government provision of needed support to let them know how they speak and perceive things within the Australian system of living. She emphasised that such help was sufficient to help them through the early concerns. It must be noted that not all of the women needed such support, as some were able to adjust and associate well with people in their new society.

In discussing their initial education contact upon arrival to Australia, some of the women described how hard it was for them to fit into the educational system in Australia given differences between the two countries' systems of education. Long stays in refugee camps also influenced this experience. Samantha described her personal efforts at implementing her African educational system as she often attends classes at a lower level than where the Australian system of education had placed her based on her age. Samantha's strength was evident with her appreciation of the Australian Government's support for women like her:

> *[I went] to English Intensive Centre. I stayed there for one and half years.* [Samantha]

Beverly further described how the women were determined for both themselves and their children to overcome language and other issues attached to communication problems. Beverly discussed her challenges with language and the strength she utilised:

> *I don't even have the language yet, but I am currently continuing with education to university level to motivate my children. If they [Beverly's children] see that their Mum is there at university; and we've all got limited skills and limited language proficiency; then the children can think through it to say that how much more about themselves who has slightly more skills than Mum. So we are all there pushing one another.* [Beverly]

These women acted as role models to inspire and demonstrate strength for their children. The women, especially the refugees, described their concerns of the effects of the differences between the two countries' educational systems on their West African children's education. They were vocal in clearly expressing their fears and the repercussions of such educational differences on their African-Australian community's reputation. According to Beverly:

Our children had issues with the wide gap in schooling and we tried to advocate. We advocated for an avenue through which our children can be helped if they [government] can't change the policy. The government's response was that there are already English classes within the community for refugees that can support our children. Yet our concern was that the English classes referred to by the government was insufficient to for instance, prepare a child for a Year 11 work, when the last schooling she had was Year 8 or 9 while on refugee camps. So, who fills in these gaps? That was a lot of stress. So that is why they say that African children don't want to learn; they are on the streets. It's because when they get to school, they can't cope with the level of class they were placed into. They don't fit into that class and year. Then they are looked upon as if they are not smart. [Beverly]

Beverly advocated for her community regarding educational considerations for refugee children:

For me, I tell my children never to give up. They should continue to go to school; whatever it takes, even if they were not able to achieve the degree that they wanted; they should still continue with schooling. They can get at least diploma or TAFE certificates; just whatever certificate that would empower them to be able to work. [Beverly]

Instilling willpower to achieve was a source of strength over the cultural difference in educational systems. Nita widened the discourse around language issues encountered to include body language. The cultural ways of how people communicate without voice but through their body also created challenges for some of the women but they were emboldened in being able to merge their two cultures to bring the best out for their resettlement process in Australia. Describing her experiences around communicating with people in Australia during her early arrival times, Nita indicated:

Sometimes your English is not good; the body language was an issue too. I actually have a lot of problem in my workplace because of my body language. They didn't understand my body language because where I grew up as a child [in Africa], you are not supposed to look an older person face-to-face [eye contact]. When adults are talking to you, you have to bow your head down and listen to them but with the Australian system, the way they do things is different. [Nita]

Availability of cultural artefacts

The West African women migrants in this study who arrived in Australia over three decades ago had difficulties accessing and maintaining some aspects of their culture in relation to goods and services. These few early migrants in the study described their feeling of cultural isolation as not having anything that could help them feel African. As Ursula explained, simple items such as

African hair styling materials, clothing and food were hard to obtain. This made them feel culturally isolated. Ursula remembered the time when there were very few African migrants living in Australia. She discussed their resourcefulness and enduring spirit to resettle into their new country. According to Ursula, the women had to order African materials from England and re-use the hair materials that they were able to buy until their hair styles started falling out; a step that was not the norm while in Africa:

> *In those days, we can never get much of our food. So, we try to improvise with Australian food. For instance, we cook potatoes like yam but then no gaari [cassava flakes], palm-oil or dried fish. We don't even see our small hair piece, cream; rather we used the white people's hair-cream; none of our clothing was available then, unless if you have come into Australia with it, or someone sent it to you … We order things from England through the [country/xxx] Embassy in England because it's closer and cheaper than ordering from [country/xxx], our country … there's everything in England because a lot of Africans live there. Going to England was like going back to Africa. All our culture and cultural needs are there because the [Africans] who migrated there brought with them all their culture and stuff; some brought and practices their fetish things there too. We order everything, clothing, food.* [Ursula]

The availability of African goods and services including African business outlets that can locally meet their cultural needs has improved over the years and they were grateful for that access, even as they utilised their cultural artefacts to mitigate experiences of cultural isolation. Some of the West African women commented on the improved social and cultural avenues providing stronger supportive avenues that helped in resettling to a new environment and militating against negative experiences. Olivia remarked on both food and clothing, indicating that it was important to be able to maintain that culture and to remain relevant to who they are as an African; despite being far from home. Consequently, she was happy to report that:

> *… we have our [country] dishes here so we are fortunate, we can eat our food … We also have seamstress in our [xxx/people] and Church community who can help us to sew, so we are able to maintain our dressing culture as much as possible, it's important to us to be able to do so.* [Olivia]

Other women expressed that they felt strengthened and were pleased to be culturally relevant during important celebrations in their calendar year. To Malia, Rita and Jemima, being able to dress up during Christmas, Easter and regular Sunday services relate to positive ways of continuous living of their African way of life. Thus, there is a sense of still being in the midst of their own

family, friends back home in Africa, because of the opportunity to hold to or practice that which was familiar and normal prior to migrating out of their West African countries. Malia said:

> *… we dress in [country/xxx] and African way too.* [Malia]

Rita's contribution in this area was inclusive as she highlighted the need to embrace the new culture where she now called home towards achieving strength over resettlement challenges. Sharing her story around the importance of her African culture in her Australian living, Rita declared:

> *I prepare both Australian and African dishes. It's a bit of everything for me. I do prepare my African dishes and incorporate the Australian recipes as well, so I embraced both cultures. Yes, I wear our traditional [country's] dress to church but for engagements, I'm more Western in my dressings because of the sayings that when you are in Rome, do like the Romans.* [Rita]

Now in her thirties and a young mother to her baby boy, Rita was a teenager at the time of migrating to Australia. Rita's above responses could therefore also be understood as an effortless step for a younger African migrant generation in adapting to their new culture having spent more of their formative years within their adopted country.

Experiences of social isolation were closely associated with the women overcoming cultural isolation. Beverly was one of the women who worked towards achieving control over the possible side effects of social isolation within her African people. As a community worker who was able to perceive the need for her African sisters to be able to overcome some resettlement challenges, she stated:

> *We have our own African organisation support group within the Migrant Resource Centre which we founded when I started to work as a case worker within the centre; along with two of my colleagues. The group supports every woman either single or they arrived Australia with their family. We have some domestic violence issues going on for our people then, so it gives opportunity to women through that group to comfort one another. Help was also solicited for those in workforce having issues. Through that we were able to bring in organisations that comes in to provide the women with needed information on DV, family relationship, work issues as a form of seminar.* [Beverly]

Similar supportive resources were offered to not only the West African women but to all African-Australians in NSW through outreach work by Christabel:

> *As a bilingual community worker with the NSW [Government] … This involved gathering African women to run sessions on topics such as female genital mutilation [FGM], because they have changed the policy in Australia for us African women that we should not take our girl child to Africa for FGM or to even*

try and do the FGM practice in Australia. Anyone caught doing the practice are charged and if found guilty, will be sentenced to … jail. And we would not like to see our African sisters go to jail … just because of FGM practice … Last year, I did a presentation on the FGM and also on women's health in the new society … during a West African women conference. So there we had the Liberians, Sierra Leoneans, and Guineans ... and I think Ghanaians also. [Christabel]

Beverly and Christabel discussed the above processes as some of the ways that the West African women built resources that benefited and supported others as a way of enhancing their African group and community resilience. The importance of maintaining their cultural identities was paramount to these women in overcoming resettlement challenges. The availability of and access to such opportunities formed one of the ways that the women exercised their everyday resilience to the challenges of re-establishment in Australia.

Some of the West African women commented on the improved social and cultural avenues providing stronger supportive avenues, which helped in resettling to a new environment and mitigated the effects of negative experiences.

We are all migrants

The women discussed their own and their families' experiences of racial and xenophobic slurs that are capable of derailing their resettlement processes in Australia. However, the resilience of the women was markedly prominent as they described how they approached the racist experiences in diverse ways and their firm rejection of being treated differently within the country they now chose to call home. The experiences of racism and discrimination ran through all of the women's stories. The women explained situations of racism and discrimination while they were at school as students, at their workplaces and in public domains. Feeling unwelcome created a sense of not belonging in the new country, but did not prevent the women from seeing their adopted country as home.

The West African women put their experiences of racism and discrimination into perspective to remain strong against the demeaning attitudes they faced in Australia. Ursula applied and was invited for a government job interview. Ursula recalled how the white male Australian interviewer, on seeing her entering the interview room, sat reclining back in his chair, folded his arms

underneath his armpits and crossed his legs on the table in front of her. This experience of putting his feet on the table while directly facing an African during a job interview and being told to "drop the resume on the table" is an example of a hurtful and demeaning attitude.

Ursula went on to describe other workplace-related racism, discrimination and xenophobia experienced by some African nurses. She noted the vulnerability and exploitation often faced by minority migrants within other well established groups in Australia:

> *… kind of stick together. Like in the nursing industry you will see the Filipinos nurses sticking together; you will see the Chinese sticking together and you see all these Lebanese are sticking together … and you are an African, you don't have much of your African people there; they kind of throw you around; this is what is happening. They just pick on you and makes life really difficult in the workplace for someone; like my own example that I gave before. Also, they put their own job on your head … Yes, and also thinking that you don't know much about the Australian system and you don't know what you are doing or who you are in Australia ... Stand up for yourself.* [Ursula]

The West African women defied the varied acts of racism and discriminative attitudes, and they appeared to see the act of racism and discrimination as evidence of the depravity of the instigators. The women tried to make sense of the actions positively. Lois described her experience:

> *… when I first arrived with my three children … in Western Australia. For instance, if we go to the shops and we want to ask people something; you will see them holding their nose, pushing and moving backwards away from us as if we are smelly. Nobody want to talk to us. They don't even want to get closer to us. [Lois]*

Demonstrating how she processed the diverse experiences of racist people's attitude, Lois added:

> *I look at things and I said, some of them have their own personal issues. I can't take these people's burden and put it on my head. These are human beings and these are their personalities.* [Lois]

The West African women described their belief that the behaviours of some of the racist people were intended to intimidate them. They described the intent of the racist perpetrators as aiming to make them feel inferior based on the difference in their skin colour and accent. Some reported that they were told that they were not born Australian, therefore were advised that:

> *The best thing for you is to go back to your country, and become something in your country because you will never go ahead here in Australia.* [Ursula]

Having an understanding of the intent of racist slurs was one vital indicator of strength because these women were then able to act against these negative effects of their resettlement process. Consequently, Ursula's response to her experiences as described above was aimed at debunking the erroneous belief and intent of the perpetrator, her work colleague, by challenging and rejecting the racism:

> *I turned around and told him; and said, are you also an Australian, and he said yes! So I said to him that, well I don't see you as an Australian because the only person who can tell me what you are telling me right now is the real Australian and you don't look like them. I know an Australian when I see one … they are called Aboriginals, and you are not. I know where I come from. I know my roots. So I asked him on the day that, do you know your roots. Right now if you tell me to go back, I can go back, but where would you go if an Aboriginal tells you to go. And since then, that guy respected me; he was a teacher like me in that school as at the time …* [Ursula]

Similarly, Gina added her view:

> *I don't care because I believe that Australia belongs to only the Aboriginals … even those people that called themselves white people, they don't belong here. They came from somewhere – Greece, UK – and then they migrated here to Australia. So, my believe is that, if you are racist to me; you too, you don't belong here [Australia], anyway …* [Gina]

On occasions, these women chose to move away from the racist situations, but at times, they challenged the situation. In doing so, they gained their independence over racial and other forms of resettlement challenges. Ursula took it upon herself to speak on behalf of her African race regarding the racial slurs and behaviours. Ursula's main perspective of the racist experiences summed up how many of these women felt. Ursula believed that the people were simply demonstrating cultural illiteracy, ignorance and narrow-mindedness:

> *To me it looks like they are not well educated themselves. They don't know anything about the outside world; it's just their world; that's how I see it.* [Ursula]

These types of views enabled the women to remain focused on achieving and taking the opportunities available in Australia. Despite her experiences as a student and her workplace racist encounters; and after receiving a favourable Workplace Royal Commission settlement in relation to a racist workplace encounter, Rita said:

> *Everywhere you go, don't expect everyone to like you, or don't expect to be accepted by everyone. I am not the kind that sit down and ponder over certain things; I refused to be bothered about such behaviour. I knew and recognised it*

> *was racist acts, it was that they sort of didn't want to work with an African, they just wanted to work with Australians, with themselves. Maybe because I have made my mind ready that I am not expecting everybody to accept me, it helped to accept their behaviours as normal.* [Rita]

Rita's racist and xenophobic experience included not being accepted by white Australian classmates for group work while at university. She explained that she held an expectation that she would not be accepted by everyone. This was a self-protection mechanism. Women like Rita were able to move on and remain focused on their aims of migration, on achieving a successful resettlement and enjoying the good that the new land has to offer. Having the perception of the universality of racism is also evident in the Rita's above excerpts, and further cushion these women against its effects on their resettlement process.

Gina likened the experiences of tribalism in their African countries as the flip-side of racism in the West. Tribalism is belonging to a tribe or social group. It is a state of being loyal to a particular tribe or social group's values that one belonged to. Invariably, one of the ways women found strength against the racist stunts was by equating racism to human attitude that exists across all cultures. The women explained that if they can overcome tribalism in their West African countries, the experiences of racism in their Australian resettlement can also be taken in their stride. Women like Nita highlighted the communal essence of war through reference to ethnic cleansing.

Faizah's experience of being singled out amongst crowd at the checkout in a supermarket for bag-searching was described as humiliating but according to her, walking away peacefully helped her to remain focused on her Australian resettlement dreams. Nita reported a similar sense of insecurity or powerlessness from racist stunts experienced upon migration. As she explained it:

> *Walking down the hill in the city in South Australia, that was when we were pretty new in the country…and there was this white Australian old [gentle]man … he walked up to us and said, you monkey; you f***in go back to your country. You don't belong here. We were only three Africans here standing, we don't have any rights; so we better go … [leave the vicinity]* [Nita]

Nita's experience was a representation of a situation where safety and freedom were being taken away from her and her companions. The

experience reminded her of the war and refugee camp experiences because acts of racism are forms of oppression. Yet, the young women chose to take the existential values of survival by leaving the dangerous and charged environment.

Faizah's reflections of some of her early years' racially motivated experiences reveal that she has achieved growth and knowledge of her new country, providing evidence of her strength and resilience. Acknowledging the lack of confidence, which was one of the reasons advanced by few other women in the study, Faizah stated:

> *In that early years, you don't have the confidence to even say anything when you see things are wrong; you have just come into their country. You don't even know what the rules are like; you don't know all those human rights too well. So now, after living here for some years and looking back to some of those early years, I can say oh! I should have challenged that. I should have said no to that, I should have said this or do that; that time …* [Faizah]

The perspective of recognising your human rights was effectively used by other women such as Beverly and Lois in handling some of their racist experiences as they resettled in Australia. Beverly viewed racial insults through the lens of the rights of individuals within the society. The insight that Beverly brought to resilience was that living as a lawful citizen and knowing your rights can empower you through difficult times. She was able to use that mindset when confronted with numerous negative experiences. Referring to one of her experiences, Beverly explained:

> *So, my coming to a new country like Australia, even if someone insults me and tells me to go away and I know I haven't done anything wrong to indicate that I should leave the country, I knew such person needs to prove the reasons for saying that I should go away from the country. And until such reasons are proved, I can't go ... [You see] my upbringing has imparted me to know what is right for me and for me to stand up for my rights.* [Beverly]

Beverly's strong upbringing reflects how the prior life of these women not only developed their self-image but also fostered self-confidence leading to resilience in later life challenges. This also contributes further evidence that the resilience of these women was not mere reference to their post-migration, but that pre-migration life experiences shaped most of their resilience and supported their re-establishment in a new country like Australia. Gina's view expanded how human rights were a source of reassurance and strength

through the racial adversities and challenges faced by many of the women in this study:

> *I'm working I'm paying my tax; my husband is working and he's paying tax, so we are all contributing to the welfare of this country.* [Gina]

The above excerpts also depict how the courage, sense of defiance and willpower to overcome resettlement challenges assisted the women to see themselves as valued members of their new country. Consequently, women felt strengthened and empowered in their capacity to contribute to the financial growth of their new country, Australia. It was also no wonder that these women were quick in securing any type of available employment to live a life independent of government handouts. According to them, it is not in their culture to be financially supported by governments in their African countries.

As a hotel room attendant, Ursula recalled with visible humour on her face about what occurred during one of her shifts in that role:

> *… when I used to have a part-time job in the hotel. As house-keeper, sometimes, I'll go and ask the guests what they really need in their rooms … or what they don't have … so that I can supply them with it … And this white Australian, she looked at me and said … do you work here … I answered and said, Yes! I work here … where did you learn how to speak that English, she asked … and I said well, we speak English in [country/xxx], because she asked me where did I come from … so I said to her that we speak English, and we start with pidgin English because every child has to learn how to speak pidgin English, so from there, you learn with the grammar when you start primary school and then it goes on and on … then she said … who gave you this job in this hotel! I'm not going to let you serve me, so go somewhere else.* [Ursula]

The determination to achieve successful re-establishment remained as the driving force in the life of the 22 West African women in this study. They reported that keeping focused on the goal of their migration, which generally could be summed as looking for better opportunities, was a major driving source for their strength. Some women decisively chose to not only overlook the racist slurs, but displayed a sense of maturity, by keeping themselves happy and choosing to retain a positive attitude over their negative experiences. One woman stated:

> *The amount of discrimination [racism] that I have been faced with, marvels me… it's not outspoken discrimination, but you can see it yourself … but I have never because of all that kind of treatment, felt any little or less of myself.* [Tatiana]

In her expansive stories around experiences of racism in Australia, Beverly's summation was that she had:

> *… never allowed their discrimination and rejection to play on me nor take it so much offensive; so, no psychological effect. Rather I endeavour to make myself a happy person … I overcome them by keeping myself happy.* [Beverly]

Gina and her family experienced racism in various ways, including via social media used to taunt her son. In the midst of the experiences, Gina's optimism and determination against the effects of racism was evident. Similar to Beverly above, Gina made the choice to be happy, and viewed it through the lens of facing the reality of life. Subsequently, she stated:

> *No matter where you go people will still be racist to you. So why don't you create your own happiness and those people who are racist, the more they see that you are happy, the more they see you are free-spirit, the more they get down in the boiler. So instead of me boiling up, getting down; feeling down, I'll just be happy.* [Gina]

The decision to embrace happiness was also a calculated resilience strategy by the women to render culprits powerless. In taking these steps, the women's determination over life challenges confirmed their resilience.

Divine explained that she perceived people hurriedly changing their seat when she sits beside them in public transport as an individual behaviour and not representative of Australia. In so doing, she is able to separate the actors and their actions from the country and is able to move forward and embrace the opportunities available to her in coming to live inside a country rather than in refugee camps. Succinctly she said:

> *Experience of racism is personal, so I can't take it upon the nation of Australia* [Divine]

Views such as these helped the women to see positive meanings in negatives and enabled them to continue to draw strength to overcome, rather than succumb to, the negativity. In so doing, Divine was able to remain focused on living a new life for herself and her family in Australia.

Divine also reflected on her experience at work with the intention of drawing strength from the opportunity to be an ambassador for her Christian faith:

> *I don't want to focus on it [racism and discrimination] … so when they do anything to me … because I want to still be able to talk to people about God … I want them to know God, I let the supervisor know my experiences of racism at work. I will let the supervisor know about it …* [Divine]

Having something that motivated them helped these women through racist slurs and kept them strong all through their resettlement period. Violet found comfort and strength in having minimal contact with people who can be mean and racist. This enabled her to stay strong and resettle with fewer challenges. Mainly, women found their strength through interacting with other migrant people from their African countries:

> *I have my African friends here that we play and joke together. We do everything together.* [Violet]

The women's stories also reveal how they rejected being objects of pity, especially as a result of their past traumatic lives:

> *I just want to focus on happiness. I don't want everyone be into my problems saying to me; is this what you've been through; this and that. That sympathy is something that I don't want people to always have for me.* [Nita]

Inherent in Nita's choice was the need to cease focusing on the past. She felt that re-living past trauma added no value to remaining strong and moving forward with life.

The experience of racism and discrimination dominated the stories of these women, but they demonstrated strength in these situations. In explaining their racism experiences, for instance, some women explained that it was important for them to live above the expectations of some Australian people that they encountered, especially in the early years. Another woman described the experience of colleagues despising her as the only African and as having nothing tangible to contribute in the workplace. Speaking generally about her experiences of being a West African migrant woman in Australia, Peaches said:

> *It's hard already being an African, aside being an African woman. There is the sense and element of racism especially in the workplace. At the same time, there are elements that they are not expecting much from you because you are from Africa; the sense of they [African people] don't know [anything]. So, for me I've tried to overcome that already … and I am still in the same company, but not at the level that I started. I have been able to move higher through promotions … For me I consciously make the extra effort to remind myself that I'm an African and no-one is going to put me down. I speak my mind at work, I do my best, and at the same time, I really! really!! make myself look good; like I really take care of myself … I make sure I improve my knowledge and go that extra mile so that I am not found lacking whenever a question is asked. I already know that we Africans are intelligent and all we need to do is to really just show it, and not let anyone intimidate you … just*

because my skin colour is different does not make me different from them.
[Peaches]

The women also overcame difficult encounters through humility. Queen was one such woman in the study whose dream of becoming an international nurse remained, and she refused to be discouraged:

> *My own type of personality before I migrated, I was a very strong girl who doesn't easily give up in life … so I have been able to survive by that personality that is in me … and also I've been able to stand stay strong by being humble. There are a lot of things we meet at work, people will criticise you; they would say so many things and laugh at you but that didn't stop me at all, I didn't get annoyed, so I've been able to stand with humility which I advise everybody to be humble. I have also been able to stand with hard work.* [Queen]

Standing up against experiences of racism for their children was also a priority for these women, stating that they most often report the situation:

> *Even with my daughter when she goes to school. She has had issues many times that when she goes to school and she's not been properly treated, I mean issues arising with racism. What I did in her case was to go and talk with her school principal. At the close of school too; at the bus station, she has experienced racist taunts. I just went to the police station to report the case … For me, I always go and report to the authority. Because at the end of the day if I allow myself to become powerless and sit down because of issues of racism and discrimination, what would become of the children and myself.* [Beverly]

Handing the matter over to the police meant that they let the law and authorities deal with the problem. The women realised that their strength is vital to other members of their family, particularly the children. This awareness supports the women's drive to seek solutions to new challenges and prevent it from having destructive effects on their lives. This is a crucial understanding particularly for the single parent refugee women in this study, some of whom are war widows. Reporting the situation was also a recognition of the constituted authority in their new country, which they realised must be respected to prevent running into trouble with the law, which may be detrimental to them.

Not all women in this study reported the experience of racism in Australia.

> *Well, I met some white people who were very! very!! friendly from the Baptist Church that we attended. They took us as family. But sometimes when they too took us out, they get upset because people asked them where you got this people, where did you get to know them. They just ask silly questions so sometimes they, I mean our friends from the church get upset the way people ask them questions … Then later they [our church friends] will tell us, don't mind*

them. They don't understand anything about life. I always think, but what is the problem of these people; of being a black person… [Lois]

I think some [white Australians] are good but some are discriminatory – racist, because at times, you feel like you have meet people who have blood running through them like you [human beings like you], but they look down on you because of your colour … that is very common here in Australia. But then, there are others who are good, helpful, friendly and lovely. But even within Africans; you will feel like you are meeting your sister [in African communal sense] to greet her and you smile to them, but would never even respond. So, I don't know, is it the culture that we have come to adopt here, therefore have forgotten where we come from. [Olivia]

Olivia's view was to see beyond the negative experiences and remained focused on positive living, one's aims and migration dreams.

Balancing African and Australian cultures to their advantage

The potential clash of cultures was tempered with a sense of embracing their new Australian culture to be able to resettle successfully. The women reported that they overcame this challenge by amalgamating their African and Australian cultures. Samantha explained how she handled these issues of cultural upbringing versus the new country's values:

When I came to Australia I used to call people Aunty, Uncle; anybody, because that was what I was taught … but the Australians didn't understand that as part of my culture. Sometimes you called some people Aunty, they look at you like; am I your aunty, if they don't say it verbally; but you can see it in their face expression. So, I have to teach myself not to call people Aunty because then I felt that it is not acceptable here. So, also to look at people into their eyes, I have issues with that [eye contact]. But in Australia; they actually want people to be able to look into others eyes when talking. [Samantha]

Accepting such differences demonstrated the women's strength and enabled a peaceful living and co-existence with other Australians. The level of understanding and growth was embedded in the abilities of these women. Yet, some women expressed their belief in the importance of instilling in their children their African culture of respect, rather than an outright acceptance of what they perceived to be child behaviour norms in Australia. Women, like Samantha, initially found it difficult, but they embraced the culture of calling people who are older by name while others retained their African values to prevent guilt when children travel home and behave 'un-African.'

Signs of resilience and adapting to Australian society's cultural norms were reflected in women referring to older people by names and maintaining eye

contact when speaking. It was a choice women were able to make rather than being directly taught by their African parents. Through this lens therefore, outsiders can appreciate why women like Peaches with young children preferred to initially instil or impart her African way of respect and discipline around not calling older people by their first name. Learning about respect from two cultures' viewpoints will likely enable the children to blend their understandings and behave appropriately, depending on the environment and situation.

Jemima utilised her access to information by regularly attending sessions, especially those on domestic violence. Jemima stated that she always conveyed the knowledge to her spouse, with a firm warning to him never to raise his hand against her because of the system that operates in Australia. The women discussed that the varied steps taken gave them a sense of belonging as they were able to conform to the acceptable aspects of culture in their adopted country. Olivia experienced domestic violence and was initially culturally perpetuating the situation by continuing to stay in the abusive relationship. She later embraced Australian Government options for support and the family eventually healed together. The women explained that it was important for them to do such things so as to be connected to their new culture, environment and adopted country.

In overcoming challenges, Ursula stated that she endeavoured to think and behave like Australians. She adapted to the Western (Australian) value of punctuality and recognised its difference to the socially acceptable form of lateness termed 'African-time'. These changes were minor, but important for these women as it reflected strength and resilience to daily challenges.

> *As an African woman in Australia, it is very challenging to be living here because they don't really understand us; we have come from a very long way. We kind of adapt to their way of life … What I did to not feel too much hardships as I live here was that I really made it a point that I will change my own ways of life so instead of bringing all my mentality as an African woman, to the white people's world, I changed it. I adapted their own ways of life and mentality. Yes! Their own ways of living here in Australia is different from how we operate back home in Africa. It includes the way live, we talk, handle people, look at people back in Africa … all totally different.* [Ursula]

Parenting in a new country

Twenty of the women were mothers. They described resilience in the context of caring for their children in Australia. As Jemima noted:

> *Coming from a different environment to a new one, there is a lot of difference in the systems. What was regarded as normal back in Africa is abnormal in our new environment. For instance, smacking the kids become abnormal in Australian system; you cannot beat the kids, you will be prosecuted and you cannot send your children to school without food. Back home in Africa, people do it and we did not die.* [Jemma]

The women overcame difficulties in parenting by ensuring that their children remained generally obedient to them. Women were concerned about the influence of Western culture on their children which, according to these women, brings about unnecessary freedom in lifestyle when compared to their African way of child rearing. The women believed that they were still the boss because they know better and have the interests of their children at heart.

> *There is a difference between parenting and friendship. There is something I impose on my kids and that is what it is. I don't have to wait for them to tell me what they want, I do what I know. If I don't know what my children wants, then I shouldn't be a parent in the first place. Sometimes it's not what the children's want, it's about what they need.* [Peaches]

Some admitted to still smacking their children on the buttocks and hands because Western approaches seemed futile:

> *Tell them to go to the naughty corner, it doesn't work in African culture. It doesn't work in my house. You tell them to go to the naughty corner, they go there and play with the toy. It has not taught them that what they did was wrong … to be honest I still smack them either on their bum, or on their hands, but I still smack them.* [Peaches]

Other women explained that they do not use smacking:

> *I punish them other ways. I still maintain that we are the parents, therefore we are still the boss, just use other medium; strategies in discipline them.* [Jemima]

Some women like Olivia and Divine took solace in the fact that:

> *I brought my children when they have overgrown that stage of giving them such disciplinary method … being punished that [African] way, because … I will not feel good that I cannot discipline my child like the way I want.* [Divine]

The women were conscious of the need to train their children in the African cultural norm of respect, especially as they may need to take their children to visit their people still in Africa. The West African women in this study expressed their deep concern and preference to maintain the African culture in

parenting. They wanted their children to fit within their African-Australian groups as well-cultured and disciplined children.

> *I've trained my kids … I have told them you have to give respect to adults. Like when we moved to this place, my neighbour's wife initially I heard my kids said to her; hello xxx I quickly corrected them to the way we do back home in Africa where we respect all adults. So I said to my kids, it is not [xxx/name], it is Aunty [xxx/name] and the husband is Uncle [xxx/name], not just xxx [name]. My kids were like; are they my uncle and aunty … They are not your uncle or aunty; but that is how you show respect to people that are older than you in African culture.* [Peaches]

Another woman was becoming concerned with her children's uptake of vulgar language:

> *My own kids have barely been here in Australia for two years and they have started saying, f*** you and stuff like that … whereas in Africa, that word 'f***' doesn't exist at all.* [Queen]

Women's discourse around parenting was further discussed by Queen. Queen compared the African and Australian ways of discipline and could not hide how disturbing it is for African woman raising a child outside their homelands:

> *In Africa, I can punish you as my child for any wrong … and no child has any power to talk back to me [challenge me] … the children just take the punishment and say thank you Mama, and off they go … and the next time they would not do such mistakes that calls for punishment again … but here in Australia, the children challenge you by saying stuff back at you … like why should I do what you asked me to do. They need explanation for every wrong thing that they do.* [Queen]

For these reasons, some of the women in the study exercised strength by keeping their children grounded through regular phone contact with family back in Africa, to remind them of their roots and through which respect and African culture are reinforced:

> *I instilled in [them to] tell them [my children] that even though they were born in Australia, we are still Africans. We have family back in Africa. My family calls a lot … so they talk to my family; only problem is that they can't speak our language but when they speak our language to them they understand.* [Gina]

Though appreciative of all that the new land of Australia has to offer them and their families, additional concerns around freedom were raised by the women. Peaches exercised fear for her children regarding their possible future choices which may not align with her and her husband's beliefs around relationships. Quizzed by a friend regarding the possibility of her children being gay, she shared her response to her friend as follows:

I just looked at the person and I am like I don't really know right now. I know I don't want to lose my child but at the same time I don't want a gay child, so when that time comes, I don't even want such time to come, but if it should happen; we'll figure it out then. But right now, I don't want to think about it [very heavy sigh] … I just hope for the best. [Peaches]

Expressing hope was often one of the ways that the West African women exercised their strength; which demonstrated resilience to daily challenges at hand, rather than over-burdening themselves with issues that may or may not occur.

One example of a negative outcome was described by Esther, whose niece was removed from her care as a child. After being moved to various foster homes by the Department of Community Services, she returned to Esther's home at aged 19 with a drug abuse problem and nearly having dropped out of school. Esther's experience of the Western cultural influence on her African culture was a painful outcome because:

Now the thing is xxx [niece] can't speak my language … She didn't go to school anymore that is why now I am desperate and really! really don't know what to do. They didn't make her go to school. She doesn't know how to read, she doesn't know how to write. [Esther]

Her niece's return compounded Esther's challenges. The niece had lost her identity and language as an African woman. Language is one of the ways that migrants keep strengthened through resettlement challenges. In the case of Esther's niece, consolidation of her African language had been eroded by years of living in the care of Department of Community Services. However, Esther remained determined to find solutions to the situation of her niece.

The idea that their young people were exploiting the Western culture of freedom emerged as an area for discussion. Nita was clear about how some African children were misusing their freedom in Australia to ruin their own lives instead of being obedient to their parents for their own good. Nita is an orphan, but she commented on her observations:

When we do something wrong and our parents want to intervene in African way, we the children called the police and the police had to intervene. The Australian system has corrupted [some] African children … because there are lot of things we can get away with … which we know in our heads as a child that we can't get away with it while we were in Africa, we can't get away with it when we were in our culture … but because the culture in our new countries are different… If my mum wants to discipline me I will call the cops and say to them that my mum is beating me, she is been violent towards me. What the Australian Government

is going to do is, find me a house and put me in there and give me more money, when I am actually doing wrong thing. So they are not solving the problem. What they were trying to do is to make it worse. Because the police have already intervened into the situation and me as the child got away with it, then I can do more and more and more because I know the police; the government is on my side. For me as an African I don't think it's a good idea but there is nothing we can do about it. That's the law of Australia. [Nita]

Women in this study generally depicted their resilience in rearing their children in Australia, but examples like Esther's, and Nita's observations, indicate the challenges some faced.

The women discussed how they embraced some new Australian systems but also upheld the important areas of their culture. One of the women described how she was told by an elderly Australian woman that doing ear-piercing for her three-month-old daughter was child abuse. However, rather than allowing this to be an issue to worry about, the West African woman stated that she enlightened the woman in order to let her see that it is the love that she had for her daughter that made her uphold the African cultural way of beautifying her daughter.

Others discussed how they conformed to experience a sense of belonging by abiding with important Australian education policies whereby children eat breakfast prior to attending school:

The environment that we are in; I mean the Western world is different from Africa. When you are bringing your children up back home, the disciplinary method that we use is different to the Western world. Like if you say to your child that because of certain behaviour like the way the child talk … is not good [then you considered punishable], therefore I will not give you food until the evening time; that is child abuse there [in Australia] … you are not supposed to deny a child of food … and so many things. [Divine]

The women also advised partners about violence against women or domestic violence. Women like Olivia initially endured abuse for cultural reasons. She eventually embraced government options of seeking help wherein she lived in a shelter for some time before resolution and healing together as a family was achieved. Rather than a clash of cultures, the women amalgamated their two cultures to their own advantage. The women embraced their new Australian culture and sought to blend it with their African cultures.

I tell my kids about the family back home. The kids talk to their grandparents. I also tell my children stories, family stories about those back home in Africa even

at times I've got story books from back home in Africa. I give it to them, they read it and that is also something that connects them to our roots. So, we are still very grounded and connected to our roots. We also tell them every day that you are from Africa. [Jemima]

Women expressed hope for constructive outcomes from the study that will influence current government policy for new migrants. The West African women in this study expressed hope for the future in diverse ways that went far beyond themselves. Beverly hoped that their children's experiences would serve as a point of departure in provoking talks around how refugee children who had stayed for years in refugee camps can successfully fit into the Australian system of education. She commented that English classes were inadequate in this regard and hoped for changes to prevent future refugee children from all backgrounds from dropping out of school. As a result, she wished that:

… the only thing is if this particular research was meant to be to the level of the government so that the government can know exactly how and what we feel when we arrive in Australia; especially with the story of my niece experiences that I shared with you regarding the educational system ... I believe that if this research was on a bigger level with the government, it would have been very good. [Beverly]

Beverly wanted future refugee children to not experience the same process her own children went through upon relocation to Australia. Many refugee children's lack of continued education while in camps created a significant gap in learning. Yet, the Australian system of education expected them to continue schooling as normal.

Realigning the self and lifestyle

Becoming flexible to issues and circumstances helped the women adapt to the changes as they resettled in Australia. With a clear sense of purpose and direction, the women discussed their endurance through the transition to Australian life. The ability to reframe themselves and objectives in Australian living were a strength unearthed in the study and elucidated as the women's ability to realign themselves and their former lifestyle.

Career change and professional retraining

Some of the women discussed how they, their spouses, and people within their African community experienced difficulties in entering the Australian labour market as skilled professionals. The process of re-certification into a profession held prior to migration was often lengthy. On occasion, such retraining did not necessarily guarantee a job in the field of choice. The processes around retraining put some of the women and families under more pressure. Peaches recalled:

> *We came to Australia on a skilled immigrant visa because my husband is a pharmacist and so he came in with us as permanent resident … but that also meant he has to come into Australia and complete his registration and exams… It wasn't easy, and for my husband especially because he had to go through exams, he had to do an internship … so he was never really stable, so I had to be like the forerunner of the house, he was contributing financially but his presence was not really there because he was busy with schools, registration and all the exams.* [Peaches]

Women sacrificed the physical presence and support of male partners to overcome financial challenges while aiming towards achieving the purposes of migrating.

Another important issue was the lack of local Australian work experience, even after obtaining certification of qualifications in Australia. According to Jemima:

> *So the issue of employment is a big issue; getting that first job, because most of the time the job you applied to, they always say they want local experience and getting that local experience is a challenge because if you are not offered a job; how would you get the local experience. So, it's very challenging.* [Jemima]

Esther expected that work experience achieved during school/college training in Australia should be regarded as local experience. Although her two-week work experience was deemed inequivalent to local experience, she persisted and enrolled in other studies.

> *To get a job is very hard in this country because even after having the certificate, they will ask for experience of like six months before they take you for job and if you don't work, how are you going to get the experience, you see; because I have the Disability Certificate but when I applied for job ... they say that I don't have the experience. How would I have the experience without working with them? When I was doing the certificate, I did work experience for two weeks, but then they said that I need six months experience to get a job. To get a job is very hard, really hard. So I continue doing more certificates.* [Esther]

In embracing their new self, there were many who settled into jobs outside their former profession. Gina and Christabel had a background in secretarial

studies. Gina worked as secretary in a company for two years before embarking on sewing and tailoring because her husband believed it would be useful for her when she arrived in Australia. Reaching Australia, Gina was one of the few who found it less difficult to train as a nurse. She liked the flexibility of the job, perceived it as well-paid, and felt it aligned with her mothering role. Gina expressed that the job changes were commonly experienced by African people living in Australia:

> *I noticed that most of the [nation/country] men are taxi drivers. Most of them also works in the factory, and all sorts and most of the women work in the nursing homes as ordinary … assistant-in-nursing. AINs do a lot of work but yet no respect. But all these people, they have qualifications from Africa – some as RNs [registered nurse], teachers, lawyers, accountants … it's because they don't accept [country] certificate here; because I have a friend who was an RN in [country], but she's at my workplace working as AIN because they didn't accept her certificate and they have to restart all over again.* [Gina]

Violet and Helena's narratives are similar to Gina's view about the steps that some of the women and their spouses had to take to overcome financial challenges while resettling:

> *All the African women are working in aged care … Well, for some of us, it's not easy at times … they look for people with local education, so most of our African sisters are working in nursing homes, just to survive.* [Helena]

When probed, Violet went further to explain that:

> *… it's the only work that they find, many of them are doing that job … some also do other jobs. I went to aged care training because many of the African women that I knew were doing it.* [Violet]

From Gina's excerpts, it became clear that for these women and their families, the opportunity to study and or enter into a gainful employment to overcome financial challenges was carefully considered. Accepting career changes and lower status positions is important for people in the process of settling in.

All the women in the study expressed the value they placed on education for upskilling or embarking on a new type of work. Samantha was a refugee, for whom, because of the war and living in a refugee camp, education had become a secondary issue:

> *it's hard … because you have to study for all the years that you've missed … and so you just have to like, focus. I personally I study all day all night, just to catch up with other people [students] and make sure that I build good relationship with my teachers … they were also helpful … ready to render their services to me whenever I want to know something or I am confused.* [Samantha]

Others with less educational background were also grateful to have the opportunity to get education and work to earn income:

> *Since I have come to Australia, I really have plenty Certificates. I am really happy to be an Australian … I did aged care … disability … childcare … everything … I have more than 32 certificates.* [Esther]

Acquiring long list of certificates of attendance at short sessions and or some TAFE certificates of attendance was not difficult as these programs were held in community venues to enable women, especially refugees, to attend. Violet's discussion of her own educational attainment provided a clearer insight:

> *I did some training but not to the extent that I want it yet…I have only done aged-care training. I also did other small ones like flower making, decorative flower making, I did the training. We just did the cooking training last month … it was done at TAFE … but it was just the introduction, not the real course.* [Violet]

The women were strong, and endeavoured to overcome resettlement challenges with limited resources. Their hope and optimism for their futures are depicted as strength in the face of challenges. Regardless of the frustrating circumstances they experienced with their new life in Australia, the women held a positive outlook. As one of them explained, the experiences were transitional:

> *Ultimately, it's getting better and we thank God for that because it then means that it's a temporal thing … we're frail, its temporal … it won't always remain like this … I think it's also something that a lot of families' experiences here…"* [Peaches]

The West African women were realistic about the challenges they faced as they realigned themselves to the new realities of living post-migration to Australia. The women did not paint a complete victory over their challenges, but one that was continually evolving. Acknowledging the challenging periods was an approach used. The women acknowledged that they continue to work through challenges of resettling. Persistence was critical. They see their strength now in the endless possibilities and a bright future that lies ahead for their children:

> *Well it's still up till now really, it's still not perfect, I'm still trying to console and reassure myself that it's going to be fine, it's still hard … it's very hard in Australia … But I think one of the biggest thing that keep me going are my kids.* [Peaches]

Accessing available financial and material resources was another vital means that the West African women in this study used during transition, even as they embraced the new reality of life in Australia. The women appreciated the privileges associated with their Australian citizenship and/or residency. Like many others, despite her chronicles of resettlement challenges in Australia, Lois recounted these available opportunities for a new life in Australia and concluded:

> *The Australian Government helped us a lot. I can say that the Australian resettlement is one of the best in the world. They are not 100% but it's one of the best. So, I was assisted by the government income support, housing and everything was given to me ... In 2006 … my mother arrived in Australia with my siblings; nine of them, and everything was sponsored by the Australian Government. They came with family reunification and my visa category covers them at that time so I don't have to pay at all; the Australian Government did it all.* [Lois]

They described the help embedded in such resource support to build a new life, in a new land and territory:

> *There is a great difference between the two places [Africa and Australia] because like here in Australia for example, I am not working now and the government is assisting us. So I think we are doing extremely well … Unlike in Africa, no government will help you … so I think it's pretty much better here in Australia.* [Christabel]

These women utilised their access to government services in problem-solving their life challenges; opportunities not available to them in their previous lives. All the women described the support they have access to because they live in Australia. They related that when they did not have jobs, they still lived well because the government provided support for them and their children, which did not exist in Africa. Christabel and Beverly were also appreciative of a new life and future with access to initial help from government and non-government agents.

> *In those early years, I thought we actually had the services that we needed and we got the help we needed. When we arrived, at that time there were services similar to the Settlement Services International of today. I cannot remember the name they were called then; but those services were not only looking after us; they also introduced us to mainstream programs like the educational, health system, Centrelink and all that.* [Beverly]

There was elation to find out on arrival in Australia that there was government support financially and materially through non-government groups that were sources of strength through the initial phases of settling down.

> *I am happy … When I came, they [government] gave me house as refugee I was living in; from the Centrelink … I did the course … the government paid $1000.00 for the course because in that 2007 [the] government was paying for people [sponsoring people] who wanted to do course at TAFE.* [Helena]

Christabel is a war widow with five children of whom three were school aged at the time of the study. Christabel was receiving Centrelink support but mentioned that it was not enough to pay rent, bills and send her children to school. She received added support from non-government organisations, representing ways that helped these women to focus on the opportunities rather than the adversities or challenges of resettlement.

> *There are some organisations that are assisting disadvantaged people like before, I was paying my bills by myself which was very hard but like now, there is an organisation that is assisting us that is paying our bills. So compared to Africa where I came from that has never happened there you know; so Australia is really assisting really helping … a Catholic organisation … they are giving support for youths so like for my two girls; the Catholic organisation is assisting me with them. Recently I took their school list of books and uniform to this organisation and they bought these stuffs online from the school; then my children went and collect the supply.* [Christabel]

While Centrelink benefits were accessed by eligible women, financial support was considered the first step towards financial independence. The women stated that they refused to be totally reliant on government support in the form of Centrelink financial support. The women explained that it was important for them to be able to take control over their own financial lives. Many took opportunities to attend school to improve their educational standing and employment levels.

> *One of the [African] ladies have an agency, nursing agency for assistant-in-nursing. So, she was able to put us through a short course, so that we can get a job quickly, so that we can continue with our lives from there. So, in that aspect, I think, she was very helpful.* [Faizah]

Health and wellbeing

The notion of health and wellbeing as a source of resilience is explored under two sub-headings. The first is the women's focus on ensuring they maintained good health, and the second is the women's experiences of healthcare in Australia.

The women's health behaviours and views were diversely displayed. Maintaining healthy and sustainable lifestyles was another strength strategy for the West African women in embracing the new Australian lifestyle to grow or develop in it for success. The women realised that having an avenue to release stress went a long way towards helping them to stay focused and cognitively well as they realigned their lifestyles to conform to their new reality and resettle successfully.

A thread of becoming self-aware through healthy living and maintaining sustainable lifestyles ran through all the women's stories. Achieving this type of lifestyle help them to be in control of challenges and overcome adversity with decisive steps. Steps to achieve a healthy lifestyles were reported. Many exercised regularly, others embarked on scheduled holidays that they ensured actually occurred, regardless of their life events at the time. Some engaged in window shopping to relieve stress, dined out and or attended dancing at parties to distract themselves from worries. Maintaining healthy and sustainable lifestyles was part of the West African women's stories that revealed their realignment process in embracing the new reality of life as normal, and therefore strong.

> *I do remember myself so I tried not to get too emotional because I actually used to be very emotional because of what I had went through in life especially since I had my autistic son. I cried a lot with every little thing because it's [child with health issues] a hard work. I have given up all my career, my everything to look after him. I just keep healthy, I eat healthy, being happy, go out a lot to activities which I can go and do yourself, I am not talking of parties; but like walk around the lake, go sight-seeing, go to movies.* [Ursula]

Peaches not only went shopping as a form of therapy, she often took the kids to eat out on such days when everything was at a boiling point for her. Peaches further utilised attending socials at African parties, which gave her chances to socialise with others as an important means of taking her focus off her stress and concerns of resettlement. Maintaining a positive attitude to life was also an avenue utilised by the women.

The women have become more knowledgeable about healthy living. Isabella's discourse highlighted health literacy relating it back to her homeland. She also discussed what may be guiding her regular health checks and practice:

Back home in Africa, we eat any type of food, some people they might not even know that they have cholesterol, high blood pressure and that there is certain food that you should not eat [or in moderation]. Also, doctors have confidentiality, you go there, you tell them your problem, you would not be exposed for it unless if you have something contagious like HIV in which it will go into the Health Department. [Isabella]

Malia expanded on this idea by sharing her own healthy living knowledge:

It is important to me to look after myself not become sick. I do exercise, massage and eat according to what I was supposed to eat: fish, vegetables. You know, you suppose to quit some food from your life and only eat the food that makes you good. Fish, meat is good but not much, just eat little bit but eat vegetables so I eat well and sleeping well. [Malia]

Many women referred to doing exercise to stay healthy and be strong for the family:

I also look after my own health by doing exercise. I cherish exercise very well. I also eat healthy food, being an educated person … I am conscious of what I buy and cook and feed my family. I am proud to say that my children from their zero years till now, I rarely feed them from food-outlets … we don't go to McDonalds, Hungry Jack's. I avoided all junk the foods and I have trained my children up in the same way … so this is how I look after myself, making sure that I eat healthy diet, exercising and that means physical and spiritual exercise. The doctors are good at reminding me of Pap smear and so when the letters come, I do go for them. The family in general, we are very healthy individuals … and if any health concerns, we visit the doctors to check it out. [Tatiana]

Through a display of health consciousness and knowledge, it was evident that the women understood the importance of their health to resilience. Most of the women were able to recognise the healthy and non-healthy aspects of their African foods and they discussed steps they took to minimise it to stay healthy. Many of the women reflected on the role of diet in maintaining and enhancing their general health. According to Keiko:

You know Africans, our food is too starchy … Also in Australia, you drive to everywhere, we don't walk much like we do in Africa, so unless you do your own exercise. That is why I also have to change the way I eat, so I eat less starchy food and I eat more fruits and vegies and it is helping my health. [Keiko]

Almost all the women reported the use of preventative medicine through regular health checks. Christabel added her voice:

Last year I did mammogram and Pap smear. I will do it again next year because according to my GP, she said I should do it every two years. [Christabel]

Health and healthcare experiences

The women's encounters with Australian healthcare were generally positive. Having access to functioning healthcare and hospital services were other

areas that all the women described as important, yet lacked in their previous life.

Some of the women in the study had used the healthcare system for maternal care and they reported good experiences. Isabella stated that she was encouraged with the level of confidentiality by doctors and the care of the nursing staff. More importantly, she stated that she was happy that within the general practice healthcare system in Australia there is the opportunity to choose the gender of the health professional:

> *You can choose who you want to see, a male doctor or a female doctor. Once you have a frequent GP doctor that you see you get more used to the person. My experience in the hospital when I was having my son was ok; because that time when I went there to deliver, the nurses were great; making sure that I was comfortable.* [Isabella]

Rita also had positive experiences regarding her dealings with the Australian healthcare system:

> *My experiences around all the healthcare has been good. I remember when I had the issues at work, I spoke with my GP about speaking to the Fair Work Commissions, he suggested that he is ready to give me certificate any time that I am not well and that the certificate would cover me for the period that I am not well … he was very supportive … I go to him every time that I was feeling sick with the pregnancy anyway … with raised heartbeat, my back … he knew about all my struggles with the pregnancy … the doctors at the pre-natal [and] antenatal were also good, very caring; nice smiling people every time that I go for my visits, they asks questions around what has been happening since my last visits. And during delivery, I had no issues at all, very supportive and caring staffs. I am happy with all the treatment that I received.* [Rita]

Queen took time to explain what was good about the Australian healthcare system and the advantages for the people:

> *I will first say that the Medicare is one of the best system[s]. The system is good because as a citizen or permanent resident, you don't pay anything in going to see a doctor and we can do every test to MRI [magnetic resonance imaging] and others. Australia has one of the best healthcare system by way of Medicare. I have seen the doctors many times and when I hurt my back, I saw them all the way through too. My children and my husband has been there to treat himself too – all free we didn't pay anything. And the staffs that we have come across are very welcoming … much better than our hospitals back home in Africa [country] … You see the welcoming aspect alone, especially when you are sick … then you have confidence that you have come to a place where you can receive help … no-one is shouting on you to say … come on get out of here … They also give you good treatment.* [Queen]

On the other hand, Olivia was unhappy with the experience of the medical handling of her back injury at work, which had left her frustrated to be out of

work. The frustration becomes clearer from the perspective that these women preferred to hold jobs and provide for their own living:

> *I got injured at work in my first month of starting the job. I work at the bakery … handywoman … The last specialist visit I had for my injured back was in the city central … The specialist told me that the insurance wrote him to tell me to go back to my normal working hours. I said I can't because my back is still sore and painful, then he said I am finished with you, so please go.* [Olivia]

Queen was also disturbed about waiting times in Australian emergency rooms and hoped that something is done to improve it because, according to her:

> *… you have to queue if you come in with fever and cough … and they would triage all the emergencies before attending to you … I think they need to have another way of attending to those little sickness a bit quicker … because there could be some underlying issues that can actually kill the person … such as pulmonary embolism.* [Queen]

The women recounted that there are others still in refugee camps or still living under failed systems of governments who are lacking access to basic human rights and safety including working for months with no salary payment. The West African women appreciated the freedom, access to relatively free and functioning healthcare system in comparison to the life they had migrated from, and were strengthened through such opportunities and promising future, thus held a positive outlook to life against daily life challenges of resettlement. Alexis clearly compared the healthcare of both worlds:

> *Life back in Africa and here in Australia; you cannot compare it. Here in Australia compared to Africa in terms of for example healthcare, life is definitely very good here in Australia. Like one of my relative is sick back in Sierra Leone, Africa; the medication is very expensive, they don't have good medication there. Unlike here in Australia, any medication given for any form of sickness and illness always works.* [Alexis]

The society that the women grew up in while in Africa had no such government support.

The women also empowered others around them who they saw were still weak or being exploited and through that, they were also empowered. The elation in Isabella while relating her experience in this regard was clearly visible and strong. She recalled how she spoke with a friend's sister, who she believed was suffering from low self-esteem:

> *The girl would say that she was not beautiful, she was only 13, but she was going through a lot of things. She's been traumatised; the family, they brought her here to Australia was maltreating her and DOCS [Department of Community Services] have to be involved. So, when she started living with me I started to*

study her and noticed no self-esteem and then in school; they pick on her that she's ugly. She will come back and tell me all about it; then I noticed that the confidence was not there for her. I realise she's empty shell. I told her to stand in front of the mirror to look at herself and to tell me what she can see … All that people say to you will only degrade you. For you to proceed, to go forward, I said it doesn't matter whether you are; this racism has been on long time ago; in South Africa, even America, they go through racist problem. That should push you to do something better for your life; educate yourself. And I said, so you have to push yourself. Anyway, that is why I said that the love has to come from inside you to be able to push yourself along. [Isabella]

Instances like this are evidence of the women's own complete healing and reaching out to help others who were still struggling.

Find meanings in situations

Embracing the new reality of their lives in a new land, these West African women at times took stock and reflected on their Australian lives. In doing so, the women explained that they were strengthened in discussing those things that had helped them and as they continued to do them, they endeavoured to see the brighter side of things and were encouraged. Faizah said that through challenges such as discrimination, loneliness and change in climate:

… the things that kept me going included all those support that I got here at those early years from the fellowship in the church, so those were very encouraging and then being able to achieve what I was here in Australia for; you know, the sports thing, going to school and getting to business. You know, achieving those things; just that I kept my focus going … yeah. [Faizah]

Gina's pride in realigning herself was evident when she said:

My first achievement of migration and resettlement is that … I have been able to further my education … secondly, I have been able to have three more kids … my husband family, though they are lovely but they can be mean too. So I was worried about them saying, oh! she can't have another child again … because before we got married … his family wanted him to marry someone else here in Australia … so I knew that if I don't have another child … it's going to be a big issue … Also, despite being a student … I have been able to save and send lots of money home for my family … I also have a friend in [xxx/country] … who helped us while we were building our house in Ghana … he lost his job … we have been able to help him by setting him up with his own business … by sending him money. [Gina]

Gina's emphasis on having children represents strong cultural meaning making as she was able to achieve her family dreams with access to adequate healthcare. The access to timely women's healthcare supported her child-bearing and eliminated her cultural shame.

Making meaning out of challenging situations and finding blessings in their relocation to a new land was apparent in the stories. In diverse ways, the women utilised this meaning-making process to see through their resettlement challenges and remained focused on migration aspirations.

Finding meaning in their resettlement adversities was also seen in the women's stories of those opportunities for global citizenship as a result of becoming Australian citizens and residents. The women valued travelling with an Australian passport, which provided easy access to other Western countries where for instance, further opportunities to a better life awaits them compared to travelling with any of their West African passports.

Violet, as a result of becoming an Australian citizen, was able to travel to the USA to visit family and friends. There was strength embedded in the women's sense of freedom. Such freedom was highlighted in their capacity to travel as desired. Freedom to travel as desired through their Australian living was a powerful tool for resilience as they embraced their new selves and lifestyles. Soon they discovered that it is not that bad after all. The joy and elation in Violet on her return from the USA after spending quality time with family was palpable.

Gina's aim was to one day return to Africa with the social remittances of skills in building modern healthcare facilities for the rural area of her original country that the government was not providing for. Gina felt strong in her ability to pass on the health knowledge and awareness that she was able to gain back to Africa. She was surprised to have been diagnosed as a thalassemia carrier including the effects of the disease for conception and her children. She shared the knowledge with family and friends in her African country. On finding out about other diseases, Gina said:

> *When I got here [Australia] I realised that there is sickness we didn't even know about, like Parkinson disease. My Mum's best friend, she's always shaky and they even think that it's their family inheritance; so it's normal. I called her. I normally call her … I said Mum, you know that your head that is always shaking; it's called Parkinson; do you know anything about it? She quickly dismissed it; she said 'oh! No! My grandmother; when she died she was shaky and my Mum before she died she was shaky'; she has no idea … she doesn't know anything about it at all. I tried to make her understand so I told her to go to the hospital and when they run checks and test; truly it is Parkinson disease; but all these*

while; they believe is a family thing …. therefore, it is ok to have it. That's why when we do research; tests we can know more and those things we take for granted in Africa thinking its part of family issue, is something big but because they don't know; they don't take it seriously. We can educate them, because I talk to them, whatever disease that I found out here; I tried to talk to my family in Africa about it. [Gina]

Another level of social remittance was the opportunity for knowledge pooling during the 2014 Ebola outbreak in the West African region countries where the women in this study originated from. As Lois explained, the whole African community in conjunction with some non-government organisations, government outlets and private companies provided support for containers of material shipped back to [xxx/country], the most affected country. The knowledge and training given to the African diaspora in Australia during special community meetings and training at the time of the Ebola outbreak were advised to be given back to families and friends in Africa to help reduced the impact of the disease at the time. Lois stated:

When we have the Ebola in West Africa … we … the African organisation here in Australia … we come together and organise a conference for the Ebola … here in Sydney … to raise awareness about the Ebola epidemic in West Africa … we did the conference for the entire African community … not just the women … we did it so that we can sensitise our people back in Africa on how to take precautions and prevent spreading the disease … we were also able to raise money to send containers of protective materials back to [xxx/country] … and that materials was sponsored by the Settlement Services International … to assist the [country]. [Lois]

The women saw their daily challenging encounters as a way to become stronger and resilient. It is adversity that often brings out the capacity in humans. As Faizah posited:

My experiences, I don't think it has affected me in a negative way. It just made me mature. [Faizah]

Additionally, the women were able to find meaning in their resettlement challenges by cherishing the achievement of a strengthened family life. The women explained that they and their husbands appreciated and cherished the opportunity to live in closeness as one family. This is because within some ethnic groups in the African culture, men are precluded from living with their own wife and children; a system that may have emanated from their polygamous system and or chauvinistic colonial system. African men from such ethnic backgrounds often live separately in another compound adjacent

to the wife/wives and children, because they are only expected to provide financial support for the family. Consequently, the men from such ethnic environment have less to do and less contact with their children. In appreciating one of the positives of relocating to Australia over the challenges of resettlement, Peaches explained further:

> *I appreciate the fact that the parents get more involved with the child upbringing especially with the dad; where back home in Africa, the dad are not really that involved … where the man is like, his own is just to provide the money … just having their own area away from the kids and mum, they are there when they choose to … but here in Australia, it is different, the culture here is involving of both parents in the practical upbringing of the children. Like my husband will say that he appreciates the opportunity to bond with his kids more … So he spends time with them, like our daughter, even just giving her a bath; they play together; you know, so that part of the Australian culture and then with the school activities that kind of the parents, mother's day, father's day. I do appreciate those ones.* [Peaches]

The above experiences show resilience was considered by these women as the ability to achieve living together as a family unit, including having a spouse who can make an overall contribution to the growth and strength of their family in a new culture and society. Strength to these women also meant having the opportunity to raise the children together as parents. These positive achievements mean that women like Peaches have her husband and children with her and challenging periods of their resettlement can be shared together rather than in isolation. The above excerpts also mean that the West African women who fall into the category of married, have another level of accessible support, especially when compared to single parents. The women's resilience was also evident with their satisfaction in seeing their spouse being happy. Happiness all around means less time to ruminate over the challenging situations of resettlement.

Samantha's way of making meaning through war experiences and resettlement adversity was to see its occurrence as catapulting her to a Western world where she can aim at helping others.

Accepting and valuing emotions and feelings

The women in this study employed every avenue possible to ensure that they stayed strong, even as they realigned and embraced their new selves. In

accepting and valuing their emotions and feelings, some women in the study were able to overcome stressful situations. Some women utilised humour while others used crying to distance the effects of challenges.

Women like Samantha utilised emotions such as crying to overcome past war hurts. This is particularly vital to note against the backdrop of African culture of silence. Tears are a form of voice, which when used can help the individual to be released and become strong again after dispelling hurts and concerns. Isabella is a single mother whose partner abandoned her after she fell pregnant as a teenager. In her culture, she brought shame to her family – conceiving outside marriage and abandoned. Isabella was filled with concerns both during pregnancy and even as she raised her son alone. She described how she used the medium of the emotional voice of crying and how she may have to prevent her son from seeing her cry because she wanted to be strong for him:

> *I sit down in my room. I will think. I will cry. I will tear myself up, then I wipe my eyes again. You know you are talking to yourself really. But you try to get the words out and you try to stay focused sometimes you think you are going crazy … laugh … but are talking it … you let it out … because at times it get to a point that you just want to let it out and cry, let out the stress; the steam and cry it out.* [Isabella]

Ursula used both humour and crying. She reported crying when she had an autistic son with no family around to help except her husband. Her cry was pronounced because of the African belief that disabled children are not accepted.

When these women encountered possible setbacks, they utilised past hurtful history and experience to show their determination to move on. Lois described her past role as a law-enforcement officer prior to the war in her country. She reported being at work on the day the war broke out, which according to her involved a 24-hour exchange of gun battle between police and rebels who wanted to take over the police station for access to ammunitions. It is an understatement to say that the experience left Lois battered, and the 2014 Sydney siege in the Lindt Café at Martin Place caused her to have flashbacks of this experience of unexpected violence. As she said:

> *As I watched the siege on the TV, I remembered what happened in 2002 when the rebels took the station hostage.* [Lois]

The tenacity of Lois in response to the flashbacks was evident:

I have to move on, I can't let that hold me down. [Lois]

Thus, the women's situation was one of daily resilience as one adversity may lead to another, even as adversity was also relived. Divine reported that she often linked the sound of Christmas crackers to the gun shots she heard over and over during the war. Consequently, experiences they assumedly overcame could represent as a different challenge in the future. The experience here underscores self-reflection and an ongoing process of the women's resilience. Through self-reflection they gained assurance that overcoming their past challenges indicated that the material or elements utilised to achieve the strength can be re-used in future experiences of similar challenges. As well, self-reflection indicates that the women's future challenges could be handled better. This builds confidence to live life to the full and handle each day's challenges with informed decisions and personal capabilities.

Cultural healing through creativity and stories was also used by the women in realigning themselves as they embraced their new self and reality. The strength and resilience required and displayed by the West African women was increasingly revealed to be not only against the challenges that arose from their contact with new culture, unfamiliar people and systems in Australia, it was also evident that the women needed to be able to rise and overcome the psychological effects of war and refugee camp living experiences. Samantha described using poetry, singing and drawing to overcome such past memories.

Smiling to conceal their suffering in a culture of silence is a usual way of resilience for Africans, especially with their belief in God that through prayers, their problems will be solved. One way that the women in the current study remained strengthened against the psychological effects of their pre-migration experiences was their newly discovered creativity. In this discovery, they were strengthened in seeing that they do not have to supress concerns.

I admire people that speak about their stories and also, I believe there is always power in people sharing their own personal stories because you may never know who is there sitting or feeling the same; like the way, the same feeling you are feeling. That person might pick that up and save that person's life and so I

have kind of understand as time goes on because through my writing it made me realise and through my performance. Because I also paint, I draw; I have discovered that people usually relate to things. It's like, let's say that somebody saw a strong image that could stare up your own personal story or their own personal feelings and they are easily able to cry about it and then [it] feels good. [Samantha]

The power of creative art to heal a traumatic past was visible as one of the ways some refugee women face the challenges of life in Australia. A number of refugee women shared their experiences of speaking out about the war and abuse as they came to realised that the African culture of silence is a form of suffering accompanied by a heavy burden to bear. Through art, the women felt lighter. Several women described healing through listening as well as sharing their own stories. In so doing, such women's strength and resilience to challenges and adversities in their Australian resettlement, was evident:

[You] have all these things [the war experiences] flowing through your head war memories of what happened that are lose and are flowing in and out of the head. So, you just have to let it out somehow because … if not … it's going to get worse … so for me I guess I describe thing that I was seeing at that present time. [Samantha]

Some of the refugee women mentioned how they attended community programs including going on outings with others and camping out as well as arranged programs. After tracing her children in Africa and achieved reunification for them to join her in Australia, Lois described how on such camping times and information sessions for women groups and workshops, she found courage and strength to move past her hurts. Listening to other people's stories:

… I found out that there are women who have more or similar stories. Some of them were raped and all the rest of it and sometimes when you listen to the stories of other women you would say to yourself, oh! My story is better so let me just strong up and move on with my life. [Lois]

Isabella, too, shared her experiences that helped in overcoming the challenges presented to the successful resettlement of these women. She shared some compelling examples of how listening to other people's stories was a source of strength and resilience for her through her turbulent experiences in Australia:

A big war, massive! It was killing of people. I didn't experienced it but most of our people that came have been traumatised with the war; because sometimes I go and listen to some high funding community events and I listen to their stories. Some of them, their husbands had been killed, shot, cut off their faces; their children the rebels would come and capture the girls and rape them. It was

a whole lot of things really ... even there [in the church] you realise that while you were thinking that your problem is so much to carry and you listen to another people's problems, you say to yourself; my God; like people that has all these terminal sickness, houses been broken down – dysfunction, domestic violence, abuse, drugs and alcohol. Then you say to yourself. God! My problem is really not that so bad … you know … because there was no illness for me, there was no alcohol, drugs involved; you know. It was just some personal issues with that you said to yourself; you know God, I thank you for life … [smile] … and it's a trial and once you go through that trial; you'll gone pass it. [Isabella]

The capacity to listen and be positively affected was empowering for these women. It must be noted that the women in the story appreciated the available mental health services in Australia as there were instances when the culture of silence failed these women who eventually had to embrace the available healthcare services to heal. Nita was part of a family of nine, made up of her two parents and six siblings, all of whom could not be located after decades of war. Being an orphan was part of her challenge in resettling in Australia:

… couple of times I've tried to kill myself … I am seeing psychologists and I'm on medications … [Nita]

Samantha believed that the Australian health system should allow for healing according to the ways that women appreciated most. She believed that their remaining strong against any effects of re-establishment issues did not necessarily have to be through the Western system of healing:

They should work with people in whatever way that person has been coping and develop it and make it in a way to stabilise and see that the person is happy, rather than [the mental health services] saying, we think; this is good for you or take this depression pill because … meanwhile it's not showing the person the way; its only showing that the person depends on medication and if that medication is not there, the person is stuck, so for me I think, they [services] can do a little bit of work on that. [Samantha]

A feeling of collective experience is evident in the women's stories at instances when they use the words 'we' or 'us'. This added up to make use of group resilience, which was utilised above in listening to others stories with some sharing their own too; thereby adding to the evidence of strength over challenging issues.

Summary

This chapter described the West African women's resilience and strength through their ability to embrace their new life inclusive of challenging encounters. It discussed the women's hardiness through their past life stories

and linked it to their ability to embrace their new reality in Australia. To present the entirety of the women's stories, the next findings chapter explores other strategies of the women's resilience and strength over resettlement challenges through the lens of the women's processes of social connectedness – *forming connections to build support*.

CHAPTER SIX: RESILIENCE OF WEST AFRICAN MIGRANT WOMEN IN AUSTRALIA: FORMING CONNECTIONS TO BUILD SUPPORT

"If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together" African proverb

Introduction

Chapter Five explored the second main theme, *embracing the new reality*, and its interconnections with the first theme, *connecting past to the future*. The current chapter examines the third theme, *forming connections to build support,* and it elaborates on the previous themes about the West African women's resilience and capacity to overcome resettlement challenges in Australia. The current theme generated three sub-themes: *remaining close to family in Africa, recreating an extended family*, and *drawing inspirations and becoming selfless*.

To face their new life after relocating to Australia, these women demonstrated determination and drew strength from maintaining a networking lifestyle and a sense of belonging. Having left their original countries/communities, the women discussed how achieving a familiar collective lifestyle helped them to achieve unity of their spirit, soul and body and to experience a sense of belonging and solidarity during overwhelming resettlement challenges.

All the women explained the importance they attached to forming connections with people. They related their connecting with people to their newness to the Australian individualistic society in comparison to their collectivist West African culture whereby living is cultivated around extended family systems. The women stated that within such systems, life's joys, hardships and everyday activities are collectively shared in a communal fashion with family members, friends and neighbours.

While the women's migration from their West African countries to Australia necessitated geographic relocation, the focus of the women's discussion was on the diverse ways they attempted to replicate and reconstruct a communal lifestyle here in Australia. Highlighted in the current theme were also the women's reported sources of strength and satisfaction embedded in their various stories of selflessness towards helping others and giving back to humanity. The three sub-themes, as presented in Table 7, are discussed next.

Table 7: Forming connections to build support

Theme 3	Sub-themes	Concepts and ideas
Forming connections to build support	Remaining close to family in Africa	• Keeping connected with extended family in Africa • Financial remittance • Having family around the world • Technology as advantage • Spousal support fostering strength
	Recreating an extended family	• Belonging to an African organisation • Cultivating a communal lifestyle • Harmonious relationships with neighbours and colleagues • Faith, beliefs and practice of spirituality and religiosity as a source of strength • Facilitating more family to emigrate
	Drawing on inspirations and becoming selfless	• Finding strength in international African achievers • Feeling inspired to help others • Advice given to children by women to prepare them for life challenges • Women's transformative experiences to support future migrants during resettlement challenges

Remaining close to family in Africa

The importance of remaining close to family members was a sub-theme that all of the 22 West African women in the study identified with as vital in overcoming their resettlement challenges and as a source of strength and resilience. Through this sub-theme, the women emphasised the traditional West African familial model and community solidarity that contributed to their resilience and strength. The women explained that they kept the relationship between themselves and their family in their West African country alive using

technology. They also referred to having a global family consisting of relatives who have also relocated from Africa to other parts of the world. This theme explains the women's gratitude; a feeling of responsibility for their extended family members and gratitude that they can meet that responsibility by sharing their material wealth.

Keeping connected with extended family in Africa

One of the ways that these women discussed remaining close to family for strength was through keeping connected with extended family who remained in Africa. Continual identification with family was imperative for these women. They described how they sourced their family's spiritual and material support to overcome challenges they experienced while resettling in Australia. The women also strengthened connections by providing financial support for their family still in Africa, making it a reciprocal process. The women referred to this as "going back to help 'my Africa" and this constituted a significant part of the women's stories. Some women planned to return to Africa to support their ailing countries in whatever capacity they could. All of these women though were metaphorically returning as they remained connected to their roots and concerned with home-front situations while remaining deeply hopeful for a better Africa. The women wanted to support Africa and to restore it. Though these women are living in a stable place currently, their stories reveal that they could still feel the effect of the socio-political situations in their West African countries.

The women exhibited determination in overcoming the challenges of resettlement and healing from their past experiences. For women who still have extended families in Africa, especially the voluntary migrants, they attributed their strong sense of connection with family back in Africa as a source of strength because their positive spirits and best wishes meant a lot to the women's strength and resettlement in their new country.

Financial and material remittance

The women maintained a communal lifestyle by remaining connected with their people in Africa in various ways. The satisfaction of being able to financially support their extended family members still in Africa was often reported as a strength they needed to overcome their resettlement challenges. Many of the women discussed the relief and joy of being able to support their families in West Africa, especially during special occasions and festivals such as Easter and Christmas. Financially supporting their elders and parents who had looked after them while they were growing up, despite living overseas, is an expectation within their culture.

> *I am able to help my people back in Africa, for instance by sending money to people when they are sick to seek adequate healthcare. If I am still in [country/xxx], I will not be able to offer such assistance. I am also able to offer financial assistance during burials for family members in [country/xxx], when anyone passes; because other family still in Africa will call to tell us. So, I help a lot in all those areas by providing money.* [Alexis]

To Tatiana, the responsibility to support were both cultural and scriptural; hence it was important to her to achieve this step to feel reassured and connected to her family:

> *And in our African culture, and also biblically, because I am a Christian, so I always refer to my faith; the scriptures says that he that does not give to his or her relations, especially the members of his household is an infidel; and so the contact with people back home in Africa is not just hello how are you, we also support them in terms of finance; we give them money so that they can even visit hospitals when they are sick, to buy food, to look after themselves generally, so that is what the contact is all about. We say hello to support them financially, materially and otherwise, yeah.* [Tatiana]

The women's stories were ingrained not only with responsibility, but with gratitude that they could meet the responsibility. Gina commented:

> *I send money to my grandma … and I send money to my dad too … because he's my dad and I have to look after him. Sending money back home is important because even though they are working, but I'm here [in Australia]; even though [it's] not too easy here in Australia, but to compare the situation here in Australia to Africa life, is, it's better here in Australia than in Africa. For them back home in Africa, it's like they are working from hand to mouth; they work and they eat [use] the money, so, you just feel the responsibility to send them something to support them, their business. They really appreciate it, even during special occasions too, whereby people need to cook lots of food to share, they buy new clothes; giving them something goes a long way, and they really appreciate it, even though they are working, but they don't have much.* [Gina]

While the West African migrant women in this study often send material things such as financial support, clothing and shoes, the women also received African materials, such as dresses and artefacts, from family. Alexis was grieving the loss of her aunty in Africa who died around the time she was interviewed. She explained that the loss and the distance of her family members still in Africa, at times, draws her mind back to Africa. Alexis specifically mentioned her inability to receive the African clothing that her aunty used to send to her, prior her death:

> *She died two years ago, from stroke in Africa. Yeah! Because I love that my sister and she too loved me. Before she died, she sends me clothes in Australia; she will call me to check on my welfare; if I am ok or not; asks if anything is wrong with me. Such her calls do makes me feel like I am in Africa. Now that she's dead, I feel her a lot*. [Alexis]

Alexis drew strength through her other sister who lives with her in Australia and also by belonging to the general African associations as well as her own country's association. These associations helped her to feel connected to her family around the globe.

The women endeavoured to do their best to meet the demands of their family in Africa. It was an aspect of life that they found difficult. Keiko explained:

> *You know we are staying here in Australia; hmmm, you know Africans. We have relatives back home. They would call you for help, they would tell you people die. Even two years ago, my mother passed away. When I got back to [countryxxx] for her burial, they thought I'm from Australia so I have money, everything: expenses for the occasion, they got it from me. When I was going, I had to take loan because I know that when I get to [countryxxx] I will spend a lot, you know. In Africa, we cherish the funeral of our elders when they passed … and people back home in Africa; they thought you are in Australia, you are rich. So, they always called, telling us their problems and they need everything from you. So, the little salary that we receive we just try to share it around struggles to make ends meet … that is how we cope and adapt to the challenges and expectations of our people back home in Africa. We try to send the little we can rather than not send at all … Yeah exactly … out of the little we get … it is not even enough for here … but we still help them out of it you know*. [Keiko]

All of the women explained that their financial obligations to family and friends in Africa was culturally appropriate as they were reciprocating the care given to them by their parents who were now ageing. They explained that the expectation is written in their heart, and no child wishes to fail in that sense, whether they live in Africa or elsewhere. The women explained that expectations of their contributions increased because of the belief that they are

working and paid regularly as compared to the African system where income may not be paid at times. Additionally, they explained that the pay they received is seen to be in a stronger currency compared to their African country. All these expectations were explained as a source of strength because they believed that the positive energy from prayers and well-wishes in meeting this commitment is an important avenue in paving the way for them through challenges they may face in their resettlement to a new country. Consequently, they were pleased and eager to fulfil the expectations. Speaking about her family in Africa, Jemima said:

> *I do send them money from time to time as well because I've got my parents there in Africa. I still got my step brothers and sisters as well; they are my family. I have to look after them. I have the responsibility to look after them … especially my parents … because they are not working and so they rely on us to look after them. It is challenging, very difficult, but from whatever I get I have to make that effort to send something regularly, especially my parents.* [Jemima]

However, not in all cases were the women able to provide help. The contrast between expectations and reality often result in frustration. Though unpleasant, the women often conveyed the message back to their people in Africa. The women were happy that their family could understand their situations in these instances. For Violet, who was not working at the time of contributing her story to this study, said she could not hide her frustration in not being able to always meet the unrealistic financial expectations of support:

> *I have good relationship with all my brothers and sisters even friends. They all expected more from us because we live overseas, like help from us to help them financially; but then in this white men's country that we live in, either here or America or anywhere, anything you get there is just to sustain yourself. Our family needs to know that the money we make is only enough to sustain us in the countries that we live in, so they should know that it's not enough to share around … and that is what I tell them; like I am not working. I am not doing much.* [Violet]

Sending money when able to do so was an important resilience strategy utilised by the women. They were guided by the concepts of needs versus wants**.**

The resettlement experiences of these women were mixed. While they were hopeful for a better life in Australia, their hope for their country and people remained strong as they reflected on living in a new land:

> *Sometimes it's hard living in Australia … as an African woman, but it's good again in another sense to live here because most of the African people living in Australia – men, women – you are able to help family back in Africa like me, I am able to help my parents because I'm living in Australia because Australia life is better than back home [Africa] because there is no money back home, there is no good job back home.* [Violet]

Reaching back home to family and loved ones highlights the need to overlook difficult living and the negative experiences of resettlement.

Having family members around the world

The women held their relationships with family members overseas in high regard. The West African women's borderless family (those in nations other than relatives and loved ones in Africa) were reported as unique support sources as they resided in developed countries like the European Union or North American countries. Consequently, they were financially stable and did not require financial support from the women in this study.

Support from borderless family members was easily accessed and not subject to a guilty conscience because of the inability to occasionally meet their financial obligations, which kept them away from reaching out to family in Africa. They explained that this social support source was vital to their continued resilience and strength in living outside their culture.

As an example, Olivia and Divine both have sons in the USA and neither requires financial support from their mothers. Olivia's friend, who she feels comfortable sharing her domestic violence experiences with, lives in Ireland and as she explains, there were even further advantages to her staying strong in reaching out to that friend:

> *I have a friend in Ireland, in the UK, we share ideas, when I am going through tough issues or tough times, I call her and we share ideas on what to do to get through such tough periods. It is helpful and also help us to know what is happening outside in the world as well.* [Olivia]

Gina calls her aunties who live in the USA on a regular basis; a close experience she simply put as, "It's like we are all still in (xxx/country)". Tatiana's brother in the UK was the source of a borderless family, "I am always in touch with my brother who is actually in London."

Beverly still hopes to resettle in the USA because she has her family there:

Actually, I was not planning for Australia; my destination focus was America because I have a relative in America who filed in for us to come and be resettled there. [Beverly]

These excerpts show that maintaining these relationships is important to these women for various reasons.

Being technologically connected

Loneliness, discrimination and racism in the women's narratives were sources of emptiness that challenged their resettlement process. Experiences such as these were managed by using technology as a lifeline to loved ones in Africa and other parts of the world. The women's stories reveal their concerted continuous efforts to connect to their families using various options including WhatsApp, Skype, FaceTime, phone calls, text messages and emailing. As one of the women elaborated on the value of remaining connected:

I miss my family back home. I've got seven siblings back home in Africa, I keep in touch with them almost every day – phone calls, WhatsApp and I look forward to seeing them very soon. [Faizah]

The women drew strength from maintaining these connections:

… they pray and they always give me advice. [Malia]

Utilising the process of staying connected as a source of strength during the challenges and adversities of resettlement was vital.

It means a lot because we are a very closely-knit family, we all know what is going on in all our lives. We are in constant touch, we all talk a lot. We all try to be together as we were, before we started travelling overseas; we share photos through WhatsApp. [Gina]

Using technology for regular contact was a strength that the women discussed because, according to them, the process drew them closer to their parents and loved ones in general. During such calls, blessings and words of encouragement were offered and sustained the women:

keeping in touch with families back home … I talk regularly with my mum and my dad because they are still very much an integral part of my growing family … so because of that I speak to them … they are the ones who advise me … they say to me to keep going on … and be strong … Yeah! I draw strength from my parents a lot. Once I speak to them, I am fine … they give me that support that I need no matter what situation that I am in … they help me out a lot, including my siblings too … all of them. [Peaches]

Spousal support

Settling in a new country and culture includes challenges such as shifting from a communal lifestyle to an individualistic society. The women in this study initially experienced loneliness and isolation. In an individualistic society, the women found themselves having to do all the chores compared to sourcing family help that was available in their previous life. Achieving goals helped them to counteract and or curb these negative effects during their resettlement processes.

The women perceived managing multiple roles as impractical in Australia compared to how things were in Africa. For instance, Queen explained that her life while in Africa was a very busy one prior to relocating as a skilled migrant to Australia. She and her husband ran a pharmaceutical business, and in addition she worked as a full-time registered nurse and nurtured three young children and her husband. Queen indicated that she coped well because apart from extended family support she had paid help in the house:

> *I have two house-helps at the time. House-helps are people employed to help with house chores and cares around the family. They lived with us and so we also feed them. They could be seen as part of the family because they live with us, but not as blood relations.* [Queen]

The loss of hired help was felt keenly in Australia. The women sought help from their intimate partners, which was a departure from African tradition. Peaches explained:

> *For me my husband would help, but you have to tell him; but after I've been nagging, I said no! I don't need to tell you all the time; if you see something dirty messy or something requiring our attention, can you just help out in such areas; he's beginning to be up and about and trying not waiting to be told.* [Peaches]

Ursula related a story around her autistic child. She recalled her sadness and the trauma of having a disabled child, which African people traditionally associate with evil spirits or wrong doing by the parents or extended family members. Ursula stated that her family in Africa often reassured her and wished that she could bring the child back home to Africa so that they could extend the moral support they gave her into the physical support she required to care for her disabled child:

> *No-one from my family can come at the time; they actually didn't like to live far away from home … and they said Australia is too far.* [Ursula]

Relating her inability to embrace her family's offer of physical support, Ursula stated that her son has better access to healthcare in a Western country than in Africa, and she appreciated that support. Ursula explained that she sought the support of her spouse:

> *He was able to help with the care of the children, he helps a lot because if he doesn't who else will help me, really he has to help*. [Ursula]

Faizah, now married with three children, offered the following perception of managing family and work, which was:

> *though, a bit difficult because you don't have any external help, but like I said, coming from beginning if I'm able to manage myself at that young age of 21; now it's a lot better now. So now I've got an idea of how to manage my time, how to do things, so that help me with the kids; how to go with things with the kids as well*. [Faizah]

Faizah, like many of the women in the study, drew on her strengths to overcome daily resettlement challenges. Faizah's spouse was working as an assistant in real estate. One of the ways she discussed her spouse's help was how he chose to achieve his further educational training via online courses, thereby becoming flexible with time while completing his studies:

> *So that gives him time … and so we are able to fit into each other's time*. [Faizah]

The ability to adjust daily events around each other facilitated the women's strength through difficult and challenging times in Australia. Focusing on the aims of their migration helped the women to remain strong and utilised what they had as a substitute to replace their loss created by living far from usual cultural support and help sources.

Recreating an extended family

The women discussed how they overcame the challenges of living far away from their families in an individualistic Western society by attempting to reconstruct their African communal lifestyle and extended family living in Australia. The women reported that it was important for them to recreate such a communal and extended family lifestyle to supplement access to those not physically present. Such support was related to associations and interactions with opportunities to relate to people as friends, confide in some and socialise. Through recreating an extended family, the women asserted that they were

able to create an atmosphere where their children could be trained in their valued African cultures and supported by improvised extended family members. It was a way of providing their young ones with aunties, uncles and elders in a new society.

Belonging to an African association

Belonging to African associations was a valuable way of creating a place to belong. The women described their experiences of networking through membership of their African associations. There are dynamic African associations in all major cities in Australia. As non-profit organisations, the associations promote sociocultural and educational activities. The associations are formed to represent the shared African identity in the name of Ubuntu. Many activities are held to solidify their relationships through events like Children's Day. As members, the women access support, networks and satisfy their need for belongingness:

> *Well, they [the African women's association] helped me very well. When I had my baby, they put some money in the envelope and bring it to me. Then during my baby's naming ceremony, they came with a lot of gifts; so, they were very useful.* [Alexis]

Tatiana gave a deeper insight into finding a safe haven through the African people's Ubuntu communal lifestyle:

> *I have never left my country even though I am not physically residing in there now … and hmmm … you know we brought all that we are into this country and we have been in touch in all forms, you know … And all these groups that I mentioned are and have been helpful in their own capacities … say for example, if a member's family relations passes away, either at home or here in Australia … even if it is other kind of incident like accident or something, the members of the association will always rally around, to be a source of comfort to that association member, give some monetary helps and other things … so the association has been helpful in such ways to its members … Also during baby dedication and christening or celebrating any parties like birthday … and you invite the association … the members will be there, helping you … the women might help you to cook … and men may bring other things … it all depends on what you are doing, and if you invite them, they will really rally around such member[s].* [Tatiana]

Jemima and Divine contributed further details of what their African association stands for:

> *I do belong to an African association … We provide support to women as they arrive in Australia … including those who have been here but facing problems, issues … I also belong to the African women's group as well. We normally do*

the African women's dinner dance, we do provide support as well … more on the social level. [Jemima]

It is now we have [xxxname] Association – the people from my own county and then the [countryxxx]] Community; there was none when we first arrived that I know. The [xxxname] Association and the [countryxxx] Community have been very helpful. The women's leader from the [namexxx] Community always lead us to other places where we can go and study some things such as going on excursions to see places and to attend workshops – to associate with people and learn some few things to enable us to find jobs. [Divine]

The various opportunities to create a sense of belonging highlight the value of creating a space for women. While experiences of hostility and racism may have created distress, they created group spaces that were community centres and religious outlets for meeting and converging. Resilience was evidently built in having access to these spaces and being able to belong. These associations equipped the women with a sense of belonging and improved their health and wellbeing.

Elders and leaders

Some of the women saw themselves as elders with knowledge and wisdom to intervene in community issues, which were ways of giving back, especially to African people in Australia. Others took up leadership roles within their community to give back and remain connected. As a 60-year-old African woman who can contribute significantly to members' needs and also be listened to, Divine stated:

Right now, I consider myself an Elder in the group. I am old and I should be considered as somebody with wisdom. Sometimes when there are issues among members, maybe people not understanding each other and if the association is looking for some people to go and settle it, I might consider myself to go there because I'm an old person in that organisation … Yes of course. [Divine]

The leadership positions were also reported by those whose main connection and roles were within their churches. Malia stated:

When I first came in 2001, I was one of the executives in the church. I was a church mother. We look after all the women, we teach them how to be humble, how to look after your husband, family, how to pray, how to cook. We teach them a lot of things; how to make bread; everything. We share the teaching around, maybe next month we just say; you teach this or that topic. We may call somebody from outside the church too; a doctor, nurse or somebody to come and teach all the church women on a topic … Also, if someone gives birth to [a] baby, we have to go and visit them; give them presents like washing powder, clothes for baby, from the women's group in the church. I did it for about nine years after that they are supposed to put another person. [Malia]

Women's strength was drawn from significant others. One of the women was advised prior to her Australian migration to always strive to live long and healthy, and avoid the stressful life situations from affecting her life. Such advice encouraged these women, and helped them to keep things in perspective while remaining relatively calm through each day's challenges. They endeavoured to aim to be positive, to remain focused on their goals, and attempt to see the end from the beginning because, to them, achieving their goal, would justify the difficult times, representing hope to get there, thus acknowledging the element of hope as a process. They had persevered through difficult times.

Population increase as a buffer

West African women's stories highlight that people of varied African ethnic backgrounds can now be seen in public areas in Australia. The increase in physical presence of African women living in Australian society was favourably echoed in the women's stories. Ursula recounted that because:

> *… migration was really booming … there are many Africans here now in Australia, so it feels homely, as if I am back in the midst of my people in Africa.* [Ursula]

The growth of language was utilised as strength by the women too. Consequently, Isabella excitedly added that her ethnic group had grown in Australia to the level that today:

> *… after the refugee program and the people were coming and starting to migrate into Australia; we even now have our languages in Centrelink 'krio' language though we still have other dialects like the Fulla, the Soussou, the Mendes, but the 'krio' which is the broken English, is more recognised amongst us.* [Isabella]

Isabella's excerpts not only attest to the increasing number of African people within Australia's multicultural society, it also advances the discourse. Ursula's comments that Australia *feels homely* is powerful recognition for the strength that these women had in resettling well to a new country, despite being far from home. From Isabella's excerpts, the growth of language was also evident and it was one that supports the successful resettlement of the women in their early resettlement, most importantly for the refugee women, many of whom arrived with limited English.

Evidently, the improved growth was a result of an increase in the number of people who needed to use the language; the increase in the number of people therefore equates to an increase in the number of people the women and their families could access to build a strong network to socially support them in resettling successfully to their adopted country. This contributed towards increased supportive sources and enabled them to feel stronger and exercise resilience while re-establishing their lives in Australia. The growth of language and increase in population of people from Africa also adds to the multiculturalism of Australia.

Dance group and youth group

The women's stories show that the opportunity to grow up in a new country with people of shared cultural values meant a lot to them and to their healing and strength. The women therefore belonged to groups that facilitated their good intentions. Through these groups, it was also evident that leaning on each other for strength and support meant a lot to these women's successful re-establishment, and for those who arrived as adolescents as they made sense of growing up in an entirely new culture. Two of the groups utilised by the women in living successfully within their two cultures were dance groups and youth groups. According to Samantha, the young people formed a dancing group. The group was a source of socialising with each other, which was vital to their early resettlement process. The young women benefited as did their community, including their mothers, which distracted them from resettlement adversities and war experiences:

> *In 2005, we actually came up with our own dance group and that was a form of expression; of drawing strength. It was made up of my cousins and myself my family members that were already here and also community members that were living in [xxx/name] area because … there used to be big refugee [country/name] community there. So, we all came together and called it [xxx/name] Cultural Group and so we just dance we sing we dance … traditional singing and dancing, and for the community … then, that was the way the young people cope, draw strength and sometimes the old people will come and just watch us do our dance.* [Samantha]

The dance group also offered the women the opportunity to retain their cultural values. Similarly, the belonging and comradery held deep meaning to the lives of youth migrants and constituted another level of strength to their overcoming resettlement challenges. To Nita, being part of the youth group meant that they

were not only socialising and growing up together in the culture they had known prior migration; it also meant that they could discuss how to help new African youths overcome their resettlement hurdles. Being able to help other youths navigate the new terrain of Australia was a source of joy and strength for some of the participants. It helped the youths keep out of trouble on the streets, as is often reported around migrant youths. Participating in such activities contributed towards a brighter and stable future in their adopted country. In sharing her own experience as a young African woman, Nita stated:

> *I do go to the youth group of our [xxx/country] community to communicate with my fellow African [country] … we go to meetings. We talk about what is happening in the community; how we can be able to help each other and be there for each other because this isn't our home. This is Australia; I'm from [country] and whatever and no matter what, I am still a [xxx/country] … So we talk about our [xxx/country] community and how to help improve it; how to make life better for the younger ones in Australia because we have a lot of migrants that come from [xxx/country] to Australia and are finding life really hard. So, we talk about how to help them move forward; how to help them get access to the community, how to help them get more privilege within the system.* [Nita]

Community radio also facilitated connection and provided regular updates about social and economic events within their African countries. The increase in the African population was extended to the opportunity of establishing African local radio stations in Australia, which boosted the women's confidence to resettle, despite challenges and/or being far from the African continent. For example, the passing and burial of Lois's mother was announced on the local radio of their African country operating in Australia:

> *When my mother passed away, I was in Sri Lanka. When I arrived back in Sydney, we have our local [xxx/country] radio station here in Sydney and on that station they announced that Lois is back in Sydney; her mother's funeral will be on, so and so date.* [Lois]

To the joy of Lois, the announcement allowed for a massive turnout of the African community for the burial ceremony; as it might have been if it had taken place back in their African country. The burial of an elder is often a large event in Africa, involving many people to help celebrate their life. Acknowledging such an achievement in a country far, far away from home, Lois remarked:

> *The turnout of xxx [our people] was beyond my imagination. I shed tears and said to them that, you people supported me so much; it's unbelievable, the turnout, the support, it was interstate turnout, all over Australia.*

The women cultivated a communal lifestyle where they were able to access what seemed lost by reason of relocation from Africa. Providing an environment where they were able to nurture their holistic care for resilience meant a lot to the women, and one of the steps taken to achieve that was their flocking together. They wanted to prevent the feelings of being a fish out of water. The children's comfort and happiness were evidently a priority to the women. Many showed resilience with their strategic choice of schools for their children and suburbs to live in. Women like Peaches indicated that they would not live in suburbs where there were no migrants, especially African people. Others utilised companionship by sending their children to school in groups.

Peaches and Jemima were resilient to issues around sociocultural isolation by strategically locating themselves in proximity to other African people. This equally enabled more access to African social and material services, including shops and schools where there were other African black people.

Being together was a source of strength as they could share views and ideas and encourage each other through issues of concern around their resettlement. To be able to access this type of social support, Peaches stated that she was reluctant to move to regional areas where her spouse was able to find employment after long periods of unsuccessful effort within the suburbs of Sydney:

> *When we first got to Australia, my husband was working in [xxx/town] and that my priority was another reason of not moving to the regional areas because I said to him that I am not going to move to a suburb or an area where I will be the only African there. We went and visit him for the Christmas. It was a further away suburb from [xxx/town]; we were the only Africans in that whole place and when we go out to the shops, the people there will be looking at us different; everywhere we go to, they could tell that we were different. They have never seen people like us before and they looked at us as, with such a look of where are we from; you could just tell with the looks on their faces … and I don't want my kids to have to grow up with that … I don't want that.* [Peaches]

Such steps show the interest the women had in the smooth and continued school attendance by their children; given that some women reported that their own experience as children of racism made them to almost abandon

schooling. Isabella was a school-aged girl on arrival to Australia with her dad, and she recalled many experiences of racism at school:

Today, that's why when my cousins come, they come together, like my cousin; like now when they came here [Australia] they came three cousins and my brother. They put them in one school at least they have somebody to talk to even if others do not want to be their friend in the school; like from other race or colour; they have the advantage of talking to themselves they have themselves, as family, as friends, as everything which for me, I didn't have that; I was the only one. [Isabella]

Also Peaches explained that she deliberately sent her children to schools where there are African children:

I said to my husband that I am not taking my kids to any school where they will be the only black people there, in such school. So, it's a priority for me … because that feeling of being different … I don't want my kids to go through it … so whatever school they go to, I want them [the children] not to be the only African in that school, I want it to be within the community that is well aware of Africans or have interacted with Africans. So, the schools they go to now, they have heaps of Africans there; different types of skinned people; so, they come back from school now and they talk to me about 'my friend with black skin or the one with brown skin'. So, you can tell. [Peaches]

The women all made attempts to remain connected as new people in Australia. Some women who shared similar background stories of resettlement in Australia expressed their views in this area. According to Faizah, choosing to stay in Sydney was strengthened by her co-athletes who made the same decisions:

Actually, it was three of us from the [xxx/country] sports team that stayed back … and got that Australian sports offer. So, I think basically at that time, we were the family that we knew. [Faizah]

Nita had arrived in Australia with two other war orphans, and had the following to say about building new family around her in Australia:

… because all of us the three orphans we don't have our family. So apart from that, we just call ourselves the little family that we can have now, so we've got each other's back and whatever is happening to us we are there for each other. [Nita]

Further, Nita stated that she moved to Sydney from Western Australia to support one of her fellow orphan migrants who had just had a baby. Violet also shared her experience of communalism in staying strong:

When I came from Africa, I was living together with the stepmother of my daughter, the lady that brought my daughter to Australia. All of us were living together and so as soon as we got here, the lady moved into another house. So, my husband our children and I was left in the house. So as soon as I came, she put my name there as tenants, as actual people renting the house,

so when my husband and I split, it was not difficult for me. She educated me on that immediately when we arrived in Australia that when you are renting, you are able to have rent history so that when you look for another place it become very easy for you … since we have arrived Australia … we have lived in three different places and three different times we have moved … and no problems getting a place. [Violet]

The above discourse highlights the benefits of recreating an extended family and the challenges of lawfully establishing yourself in a new country. Knowledge is power. The system of renting a house might be different to their previous lifestyle but the availability of supportive knowledge from living with others from their background eased one important area of resettlement challenges for women like Violet.

Harmonious relationships with neighbours and colleagues

Harmoniously living with other people in Australia helped the women to develop their sense of belonging. Achieving this sense of belonging depicts growth, and was crucial in achieving a healthy balance between their ties to their African family and the opportunity to be connected to the country they now called home. The African people's essence of Ubuntu, or living in harmony with each other, is key to African people, whether in Africa or abroad. Ubuntu emphasises human personhood and extends to other people around them. The interconnectedness of all things helped the women in this study to be strong when confronted with cultural isolation and racism.

Keiko highlighted that community help can be as small as a gesture that can bring a smile or to bigger actions that raise awareness or support the person(s) or groups financially or in kind. As a church minister's wife, Keiko explained that her community work extended beyond caring for her church members. She expressed her strength as emanating from her ability to reach out to other migrants:

It's not only church members. Some people when they have problems, they ran to you, those Indians that lives around us. I am close to them; if they have problems; they discuss with me and sometimes people may call that I should join them to somewhere; I have to go. For instance, they have hospital appointment and don't want to go alone, I go with them; if they call me … I remember one time, my neighbour; her husband wasn't home and she was going to the hospital and didn't want to call the ambulance, so I went with her; so I drove. [Keiko]

Some women were fortunate and expressed the opportunity to have harmonious working relationships:

My boss takes me like a daughter. Since I started working there. She's from Australia. She loves me. I have been working with them in that nursing home for 15 years. It is still the same boss there since I started working there. [Malia]

After experiencing racism, Gina counted her blessings and was able to take solace in the fact that:

… my boss liked me, but most of the other African girls' co-workers there at my workplace; they fight because people make racist things about them. But I'm a bit lucky because my boss liked me. Most of the people [staff] there doesn't want to say anything against me because they know that my boss will be there to support me. So, at my workplace, I'm a bit lucky. [Gina]

Peaches had three children under 10 years of age. She called herself 'weekend wife' because her husband works far away from Sydney. She was grateful to have neighbours she could relate to as a family who are not from an African background:

I've got neighbours that are very helpful too … if she's going to the shops, she asks me if there is anything she can pick up for me or even if I need to go somewhere, I can leave the kids with them, they also help me take my bin out, bring it back in. If I need things that needs fixing in the house, like the other day that my gas stove wasn't working and the real estate was taking too long to come and fix it. My neighbour came over to fix it for me, yeah! My neighbours are very helpful with anything that I need, they come over to fix things and help out. [Peaches]

Strength through faith, beliefs, and practice of spirituality and religiosity

The West African women's stories highlight that their strength and resilience was linked to spirituality. They described their strength as being connected to constructs of their spirituality. All of the women reported their spirituality as a major source resilience and strength. For example, the women's stories were heavily punctuated with their practices, beliefs and faith in supreme beings, who were sources of strength during stressful situations and challenges. The women emphasised the importance of spirituality and religiosity to their successful resettlement processes. They trusted in their God to guide them in the right direction in Australia. They explained that their people and culture recognise a higher being's total control of their life and existence:

… because we Africans are brought up to depend on God … so an African woman has always depended on God, to have strength of the inner man in carrying on when they faces challenges of life … so they rarely complain … instead, when they meet with problems, they look up unto God to gain the

strength to carry on. Instead of complaining, they just build up inner strength and resilience to face the challenge that comes their way. And it has worked and it has always been the way out at the end of the day; they look up unto God with the belief that God is the source of all strength; that He would enable them to overcome. [Tatiana]

African women are home keepers but also leaders of families who provide support to other family members. Teaching and handing down culture from one generation to the next is often handled by elderly women in the household. Such responsibilities demand strength. In elaborating on her transit experiences to Australia, Tatiana stated:

All the same, with the strength and resilience of an African woman, I pull through safely. An African woman has this in-built strength to resist, but also a coping capacity, energy to face situations and challenges. Yeah! An African woman doesn't complain when they sees problem or meet with problems. They just built that strength inside of them. [Tatiana]

Attesting to how her faith and beliefs were her source of strength and resilience, Rita affirmingly declared:

Yes I'm a Christian, I believe in the Creator. I believe in God, through Jesus. I'm a strong believer and I believe in salvation, that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and that Jesus is the only one who came unto this Earth to save us from our sins ... I've always been a prayer warrior, so I do pray a lot. I never take any decision without praying. I've always prayed to God and I've always dedicated everything that I have done to God and in doing that, I have been successful in every area of life including living and resettling in Australia. [Rita]

The women's act of practicing their religion was seen as a source of resilience, hope and strength. It was important for the women to congregate along with others as they believed in the joint worship processes they had engaged in in their African countries. Worshipping with others reflected the importance of socialising with their church members; an act that brought them reassurance in overcoming challenges. Violet described praying for one another as being part of the strength afforded by her religious beliefs and practices:

I belong to a Christian church organisation. So, I believe in God. I am a Christian and when I go to church I pray and God helped me, and my church members always pray to God for God to help me and for every one of us too. The members also pray for God to help them in their own lives too. [Violet]

Gina explained that her religiosity was modelled by her parents:

My strength is from God because my family is a very staunch Christian family and my mum used to read [the] Bible to me as far as I remember when I was a very little girl; so she reads every part of Psalms to me. So whenever I'm afraid or whenever I'm sad, I turn to Psalms in the Bible and my mum used to sing a lot to me. Even sometimes I can see that she has nothing, she is really sad but

then she will be singing and singing so I inherited that from her because I would just sing and sing too and then read my Bible and all my concerns will vanish … it's about praying to God … so I pray a lot. [Gina]

The women described their faith as providing solace and peace as they attempted to make sense of past challenges and traumas:

Sometimes because of the experiences that I have reading the Bible I say to myself that God knows what He is doing. He's created me. He knows what my purpose is on this Earth, so everything is in the hands of God. So even though sometimes I sit down and wonder why me why is everything [war, rape] happening to me but at the end of the day, I know that there's always a reason why God does things. [Nita]

Meaning making was also evident in Nita's above excerpts and depicts it isn't necessarily always positively viewed. Hence, the women at times make meaning in the form of demanding why their God allowed some events to happen in their lives. The ability to positively make meaning after an initial form of querying meaning making was a sign of growth, which is quality of resilience and wellbeing.

Religious centres as enablers

Religious centres were enablers for these women as they discussed their churches as communities from which they gained strength. The women found strength for each day, comfort for their cries and light to their paths during the various challenges and difficulties through connecting with God, worship centres and church members. The women viewed the church and other religious outlets as a type of family where they could feel warmth, love and a sense of communal belongingness. As a converted Christian, Isabella was sure of the sense of hope and a sense of community that the religious circle provided for her in going through her resettlement challenges:

Actually, church is like a community. It's another community in itself. If they don't see you, they will call you up and check what is happening, that you were not in church; what's the problem? You know; you feel that support; that welcoming atmosphere. If you are sick, they would come to my house and pray for me; things like that; those things also help. [Isabella]

In similar vein, Faizah related:

I did not get to the point of having contact or help from African social organisations. Apart from the African fellowship in our church … no contact with any African organisations. It's all about my church and the African fellowship in the church. Yeah! [Faizah]

Violet highlighted how their beliefs are realised in real life:

> *So I believe that God is passing [using people] through everybody in Australia to do things that I needed for me. It's God's power passing through people to help me.* [Violet]

Queen was more detailed about the support available through the church and therefore, a source of strength and resilience in overcoming re-establishment challenges. There were opportunities to be supported in seeking employment, learning cooking, buying their own traditional foods for cooking as well as doing make-up:

> *And through their [church] we establish a lot of connections; different types of connections. Some teach you about cosmetics, other teach on how to cook some modern food but other people are there too that can help you organise your resume so you can easily and quickly get job as new arrivals into Australia. You would also meet others in that same church who would take you hand in hand to some organisation that can give you job … The moment you start going to any of the church, you introduce yourself as new member, commit to become a member; become a member and can learn about those small groups that I mentioned then you decide which one you need and talk to anyone who and help you …I would say for the psychological aspect, we have a little group in the church, it is the women's group … We meet once a week and we encourage ourselves; pray for ourselves; if anybody has problems, the person brings it. Everybody brings their advice and we pray for the person. So, that is my strength psychologically. And I also have some few trusted friends, still in the church that I can share any problems I am going through with.* [Queen]

The above excerpts detail how church was a good avenue to access social support and a strong network. The opportunity enables healthy living by diminishing the stress of new migrants. The women discussed that when arriving in a new country without good English language skills, belonging to such a group with cultural support is vital. Queen explained how belonging to the church group helped her psychologically, inclusive of women in the group, which created positive attitudes to negative experiences.

Connections to include secular avenues

In addition, most women extended their sources of communalism and social networks outside religious connections to include secular avenues. To these women, accessing strength and support in times of resettlement challenges via religious and non-religious means was significant and supported strength and resilience. Queen stated:

> *I would say I go to church, which is my only organisation. Oh! I should not forget I also belong to my country tribal group … You know every country is organised on tribes, so I come from one of the tribes in Ghana, though it's not*

> *functioning properly. We call it the [xxx/name]. It was an association formed to recognise ourselves in Australia, diaspora, we all have the same language. They have the goals of helping each other when bereaved, or having happiness periods in terms of party; they would come. We also contribute money to give to any member who is in problem. So it is like a 'help' sort of association. I also belong to the church association because I am a Christian so I go to church.* [Queen]

Ursula attested further that the advantages the women received by belonging was extended to their African community groups; but added that non-members often extended support to people too.

Changing religion and faith to belong

Using their tested and trusted strength, a few of these women reported that they changed their faith and religion to have access to support and community during their challenging times. Nita utilised this particular strategy while in the refugee camp, prior to her move to Australia. For Isabella, who had endured diverse challenges as one of the African children who resided in Australia prior the African population growth, the change in faith was an important source of resilience.

One major challenge Isabella faced was falling pregnant outside wedlock, which in African culture is a source of shame for the woman, her parents and family. Isabella's case was made worse because she suffered domestic violence from the man who impregnated her and who eventually rejected her and the child. As a Muslim, she was in total isolation because, according to her, her religion was less communal. A discussion with her parents approved her to change religion to be able to associate with other people. Isabella found strength through her turbulent times of Australian living by changing faith:

> *Until I became a Christian and go to church then I know that human beings go through trials and that trials impact your life to be stronger and where there is weakness you strengthen it and where there is frustration you know how to handle it; you know; rather than explode before time; you exercise patience. Some people don't have that.* [Isabella]

Religious leaders and ministers as support

Finding supportive religious leaders and ministers was also evident in the women's stories. They confided in and/or trusted their religious leaders; a supportive step they found pivotal in overcoming challenges. Beverly was one woman in the study who received counselling support through her church after

her experiences of war and the refugee camp sites, and racism, language issues and employment upheavals in Australia. For her language issues, Beverly believed that:

> … [with] English being my second language, I have to compete with other people out there. I guess they would take people who are fluent in the language, and that will put me at a disadvantage; I wouldn't even have the job that would even be my preference. [Beverly]

Although these experiences were challenging and a potential source of depression, it was important to the women to remain well and strong. The lack in meaning that was parallel to mental illness in the African sense may be a precursor to this. Thus, they sought spiritual and pastoral care:

> Yes the church was one of the support arms for us because we have the same belief. So, when we go to church, we are able to talk to our pastor and leaders. And even if we have other difficulties, we will go and talk to them about it and they will lead us into other ways and show us the way out. And also, they were teaching us the word of God which is our comfort. [Beverly]

The women drew strength from the religious community, they drew hope and assurance from the messages preached to them in church. In all, it helped them to make meaning of their experiences and move on with determination; vital as a counter to negative outcomes.

Some of these women were war widows, which meant that caring for their children in Australia was their responsibility alone. Christabel cared for her five children in Australia alone. She sought spiritual counselling from her pastor like other women, but also sought assistance financially and in kind, therefore utilising the help that their spiritual leaders were able to provide.

> I am a member of The Salvation Army Church at [xxx/name]. I still need my full driver's licence, however. I am doing some lessons for this driving, but when I pay the money for it, as soon as my money finishes, I have to sit down again. And when I have money to able to go again; it's always as if I am starting the driving lessons all over. So, recently I went to my church and discussed it with our pastor; and they have now fixed it for me with a driving instructor, who will be taking some driving sessions with me. We will start on the 22nd of June, which is next Monday. Getting my full licence will give me more chance for work … My strength also is from my spiritual and religious life connections. For instance, my church pastor was able to send a recommendation letter and character reference for me for [a] job and he has told me to be using his name as one of my referees. This is apart from the driving lessons for my driver's licence that they are helping me with. They are really helping me and I draw strength from that. [Christabel]

Malia described a source of strength that came from her church and community leaders following the loss of her husband and caring for his adult son who was unwell:

> *I talk to my friends and my church mother; I mean the apostle's wife and the apostle too in the church. They look after me, so I am happy; then I feel good … I can talk with my church mother and the apostle … and share my problem with them.* [Malia]

Spiritual counselling after building a trusting relationship with their church leaders was also sought outside church service times. Gina utilised this means during the trying periods when the loss of her mother became too much for her and especially her spouse. Over time, the relationship can become that of a confidant. As Gina noted, they received support through:

> *… this family friend who is a pastor and he is like a father to us too. So, we talk to him a lot … and he always counsels us, he always advises us.* [Gina]

The West African women understood that despite their belief in divine intercession, the Lord gave support through other people. Therefore, it was important for the women to have good relationships with people around them:

> *God supply our needs by sending friends to give, you know I could remember a friend of mine from the US who heard that I just gave birth to a baby and send me some hard currency, US dollars. So in that way God has supplied my needs. I didn't know that was going to come, you know … because when we arrived into Sydney, we joined the local church and they were very helpful … each person were contributing their bits … to see that we live well and survive … and life moved on from there.* [Tatiana]

Expressing a similar belief, Violet said:

> *I believe that God is passing [using people] through everybody in Australia to do things that I needed for me … it's God's power passing through people to help me.* [Violet]

Facilitating more family to emigrate

The women discussed having access to interest-free loans through non-government organisations. Such financial support was used to assist the emigration of more family members that enabled the building of needed social support networks. The act of helping more family from Africa to emigrate was a source of strength for the women. The Australian system has in place the opportunity for family reunification for people resettled in Australia from war-zones. Some of the women's stories revealed how they continued to help their own family members still in Africa to migrate to Australia so as to expand their

clan and enjoy the communal lifestyle they previously had in Africa. Having a large family surrounding them in Australia meant there was less time to worry about racism, isolation or loneliness.

Esther was able to expand on her ability to relocate almost all her family members to Australia, over time. With the help of access to interest-free loans from non-government sources, Esther said:

> *I have sponsored many of my family members to come to Australia; all of my family are here now, only one of my youngest brothers is left in Africa. We are all here now in Australia because when I brought some, they too bring other people and other people. My sister brought five of my family members. Then in 2006, I brought 16 members of my family … They were my brothers, my brothers' wives, my brother's kids, my sisters … I have plenty of them … and recently bringing wives … bringing kids … now we are more than 30 here in Australia. We have a large family here now … Yeah! All the time we have [we] get together.* [Esther]

Lois's nine family members, which included her mum, arrived on the same day to start a new life in Australia with her and expand her family presence here in Australia. Discussing her joy to now have her mum living in Australia, having initially been burdened with looking after the elderly ones living in Africa, Isabella reported that:

> *… with the war, there came a big opportunity for Mum to come. So now we are 19 or 20 of our family here now in Australia.* [Isabella]

The enlargement of the family in Australia was a great resource for Isabella to utilise during her difficult time of becoming a single parent as a teenager. Isabella's gratitude for such support was clear:

> *Going for check-ups by yourself and you see many other pregnant people with their husbands and being encouraged, and you are not; it was difficult, but my family stood by me which was good. I have the biggest family here and they all stood by me so I had my baby safely. They were in the hospital with me. At that time, I just have some family members, just came in to Australia from [xxx/country] and they were helping me with the child – bathing him, you know it's my first born so they were showing me things; they helped me a lot, till have to be on my own now … my siblings too, my baby will be with them when I go to work in aged care … so I was getting help all around.* [Isabella]

By creating the above connections around themselves, the West African women were able to beat the odds of loneliness, isolation and the effects of racism. Working for income was made easier as highlighted by Isabella, because they shared the load around each other and it was also easy to complement their shift work by working alternate shifts to each other in order to

make someone available at all times for help as needed within the family. The importance of communalism and the ability to form connections with these women, therefore, helped them gain strength from each other when life challenges demanded it, and the sense of humour with which to live it. Access to family as resources mitigated against psychological issues and facilitated resilience over resettlement challenges.

It must be noted, however, that not all women were successful in relocating their loved ones to come and live with them in Australia. Helena's efforts to bring her parents to Australia was twice unsuccessful, yet, she continued to build her source of support via other avenues.

The inability to achieve family reunification was frustrating because it meant extra care and essentially that the element of resilience that could be achieved through reunification might be jeopardised. In expressing her life goal for her parents, Violet stated:

> *Because I am taking care of them, so they need to be with me … I am a citizen here in Australia … so I can bring them to myself … when they are here with me … my burden is going to become less … because I would not need to send money overseas all the time.* [Violet]

Drawing on inspiration and becoming selfless

The concepts and ideas discussed under this sub-theme include women finding strength through international African achievers, feeling inspired to help others, providing advice to support children's resilience in challenging situations and new knowledge from the participants creating a resilience legacy for incoming migrant women.

Finding strength in international African achievers

The women discussed feeling empowered through international African achievers. The women believed that they too could overcome their current challenges and even be in high positions like the mentioned African international achievers. The women found strength and tenacity in the achievements of black African leaders, and believed that they were inspirations for their own course, especially against any form of resettlement challenges, racial slurs and discrimination.

> *Let's say I'm black. I'm proud of it. I'm happy. Yes ... because there are lots of African black skinned people in high places. In the UN, Dr Kofi Annan, the former UN boss; he is from Ghana even Obama is black!!!!* [Gina]

The women's stories reveal that they had some international heroes and heroines who they were delighted to set as standards for overcoming their challenging situations. The women became empowered through these international African achievers, drawing strength to go through their own challenges. Samantha reported on Oprah Winfrey:

> *I watched her show when I first newly arrived in Australia when I saw her and she was a black woman; a coloured woman … it really strikes me that, waoh! Look at her and then it made me really see myself in her.* [Samantha]

Feeling inspired to help others

Feeling inspired to help others reflects some of the women's decisive steps for strength as situated in their ability to give back. The women also became selfless and were encouraged to give back both to Australia and to people around the world. Some women advocated for others still languishing in refugee camps. The women in the study were strengthened in being able help others in this manner, because it was another way to give back to society; in their little but powerful ways.

In becoming advocates, such women provided a voice to the voiceless and made positive influences in people's lives. Becoming advocates for the voiceless both home and abroad and having a positive influence depicts the West African women individually as strong because it became clear to them that overcoming life challenges was no longer about them alone, but actually the desire to build others up. Esther appreciated the various government and non-government support groups during her family's resettlement processes, consequently she:

> *… joined the support group … I used to help people too when they arrive from Sierra Leone into Australia … Because I know [xxx/country] people they like cassava leaves or potato leaves … so I will cook it … and I will tell the support group … I have the food for the African [xxx/country] here in my house.* [Esther]

The women's process of reaching out was their own way of giving a voice to the voiceless who are still in camps; the silenced members. Such women

achieved the purpose through advocacy, an active involvement in ensuring liberation and justice for women, children and family:

> *I started to advocate on behalf of other refugee women who have been left behind in refugee camp and I have had the opportunity to go to the United Nations and started my advocacy till today. Last year I was advocating for other refugee women from different countries; from Africa and other countries … in different refugee camps like we go to Sri Lanka, Thailand … I was the first resettled refugee who opened that floor in the United Nations Geneva to allow refugee women themselves to go there – Geneva – to tell their stories themselves, rather than other people going there, I mean to Geneva to tell the stories on their behalf … work for the community … as with women who have issues with community like child protection issues ... I will represent them in court and advocate on their behalf for their children to be returned to them.*
> [Lois]

Despite Nita's horrendous experiences as a child during the war and in the refugee camps prior resettling to Australia, she was a determined young woman who took every opportunity that came her way to ensure that neither her past hurts nor her current adversities impacted on her life. Consequently, Nita had also taken it upon herself to become a role model to young people within her community who have been negatively affected by the war and were finding it difficult to move on. By taking this step, Nita remained strong and was inspired and strengthened in helping her community sisters who were still struggling to achieve the same healing. Many of the women who Nita single-handedly helped were experiencing challenges. She said:

> *I helped a lot of young girls there who were on the streets, who were doing drugs, alcohol; I tried to bring them into my own home … they are Africans, some get pregnant too and I helped them get out what they've been through. Their parents are alive and they are still here in Australia but that's why the advice I normally give these girls is that; look you guys have the opportunity to be with your family, I didn't have that opportunity but even though sometimes I hate life but you have that privilege, please make use of the opportunity … don't waste it; because drinking alcohol and smoking is not going to do you any good. Some of them were from the war trauma that they have been through. Most of the young ladies I worked with were [xxx/country]. They have been through war, they've been raped, they have been through a lot of things during the war that they don't even want to talk about but I relate to them because I've been through that as well as a lady. I've been through similar situations with them, so I kind of understand where they were coming from … But my trauma didn't lead me to alcohol and drugs. These girls think that drugs and alcohol is what is easing their pain because they are trying to ease their pain from what they've been through; they don't want to remember the pain from the war. They say it calms them down. So, I was always trying to advise them against it because it's not the best solution.* [Nita]

While Nita's leadership and philanthropic roles were mostly directed at the youth in her community, Samantha extended her reach to other community members who had similar experiences of past hurts and current resettlement challenges. In discovering her own strength to recover, Samantha was determined to use her own experiences in helping others to heal and achieve a successful resettlement in Australia.

> *In 2013, I was asked by [withheld] Police Station to help girls that were facing difficult times in schools. These girls were from refugee backgrounds, migrants so I ran a workshop with them; you know and that was something I was passionate about because I told the police that I don't know if I can help the girls but I know that they might be experiencing something that I experienced [a] few years ago; maybe because they came from war-torn homeland, they're still fighting within themselves; they may still have emotions within themselves. Yeah exactly and that could be one of the reasons why they have to always fight other people or you know to set themselves free from whatever bondage they are feeling. Then they said to me that, well if I want to run a workshop that would be great and I said I want to take creativity, creative arts to these kids because creative arts are my own way of coping; the way that I draw strength, and they allowed me. Then I asked around from my own people, my network of people and was able to help me run the workshops in school for six weeks. And at the end, we had a great result of how I helped the girls in speaking out about their experiences, talk about their journey and war experiences.* [Samantha]

Women's resilience strategies for their children

Strategies that the women used to prepare their children for challenging situations involved having quality education, having gainful employment, being a good citizen, belonging to their ethnic and non-ethnic communities for strength, helping others, and being strong in faith.

It was clear from the aspirations of the women in this study that their children's futures were important to their relocating from Africa. Consequently, their stories were indicative of how they planned to achieve such aspirations in the lives of their children. The first strategy used to strengthen their children against life challenges was to ensure education for access to gainful employment. Divine believed that she was empowering her children for the future by:

> *… encouraging them to go further in education, and then get some trainings and be able to work to contribute towards the society … because if you work, you will be able to pay your tax; but if you sit down, you become liability … so is better to go to school, get good training and work … and be able to be a help to the society. They should also be peaceful in their community.* [Divine]

Queen gave comprehensive strategic plans for her children's future:

I want my children to have a very bright future, learn very well and go on to the university and do whatever course each of them wants to do. I don't want them to stop schooling at secondary school level. No! my aim is for each of them to get to the university and come out to be very good graduates in a very good course, a course that they can get jobs with easily and they are happy with, such as health. But my children have always said no to nursing; other health areas – occupational therapy, speech pathology, pharmacy, even though I have been told there that there are lesser pharmacy jobs in Australia, paramedics, engineering though not much of jobs in that area in Australia because the country is not that industrialised; more social in nature. They collect money from social things [more] than industries. [Queen]

The importance of having a source of income was highlighted by some women's flexibility about the level of education their children may achieve:

So, I tell my children to learn a trade if you cannot go to university. It doesn't mean that because you didn't go to university therefore you can't fit within the society … You can fit within the society if you work hard and contribute to the society … even my son … that's what I said to him … I said … learn a career that would take you forward tomorrow … because you want to make a family. The woman who is coming cannot come and sit down with a husband who does not have a career. You can't even get a better wife if you don't have a career, you can't get anything good for yourself. [Lois]

The women gave reasons for ensuring their children have an education. One reason was that with education, children will have wisdom in decision-making as they grow older. A story was shared where a young African male who was intellectually disabled was used as a drug-mule who was sentenced to death. With a feeling of outburst of motherhood for the young adult, and relating it to having a son of her own, Isabella stated:

I then said to myself that God, as a single mum I raised my son. And after suffering through the years, do I want my own son to end up like this boy's story? The convicted disabled guy said he was given $15,000. With that I said to myself that if I give my son a better education, such money would not be a reason for him to go and carry drugs for someone else, because what is $15,000.00, it is not enough for a life. [Isabella]

Keeping an enduring spirit was endorsed by other women in the study:

I tell my children never to give up. They should continue to go to school; whatever it takes, even if they were not able to achieve the degree that they wanted; they should still continue with schooling. They can get at least diploma or TAFE certificates; just whatever certificate that would empower them to be able to work. [Beverly]

Peaches instilled confidence in her children and encouraged them to be proud of who they are and their skin colour although different from most people of Australia. In her own words:

> *I told them that Yes! You have different colour, and that's fine, but you are no different from anybody out there … I always remind them of that. In fact, I made them realised that their black skin is the best skin … so at times he will ask; Mum, do we need tanning lotion, I always tell him. No! Your skin is beautiful as it is … I talk to them to build their confidence, so that they can face any life challenges.* [Peaches]

A few of the women were confident in discussing their experience of domestic violence and its effects. Such women drew strength in believing that their experience would be useful to train their sons in being gentlemen in the future.

> *I am empowering him to be a better man, and especially when you have a father that is abusive. Maybe it was that his father saw the abuse from his own father, you know. These are the things sometimes a home … Home is one of the biggest things for children, environment, home. If a home breaks down, you know, if a home is stable, in my son's case.* [Isabella]

Spirituality and religiosity were endorsed sources of resilience for children. Rita's advice for children as they grow up is to hold on to God through which they can overcome their own challenges which according to her, would differ to hers because they were born in Australia.

Politeness in handling life issues was included in the ways that the women hope their children will rise above challenges. They encouraged young people to be polite and respectful with their responses, even where they were being racially abused:

> *When somebody makes any racist comments about you, just walk away; it doesn't matter because they themselves, they don't belong here because even if your colour is fair, the fact that you come from Africa; they will still disrespect you and we don't get respect by demanding it … we get respect by gaining it … if you respect others … you will get respect too … so I train them to respect everyone … regardless of what they say, regardless of what they do. If you ignore and just respect them, truly! Truly, they will just accept you and respect you. So that's what I trying to train them with.* [Gina]

Women's resilience legacies for new women migrants

The women in this study offered suggestions to support future migrant women from West Africa. The women reported that they were interested in sharing their experiences of their resettlement challenges to help their future 'African sisters' to have easier resettlement experiences than they had. Samantha

referred to the opportunity to contribute her resilience and strength stories as a victory in that her legacies could live on as part of help in the lives of future women migrants:

> *I think it's good. What you explained is that, it is for your university research and to be able to help other women. Then I just feel like it's another day of victory as well because each day I have opportunity to speak I see it as a victory in a way that I've shared something that might be someone else's story ... So, by doing so and helping women, I thought I've done something achievable in a way that you can share that with other people and then we can educate them.* [Samantha]

The women's resilience legacies and supportive advice for new women migrants include holding on to their migration dreams, getting educated, ensuring that they work, expect change, do not break the law, create a family, take care of themselves and their children, and reach out to seek support. These tasks should be prioritised over making extra income by working too much. In other words, the advice touches upon the purpose of migration, education and jobs, health, spiritualty, and family.

The women stated that their African sisters should not be caught in the web of their new society's opinion about the colour of their skin and the attending racial slurs but; rather to remain motivated about what they can achieve with their brain and through hard work. Advising about racism and discrimination experiences*:*

> *You just try not to take their comments personally otherwise; you will never get ahead in what you are aiming for, really.* [Ursula]

With a whole family who had a fair share of what racism is all about, Gina remained strong and focused on her migration dreams, and her advice for future African migrants could not be more direct. In making sure that future African migrants are also resolute and driven, Gina had this to say:

> *Forget this racist issue. You are here [Australia] in a new different country, nothing is going to be the same as if you are in your own African country. Even like I said earlier, among tribes in my country Ghana; there is racism [tribalism] anyway. So, don't let the racism push you over or bother you. Focus and stick to the aim and reason why we have come to Australia. We should stick to it and fight [work] for it.* [Gina]

To achieve the aims and purposes of migration the women in this study encouraged their incoming African sisters to be propelled and motivated by the

reasons and justifications for leaving their home and environment in their African countries to the relatively unknown continent and country of Australia.

> *While everybody is different, I would still like to say to the new West African women coming to live in Australia to have an aim, an ambition, for coming to Australia. Let that aim rest on you* [Rita].

> *I believe being a refugee, you still have your own dignity and you've got your own dream. And in order to even arrive at your dream if you were in Africa, you still need to work hard; you still need to press forward, so my advice to them is, they should not give up.* [Beverly]

In expanding the importance of the women's purpose for migration, some women encouraged their sisters to ensure they remain lawful, as this was imperative for strength and resilience in their resettlement challenges:

> *It is very easy for people to leave that vision [dreams and goals of migration] and seeing them joining bad groups and destroying their lives. But if they cling to that vision then life shouldn't be stressful … living in Australia. Immediately you leave that vision joining some groups who will not help you achieve that vision, no doubt life becomes unbearable ... You can't live in Australia successfully by joining bad groups, you will get into police problems and if not careful, you will get deported.* [Queen]

Remaining lawful included being sensible with their choice of friends; such steps can make or break resettlement processes and migration dreams:

> *The new women coming to Australia needs to be careful too because just walking around, cannot make you achieve anything … look for good people and walk with them [mingle] with good people to avoid getting into problems.* [Malia]

Respecting and/or being on the side of their new country's law for some women simply meant wanting their future African sisters to live with a plain and important reality that, "Australia is home, keep out of trouble" [Nita]. They thought that if new women migrants view the new country as home and respect its laws, the law of the land will always come through for them. Likewise, incoming women should also be aware of their rights. Ursula's encouragement for incoming women was:

> *… to stand up for yourself ... Some white people would make life so miserable for you at work that you wake up in the morning you would not feel happy to go to work because you know that there is somebody there giving you a hard time. You have to be happy to go to work every day. You shouldn't be thinking of so and so at the workplace who doesn't like me, is there today; and don't feel like wanting to go to work, when it's time for work. You don't have to go to work because of money. No; you have to be happy with your work. There are lots of African people who are going through hard times because of all these bulling … mostly nurses; a lot of nurses.* [Ursula]

Inherent in knowing their rights and following the Australian law was that knowledge is wealth. Having worked in the system around migrants' resettlement in Australia, Jemima felt that she was equipped to advise future African migrants to ensure they understand the law of their new land. She stated that future African sisters should endeavour to be well informed and knowledgeable around the Australian system and governance. In line with Ursula's contribution in this area, the women explained the importance of knowledge and advised that there are brochures and sessions that discuss rights and unwelcome behaviours of people who live in Australia. Jemima's additional view was about ensuring progress towards their life goals. Invariably, women were advised not to:

> … just be comfortable with what you have; for instance, if you are working in nursing homes, don't say that is enough for me, you should be able to go out there and aspire to move ahead. Don't be satisfied with the current level. Every year, aspire to move up. [Jemima]

The incoming women migrants were counselled not to be afraid of the unknown because they can never achieve the known. New migrants were advised to launch into their dream jobs rather than the usual jobs for migrants, which are often menial and low-paying jobs. The women in the study encouraged their incoming West African sisters to be bold by leaving their comfort zone that may limit them reaching their full potential. Expanding on Jemima's excerpts above, the women advised new migrants to thrust themselves into their dream jobs by taking steps to seek qualifications:

> When you get to Australia, never look down on yourself. By looking down on yourself I mean thinking that is an African person from a developing country, but Australia is a developed country therefore the Australian people here are superior. Don't ever think like that. Believe in yourself, stretch yourself, and push yourself. Push the buttons and you will see yourself where you want to be. [Rita]

The above advice sits well with the strong message around education. Aside from education being a lifeline for sourcing income, the women emphasised its importance for independence and the ability to interact. Asked why her advice for future women was to go to TAFE, Esther responded:

> If they come here [Australia] and they don't speak good English, they won't benefit out of anything. If they go to TAFE and they know how to read and write here in Australia. For instance, you have a lot of forms to fill always, if you can't fill in form, then you will need to find someone to help you and not all

> *the times are people happy to help you. You have to be able to help yourself. Going to TAFE is very important.* [Esther]

To Violet, education not only provides opportunities for jobs to incoming women; it is a way of overcoming doing menial jobs:

> *They should work; when you work in Australia you live better life. When you study, it's all about working later, so going for education is about getting good jobs.* [Violet]

Achieving a fulfilling career is healing and brings strength to the soul, which can serve as source of empowerment for both current and incoming migrants to embrace their new self in a new culture and environment:

> *I used to work with new arrival refugees and migrants. So I tell them education is very important. They should make sure they have qualifications … because I remember when we first came to Australia, you can work in the nursing home without qualifications but now, that's not possible. So, to work in a nursing home now, they used to ask for Certificate III now they are asking for Certificate IV. So things are changing and therefore people should learn more … so that they would become employable, so that they can have better working conditions.* [Jemima]

Expecting change was advised by the women in this study because difficult encounters and transitions in a new environment were deemed inevitable.

> *My advice will be … there are going to be challenges, it's not your father's land, and it's not our mother's land. So you coming to a new country, there are going to be challenges. But the best thing is to stay focused on why you are here in Australia and what you want to achieve and what you want to give to the community or to the world around you. So if the future West African migrants to Australia stay focused to those things, they will be fine.* [Faizah]

Rejecting wasteful spending, Keiko discussed how she hoped to see changes to imprudent ideas around huge double spending both in Africa and Australia after the passing of aged loved ones. Peaches advanced the finance issue by advising the newly migrating West African women against unnecessary extravagance. Peaches related it to the effects it could have on homes, families and relationships. The new women migrants were also encouraged to use their newly found freedom and government support wisely while focusing on keeping their homes and family intact:

> *To the newly arriving African woman into Australia, I will say … the most important thing is make your family the priority. The only thing you have to fall back on is your family and if your family is not strong, woman, you are doomed; you are not going to make it. Always have your family as your primary focus. You came to Australia together, you all came to build each*

other together, so don't leave one person behind, just carry each other along. [Peaches]

The legacy of keeping a strong and healthy family has significant impact on forming connections to build support in a new country. Women in this study also advised new women migrants to expect spousal role shifting, and the need to work and develop financial trust with their spouse while contributing to the economic strength and stability of their homes.

The impact of the above changes on happiness in the home was stressed along with how it often constituted major challenge for resettlement processes; hence the advice to guard against the challenges while upholding the strength and unity of the family unit. The above advice underscores the importance of forming connections to build support in a new land, which often flows from the immediate family unit to others within the community. The communal essence of hope and love for Africa was also mentioned in the advice:

> *My advice is for them to first think that we have left a family back in Africa … and when we come here, we have to remember … our extended family, I mean our Africa.* [Gina]

Others advised the new women migrants against not only imprudent spending but also competitive squandering of hard-earned income. The women advanced many reasons for being prudent with finances. The new migrant women were advised to embrace sustainable living, but not extravagance. According to Olivia:

> *Coming from far Africa, it is important that we save for our future, and be able to take something back home to Africa. We are not going to live in Australia forever.* [Olivia]

As a church minister's wife, Keiko utilised her experience from visiting prison inmates to caution incoming women on the importance of an adult presence in children's lives in Australia. This advice might be vital, because in Africa the village nurtures children, and being aware that such opportunity is lacking in Australia means that incoming parents need to work towards parenting and taking all responsibility. Keiko stated:

> *They supposed to work, I know but they need to have time with their children. They are just chasing the dollar and leaving the children to go astray. The last time we visited the prisons as ministers of God, we have many blacks there, and some are teenagers. If you listen to their stories, you would know that if their parents took good care of them, it won't happen like that [high pitched*

tone, denoting her disgust of the situation]. Their parents are always going to work, so if the mother goes to night duty, the father also goes for afternoon shift. The father comes back maybe 10pm and then the mother goes and comes back early in the morning. When you go their homes, no elderly person around, I mean their parents, with the kids so the children are free, doing whatever they want therefore some of these children had the chance to join bad groups … and that was how they end up in prisons. Some of them are thieves, armed robbers. I met one 16-year-old boy who just stabbed someone and the person died. I felt sorry for him because it is not good at all. [Keiko]

Keiko is an adviser to children and adults though her church ministerial position. She enriches her insights in being able to advise because:

… most times when I go out I just listen to people's conversations and I just use that to advise people. [Keiko]

Many women from war backgrounds are widows due to the loss of their intimate partner during the war. In showing their sisterhood, the West African women wanted to ensure that new migrants and their children do not fall prey to indecent men. The women's advice highlights the importance of parenting, especially the frailty of single parenting in a new context.

If you are single, you have to concentrate on your children. It's not about men, men, men. Yes, it's good to have a man but if you have a stupid man, that's the worst thing you can ever experience in your life and especially if you have your children and you have lost your husband. Some of these men that comes around you, you have to be very very! careful about them because some of them will play with you, sleep with you and turn around and try to also sleep with your own child; because that child is not their biological child. So, we have to be very careful with the people we hang around with for our children's sake because the hope of our children lies on us as single women and if we let them down, you have already fractured their identity. If we cannot give them that moral support while they were dependent on us, then their identity will be fractured. [Lois]

Being a good role model for the children in Australia was practical advice that the women wanted to share. Women indicated that many of the refugee children could be traumatised by war and refugee camps. With most refugee women being war widows, study participants reminded incoming migrants that:

… there are certain things that we should not do in the presence of our children because they learn directly from us. You can't be drinking alcohol or smoking in front of your children at this their young age. They call you Mum, so what do you expect your children to do, if you are not keeping up as a parent so what else do you expect from your child, because children learn from parents. [Lois]

The women in the study had generally made lifestyle choices that aligned with their physical, mental, spiritual and emotional needs through the use of the

core elements of resilience, yet they believed that it could be challenging to maintain a balance when under pressure. As a result, some of the women described that for them to maintain their own health, they chose to avoid junk food to stay healthy. Others utilised the way that they maintained their health and lifestyle to inspire future women migrants. Olivia expounded that:

> … *I do checks for Pap smear, breast screening for cancer. That one I would encourage everyone to go for it even if when you go and they discover that you have the cancer disease, there is a way that they would help you out. So, the important thing is that we have good chance, the opportunity to use it.* [Olivia]

New migrants were advised to endeavour to reduce stress rather than taking on too much:

> *Don't stress yourself in doing too much jobs, because I know so many families that are doing two jobs and drains out their health.* [Ursula]

Jemima merged the two views and added broader advice by saying to the new women migrants to:

> … *always put yourself first, always look after yourself. Make sure you put your needs first because they matter … Do something good with your life. Doing something doesn't mean jobs alone, even your health as well. Early intervention is better. Every year, do all those needed medical checks to know that you don't have any health issue and if you have, take appropriate measures.* [Jemima]

The women advised new migrants to embrace preventative medicine and screening for disease through available healthcare services in Australia. Encouraging their African sisters to embrace preventative rather than culturally entrenched curative medicine is a vital legacy because a life free of illness and disease can endure life challenges of resettling in a new environment.

As Olivia said above, migrants have opportunities in their new country, evidently pointing to how the women in this study had utilised available opportunities, therefore seeing the positives, both in the detection of disease and in their resettlement stories, rather than being burdened with negative experiences. A sense of optimism was evident in the resilience and strength legacies. It is all about finding meanings in situations as they realign self and lifestyles towards embracing their new reality. In a society where everything is available and an easy life is at the finger-tips, new migrants were advised to

aim for healthy children who would become constructive adults in the future. They were admonished to make health paramount.

Being patient and using available social supports were suggestions to facilitate resilience in new migrant women from West Africa.

> *Well I will advise them to be patient and wait for their time because everything is as per time. Some people may want to get things [e.g. jobs] quicker than necessary. Meanwhile, they might need to take some other steps first. Like for me when I got here, I first attended English classes which I did for one year.* [Alexis]

Tatiana said, "The system we have here in Australia is one that looks for experience". Understanding the time it takes to develop experience sought after in the labour market might prepare the women for delays in obtaining employment. As Tatiana further discussed, which may be more relevant to voluntary migrants:

> *When coming initially, at least you know that you are not going to get job the next day. So be prepared from home [Africa]; have something ready with you to sustain you till you get job.* [Tatiana]

The communal benefits of Australian people was also high on the list of advice given:

> *Also look for help. If you need it, go out there and get the information that would help you. Don't sit down and cry, because your situation will not get worse. Rather, take that bold step because whatever you need in life, you have to go and get it. It will not fall from heaven. Move out of your comfortable zone.* [Jemima]

Summary

In this final chapter of the findings, I explored and documented the third theme of the study around the stories of resilience and strength of the West African migrant women living in Australia. Their stories revealed that they exercise strength by ensuring people are available in their difficult periods, and they moved past that stage into the stage of being able to give back to humanity. The essence of their strength was situated within an improved educational system for refugee children upon permanent resettlement in a Western country. The women's stories also highlighted a different kind of communal resilience that depicted their hope for a stable, restored and better Africa.

Collectively, Chapters Four, Five and Six revealed how the lives of the women prior to migration shaped their resilience and strength status in their daily encounters with resettlement challenges in Australia, documented under three major themes: *connecting past life to the future*, *embracing the new reality* and *forming connections to build support*. The next chapter situates these findings in contemporary literature.

CHAPTER SEVEN: DISCUSSION

"I have learnt that if you face the challenges with positive energy, you are most likely to get better results" Adenike Ogunlesi

Introduction

The research findings in the previous three chapters of this thesis revealed the resilience and strength of the West African women who participated in this study. In this current chapter, the theories and concepts surrounding the core elements of resilience and strength in the women's stories are defined and explored in the context of the broader literature. Resilience concepts are the qualities of hope, optimism, hardiness, emotions, social capital inclusive of social support and networks, spirituality and religiosity, and communal (hope) resilience. The resilience qualities are explored in the pre and post-migration periods of the women's stories. Unique insights from the women's stories such as resilience legacy are also explored. Women's socio-demographics is also situated within literature.

Core elements of resilience

As stated, the core elements of resilience are hope, optimism, hardiness, emotions, social capital inclusive of social support and networks, spirituality and religiosity, and communal (hope).

Hope

"Migration is motivated essentially by hope." (Javier Serrano 2017)

In the reality of contemporary living, feelings of hopeless are endemic and human cruelty to other humans has challenged the meaning of hope (Hryniewicz 2007). This is especially relevant to migrants whose life pre and post-migration included war, refugee living and experiences of racism and xenophobic acts.

Hope according to Snyder (Snyder 2002, pp. 249-50):

> is a positive motivational state that is based on interactively derived sense of successful agency (goal-directed energy) and pathways (planning to

meet goals) … the perceived capability to derive pathways to desired goals and motivate oneself via agency thinking to use those pathways.

Used as a structure, hope supports human beings in reaching life goals by positively influencing health and wellbeing (Snyder 1995). 'High-hope' individuals possess the self-confidence to map out various routes. Snyder (2002) further explains that people with high hopes adapt better to challenges and difficulties than low-hoping individuals.

The concept of hope has three components: having a *goal*, having *pathways* (routes) to accomplish the goal and having *agency thinking* that motivates goal attainment (Snyder 2002; Sun & Shek 2012; te Riele 2010). Hope is an attitude towards reality grounded in human capacity to ensure the desired outcome (Blöser & Stahl 2017). The importance of hope in mankind is that the power of incompleteness often motivates humans to seek completeness (Freire 1998; Freire 2014). Virtually all major philosophers discuss the critical function of hope in relation to human motivation, religious belief and or politics (Blöser & Stahl 2017; Kleist & Jansen 2016).

Optimism

"The optimist sees the rose and not its thorns." (Kahlil Gibran)

Optimism is an important cognitive feature of happiness. It is instrumental in maintaining hope, building confidence over life situations and involves expectations for good outcomes in turbulent circumstances (Bediako & Neblett 2011; Maddi 2006; Riolli, Savicki & Cepani 2002; Stephens, Smith & Cherry 2017). The ability to utilise optimism to overcome challenges positions it as a vital element of resilience.

Rooted in positive health psychology, optimism is described as "maintenance of hope across many life situations or the generalised expectancy that good things will happen" (Tedeschi & Calhoun 1995, p. 46). Optimism can strengthen an individual to overcome challenges and assist them to remain on their pathway to achieve life goals (Carver & Scheier 2014). Optimism can promote physical and mental wellbeing and increased success (Forgeard & Seligman 2012; Scheier & Carver 1992). Optimism equips the optimistic individual with the courage and strength to accept whatever life circumstances

that cannot be changed and to grow in it (Grayman-Simpson, Mattis & Tomi 2016; Khawaja et al. 2008).

Optimists share the goal-directed behaviour of hope through problem-focused adaptation and planning (Bailey et al. 2007). Hope and optimism represent a belief in the future, while hope utilises the three variables of having a goal, pathway thinking (routes) and then agency thinking. Optimism is cognitive (dispositional) and has life goals but generally, no motivation to act (Bruininks & Malle 2005; Fowler et al. 2017; Sun & Shek 2012). Both hope and optimism are useful elements to human health and adaptation processes.

The literature highlights three key factors to optimism: internal or external causes, stability or transient factors and global or specific factors. Optimists view challenging circumstances as external, transient, and specific factors (Malinchoc, Offord & Colligan 1995). Optimists acknowledge the presence of negative events but think about them constructively rather than in a fatalistic manner (Forgeard & Seligman 2012).

Hardiness

"Do something every day that scares you." (Eleanor Roosevelt)

Hardiness is an important pathway to human resilience (Maddi 2016). Maddi (2013, p. 6) defines hardiness as "the pattern of attitudes and strategies that constitute the existential courage and motivation to do the hard work of turning stressful circumstances from potential disasters into growth opportunities". Maddi (2002, 2013) further explains that hardiness encompasses three indivisible components in expressing existential courage. An individual learns to accept and embrace *challenge* as normal life occurrences, and that it is only human to experience hardships. There is full *commitment* to the challenge, rather than avoidance, for good outcomes while *control* is taking charge of one's emotions while keeping on trying to turn the adverse to personal growth opportunities; that is learn from it. In simple terms, hardiness is strength and endurance, which the women in this study utilised in their pre-migration challenges and during resettlement in Australia.

"Showing your emotions is a sign of strength." (Brigitte Nicole)

Emotions are linked to hope and inform goal-directed thinking (Snyder 2002). Emotions regarding life goals can be channelled negatively or positively (Snyder 2002). When positively channelled, they support high-hope individuals to appreciate their goal pursuit and include self-talk such as 'I am ready for this task'; 'I think I can' or 'I will not quit' (Snyder 1995, 2002). High-hope individuals and individuals high in hardiness, possess enduring positive emotions that instil enthusiasm to pursue life goals (Snyder 2002).

Emotions support human beings to take action, make decisions or understand others. All the qualities of emotions are utilised daily by people with hope (high-hope individuals). Emotions have been linked to achieving success as they connect everything together in human life, from decision-making to achievement of goals (Cherry 2012; Cherry & Mattiuzzi 2010). Bonanno (2004) indicates that resilient people utilise the pathways of positive emotions and laughter, which were hitherto referred to as a form of denial. Positive emotions support people through their challenging times by reducing levels of distress, reversing negative emotions and supporting the individual to intensify their social support (Bonanno 2004).

Social capital

Social capital is a quality created between people" (Burt 1997, p. 339)

Social capital is "the degree of connectedness and the quality and quantity of social relations in a given population" (Harpham, Grant & Thomas 2002, p. 106). This attests to the African Ubuntu philosophy that people are people because of other people. A proverb among the Yoruba people in the Western region of Nigeria expands the Ubuntu meaning to *Oju merin lo n'mu omo wa saye; egberun oju ko to lati too omo,* which literally means only four eyes (that of both parents) give birth to a child, but thousands of eyes are almost insufficient to nurture the child.

Social capital is explained as an individual's social ties and the resources accessed through them (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992; Coleman 1988; Jokisaari

2007; Lin 2001) whereas social support refers to "interactions with family members, friend, peers and professionals that communicate information, esteem, practical, or emotional help" (Simich et al. 2005, p. 259). Social support is a basic determinant of health like others such as food, shelter and earning income (Walker et al. 2015). Relative to the current context, social capital includes the social support, relationships and networks that buffered the women through challenging periods and helped them to successfully utilise other core elements of resilience.

Spirituality and religiosity

"Sound mind in sound body on sound society and sound religion"

Spirituality and religiosity are different constructs (Koenig 2009; Koenig, Al Zaben & Khalifa 2012) that are often used interchangeably. Spirituality represents an individual's quest to make meaning and find purpose in life through satisfying a moral responsibility to self, others and the universe (George 2012; Koenig 2009; Park, Roh & Yeo 2012). Religiosity from 'religion' is organised and practiced within a community sharing the same belief in the sacred (Koenig 2009). Religion is formal and outwardly expressed spirituality. Religion is also at two levels: faith and practice. While faith refers to beliefs in God and the importance of religion, practice includes religious behaviours such as worshipping, making pilgrimages, fasting, prayer and meditating (Basedau, Gobien & Prediger 2017; Cotton et al. 2006; Puvimanasinghe et al. 2014). Faith has a resilience quality as it brings peace to overcome adversity and is an insight that is as old as religion and medicine (Jakovljevic 2017). Faith is an element of hope for those who believe. Faith, religion and spirituality are well documented strategies in overcoming situations and circumstances including mundane events, especially by migrants of non-European backgrounds (Jakovljevic 2017; Ögtem-Young 2018). Spirituality and religiosity contribute to resilience in managing adversity (Jakovljevic 2017; Reutter & Bigatti 2014) because people are able to draw meaning from life challenges and draw spiritual and social support through connections that are made within communities of faith (Cotton et al. 2006).

Communal (hope) resilience

Communal resilience is hope that is held with others (Ghezai 2017; Ní Raghallaigh & Gilligan 2010). Communal hopeful resilience is said to occur in the "in-betweenness of interaction" (Afuape & Krause 2016, p. 212). Communal resilience involves community tenacities and activities occurring within the socio-political and cultural terrain (Ghezai 2017; Panter-Brick & Eggerman 2012). Resilience has metamorphosed from its initial conception among children, to adult and beyond individual resilience constructs (Panter-Brick & Eggerman 2012; Ungar 2011a). Therefore, resilience against trauma or challenges may encompass community resilience and resilience against the oppressive state within the political system individuals originated from (Almedom 2004; Ghezai 2017; Tribe 2002).

The above accentuates the multifaceted frame and complexity of resilience therefore may not be measured and that it varies in understanding and expression (Almedom & Glandon 2007; Ghezai 2017; Lenette 2011; Panter-Brick & Eggerman 2012). Eurocentric literature tends to describe trauma, especially refugee trauma, within the context of post-traumatic stress focusing on actual or witnessed trauma (Goodman et al. 2017; Marlowe 2010). This stance may discount what trauma and resilience actually means in non-European migrants like the women in the current study.

Socio-demographic findings and the literature

As stated in Chapter Four, The 22 women who participated in the study were evenly split between forced and voluntary migrants. The 11 in the voluntary group included women who migrated as dependants to either join their parents for education or those who came to join their spouses (see Table I in Chapter Four). The women were also diverse in terms of their country of origin, but they adequately represent members of West African migrants living in Sydney. The women were not only diverse in terms of country, but also in terms of their local cultural practices and languages, religion and educational qualifications. The diversity in the women's demographics is congruent with the literature. As the literature indicates, refugee migrants are often guided by reactive decisions, unlike voluntary migrants whose decisions are often pro-active in

nature (Richmond 1993). In all, international migration, whether forced or voluntary, is often guided by social, political and economic reasons; invariably all categories of migrants are in search of better opportunities in life (Kuo 2014; Simich & Andermann 2014). The search for better opportunities in life represents a display of human hope, which always propels towards reaching life goals (Bailey et al. 2007; Snyder 2002).

The importance of participant demographics cannot be overemphasised in understanding research data. According to the literature, without detailed information such as age, sex, level of education and so on, there is an increased risk of "'absolutism,' which assumes that the phenomena of interest are the same regardless of culture, race, age, etc.'". (Hammer 2011, p. 261). The demographics insight becomes paramount as it assists in deeper understanding of resilience of women in the current study. Consequently, a discourse of vital aspects of the demographics in Table I (see Chapter Four) is given here to elucidate the research aim around women's aspirations and expectations prior migration to Australia.

The age of the women ranged between 24 and 60-years, indicating that they were relatively young and of working age. This socio-demographic outcome is consistent with findings that international migrants are of working age and often between 20 and 64-years, which decreases their dependency (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA) 2017). When further analysed, the women's statistical age indicates that 19 (99.34%) out of N = 22 were less than 55-years-old and only three (0.66%) were aged 55, 56 and 60 years respectively. The migration of African people to Australia, especially women contributes to the reversal of population decline in the Oceania region (United Nations
Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA) 2017).

Though the First Fleet from Britain to Australia had 11 people of African descent on board (Jakubowicz 2010; Pybus 2006b), the literature indicates that refugee and voluntary migration from Africa started post WW II (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury 2008). The current wave of African migrants that slowly commenced with some West African students in the 1960s shows that they are

a relatively new but fast-growing population within multicultural Australia (Abdelkerim & Grace 2012; Babatunde-Sowole, Jackson, et al. 2016; Udah 2017). The current study's findings from the West African women's length of stay ranging between two and 32 years, is a testament to the above.

Generally, women in the study were fluent in English as most were from British colonised countries. Consequently, they shared the common nexus of the Commonwealth group with Australians (Okai 2001; Saffu 2014). However, irrelevant of their status of migration, as people categorised under the non-English speaking background or culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) group, most of the women in this study had an accent that predisposed them to language challenges during resettlement. Millbank Phillips and Bohm (2006) hinted that over 200 languages are spoken in Australian homes. The importance of improving their English and/or accent was a vital quality of hope (a resilient element or variable) that smoothed their life achievements. The literature abounds with the importance of having adequate communication facilities through which new migrants can secure networking, employment and access to available resources that ease resettlement and assist in achieving life goals (Abur 2017; Saffu 2010). Women in this study were predominantly religious and mostly Christians, with two indicating they were Muslims. The importance of women's religious beliefs and practices to their resilience supported the need for further details around women's demographics.

Pre-migration and elements of resilience

The elements of resilience during the pre-migration stage of the 22 women in this study is discussed next with literature.

Chronological storytelling

Foundational contexts and past personal experiences are a vital component of migrant resettlement stories (Çakir 2009; Kumi-Yeboah 2016; Rashid & Gregory 2014; Sherwood & Liebling-Kalifani 2012; Sossou et al. 2008). According to Bourbeau (2015, p. 1963), "resilience does not take place in a vacuum, but draws on past experiences, collective memory and social history, as well as depending upon critical junctures at which agential powers decide to

act (or not)". Postcolonial scholars also suggest that we only know our worlds through our interactions and lived experiences (Mirza & Joseph 2013). However, these past personal experiences are often missing in most reporting, which thus diminishes insights into the lives of migrants following migration (Sanchez et al. 2012). Embracing foundational contexts supports the need for a holistic approach in migration studies.

When reflecting on their resilience, women in this study tended to tell a chronological story, contextually relating their past in West Africa to their new reality and future lives. This mirrors the Africentric worldview of time, where equal importance is given to the past, present and future (Belgrave & Allison 2006; Belgrave & Allison 2009) and highlights the importance of utilising an Africentric worldview in studies around black African people; which seldom occur. This also echoes Bloch's (1986) discourse around the concept of hope, where hope is embedded in human past, present and future. Snyder (2002) adds that human thoughts are always shaped by how we link our present to imagined futures. Invariably the idea of time and how human beings progress through it are vital.

The women's chronological storytelling helped to contextualise their aspirations and reasons for migration, how they were able to keep hope alive and how they continued to move forward. Serrano (2017) indicates that through the storyline of his case-study participant, readers were able to identify stages where important decisions to migrate in relation to life aspirations and hope were made. The process of exploring the core elements of resilience amongst West African women in NSW is a unique endeavour.

Women in this study stressed some important periods in their lives. The forced migrant women highlighted the period before conflict, the time of war and time spent in refugee camps. The voluntary migrant women stressed the periods when economic and political downturns in their countries brought about doubts about their and their children's futures. Studies and theories of hope indicate that people see their limitations as opportunities to move forward and ahead in their life journey (Bloch 1986; Marlowe 2010).

Fleeing

As highlighted in the findings, many of the experiences shared by the women were raw and compelling. Much migration literature describes war experiences, including how participants' peaceful and normal lives were suddenly disrupted. Studies assert that fleeing war normally occurs with little or no preliminary planning as a result of chaos, extreme distress, displacement and social disorganisation (Halcón, Robertson & Monsen 2010; Milco 2016; Newman 2013; Schafer 2002). While running for one's life in threatening situations could be termed as instinctive, it holds the essence of both optimism and hope for a better future that may be achievable elsewhere and the use of positive emotions. As women with a belief in a better future, their sense of agency thinking was evident in the act of running. Borwick et al. (2013) describes how their study participants believed that the essence of independence and freedom in their life strengthened them in making dangerous escapes from the Burmese militants.

Ingenuity and keeping life goals alive

The women in this thesis reported poor health and challenging living conditions in refugee camps. This finding is similar to Bokore's (2013) study. Women in the current thesis and Bokore's study were unable to sleep as they struggled to survive, protecting themselves and their children from wild animals and human brutality. Hardiness, a core element of resilience, is evident in the West African women's challenging situation in the camps. The women recognised and accepted the challenges, which helped them to commit to trying to turn their adversity into personal growth opportunities (Maddi 2013, 2016). The women did so through being resourceful. They discussed using ashes to kill dangerous and crawling pests on the floor where they lay at night. In line with the African proverb: *home is not where we live, home is where we belong*, the study found that the women placed importance on 'home' both to live in and to belong. There were instances where the women endeavoured to make their camp sites liveable, such as using ashes to keep dangerous animals away from their tents.

Some women home-schooled their children, while others developed entrepreneurship to invest in their children's education and general care in the

refugee camps. The steps taken to ensure some form of education was to keep alive the dream of a better future for their children. Home-schooling the children by the refugee women in this study and using ashes to make the environment more 'home' are unique to the women in this study and not previously reported in the literature.

Analysis of the women's stories reveals that the women utilised the resilience elements of both optimism and hope. High-hope individuals often refuse limitations that difficulties can place on their life goals (Bloch 1986; Marlowe 2010; Snyder 2002; Sun & Shek 2012). Consequently, they are often motivated into action (Snyder 2002) because they see trauma or adversity as a call to pursue their life goals elsewhere. Developing and maintaining goals was evidence of the women's determination to overcome negative occurrences. Resilient people are future-conscious and determined, they stay on course even if it involves taking alternative routes to desired goals (Snyder 2002). Optimistically resilient people like the women in this thesis, generally elevate their positivity over the negative experiences that occur (Bediako & Neblett 2011; Maddi 2006; Riolli, Savicki & Cepani 2002; Stephens, Smith & Cherry 2017).

Some women in this study lived in refugee camps for up to a decade. These sorts of life experiences can cause a loss of hope for the future (Anjum, Nordqvist & Timpka 2012; Goodman 2004). A study conducted among a group of Sudanese refugee youths who were resettled in the USA, also echoes the potential of feelings of despair of living in refugee camps (Goodman 2004). However, these West African women's optimism and hope for attaining life goals was particularly strong, and evidence of their resilience. Their hope for survival in the refugee camp was echoed in Goodman's (2004) study where the Somali boys indicated that a sense of hope eased the experiences of boredom and hardship in refugee camps. Milco (2016) also attributes the resourcefulness of study participants helping them adapt to different ways to live as they moved between camps. However, this adaptation differed to the women in the current study.

Migrant refugees' experiences of trauma and stress during migration to developed countries and resettlement challenges are well documented (Babatunde-Sowole, Jackson, et al. 2016; Fozdar & Torezani 2008; Kiteki 2016; Wachter et al. 2016). What is less documented is that migrant people coherently make meaning from their prior experiences of adversity (Kiteki 2016). Phasha (2010) suggests that refugee women discussing painful lived experiences helps them to appreciate that it was a learning curve for their growth and capability to overcome other life challenges. Hardiness, a conduit to resilience (Bonanno 2004), is the constellation of life experiences (Maddi 2006).

The women often discussed how they prevented negative experiences of resettlement affecting their life goals. They looked for positives in their war experiences and relocation to Australia. Some of the women stated that they believed that the war happened for a reason, which was for them to relocate. Optimism is about a positive mental health representation of negative life experiences (Bruininks & Malle 2005). Ruminating on previous negative events can result in mental health issues (Sherwood & Liebling-Kalifani 2012, 2013).

Similar to the West African women in this current study, Sherwood and Liebling-Kalifani's (2012) participants understood the importance of staying strong and mentally healthy to enjoy the better days ahead that they hoped for. Resilience in research focuses on cognitive and behavioural adaptation strategies, inclusive of supportive structures that help protect against risk factors (Ungar 2011b). Making meaning out of adversity helps to build, solidify, and reassure as thoughts are restructured to create new insights of self which accommodates growth (DuPree 2017).

Immigrating and aspirations for migration

The women migrated to seek better opportunities in life. The voluntary migrant women's decisions to relocate to Australia and the refugee women's agreement to being resettled outside familiar African territory, demonstrate optimism. Studies have confirmed that the evaluation of rewards or advantages often motivates migrant people's capacity to adapt to challenges

(Loh & Klug 2012; Maydell-Stevens, Masggoret & Ward 2007). Weinberg et al. (2016) indicate that optimistic people not only positively evaluate experiences, they are also hopeful for their future and therefore more open to reaping the benefits. The *Online Oxford English Dictionary* (2017) defines hope as an "expectation of something desired; desire combined with expectation", essentially having aspirations. Women in this study had aspirations and expectations of relocating to a new land that were situated in better opportunities in life. The migration literature is saturated with migrant people's eagerness to attain appropriate education to enable success and productivity in their new countries (Anjum, Nordqvist & Timpka 2012; Haffejee 2015; Ilo 2015; Saffu 2014; Shakya et al. 2012).

The hope for a future situated within achieving education can be understood as migrant people's viewing knowledge as a personal and permanent resource (Goodman 2004; Shakya et al. 2012). Consistent with the literature, the West African women in this study aspired to opportunities in life that were achievable through education and gainful employment (Atwell, Gifford & McDonald-Wilmsen 2009; Goodman 2004). These women, as with other culturally diverse migrant women, exercised hope and optimism despite their traumatic experiences (Çakir 2009; Toth 2003; Wachter et al. 2016). Strengthening new migrants to achieve a sense of belonging therefore includes supporting them to achieve in these vital areas. Local experience, even in local shops, will solidify migrants' efforts in their resilient effort to live a life that they desire/hope to live.

Spiritualty, religiosity and making connections

Prior to migration, the women in this study discussed praying and fasting in refugee camps to overcome hardships and to keep hope alive for relocation to a Western country. The women also discussed connections with others contributing to resilience and supporting each other to overcome obstacles. Milco (2016) conducted his research among Angolan refugees in the Osire refugee camp. Milco's participants also indicated that faith in God, church attendance, prayer and religious beliefs were their greatest source of strength in overcoming trauma. Detailed exploration of pre-migration stories are often

lacking in the literature (Sanchez et al. 2012). The women in the current study were from diverse countries on the Western coast of Africa who pursued their life goals outside of Africa by migrating to Australia. They were different to Milco's homogenous participants who were able to return to their home country of Angola after leaving Osire refugee camps. The experience of post-migration to a Western country demarcates the two studies.

Relocation, hope and hardship

The West African women in this study explained what it meant for them to relocate from Africa. Some migrated for employment opportunities, to join spouses or to reunite the family unit, others relocated after being displaced by war and chaos. However, most of the women expressed feeling profound hope upon arrival in Australia and realising the endless possibilities.

Early days

All of the participants in the current study lived in metropolitan Sydney, the largest city in Australia. The research aligns with other studies that indicate over a third of migrants live in a capital city (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2012; Settlement Services International 2017). Kodithuwakku (2010) and Twagiramungu (2013) found that resettling refugee migrants in big cities can negatively affect them because of the busy life of a big city. However, none of the women in the current study alluded to the above findings. Their capacity to comfortably adapt to city life in Australia is further evidence of the personal qualities of hope, hardiness and optimism resilience.

Upon arrival in Australia, the West African women were appreciative of the multicultural nature of the country, which represented a source of optimism and reassurance of the possibility of successfully settling in Australia. They believed because Australia is a Western country it would be a predominantly Caucasian population. Other research conducted with migrants and refugees in Australia confirms the above finding (Bansel et al. 2016). According to Bansel et al. (2016), the visibility of other cultures in Australia made their participants feel less conspicuous and more comfortable than anticipated. The West African women participants in Ilo's (2015) Canadian study reported

similarly. However, it is not a commonly reported finding, and may have been overshadowed by negative experiences of race.

Hope in securing stable housing and employment were also paramount to the women in this study. However, these goals proved somewhat difficult to achieve by African women in a study conducted in the USA by Watcher et al. (2016). Evidence from women in the current research indicates that they were supported and assisted by the Australian Government. The government support provided to women in this current study is excellent compared to many other Western countries. But more is still required in the areas of securing appropriate employment and issues of racism.

A few of these women demonstrated agency by taking advantage of non-interest loans from non-government agencies to achieve family reunification. This has not previously been reported in the literature and is a finding unique to this study. This further underscores the variation in government and non-government support in the different Western countries where migrants resettle.

Although a couple of the women in the current study were unsuccessful in relocating close relatives, the general consensus from the findings of this research were that, there was good support for participants to achieve their hope and life goals of family reunion. This was not the experience documented in a longitudinal study in Sweden conducted among a group of African refugees (Anjum, Nordqvist & Timpka 2012). However, their study is consistent with findings from this thesis about supporting the participants to achieve their immediate life hope of achieving educational goals and aspirations. Similar frustrations in achieving family reunion goals were documented among African refugee migrants in the USA (Wachter et al. 2016).

Ong (1999) discusses an astronaut lifestyle in migration whereby Chinese (entrepreneur) male partners shuffled between their new country and country of birth, to financially support their nuclear family members in the relocated country of the USA.

Language, functional literacy and qualifications

This research found that West African women shared similar dreams, hopes and aspirations in migrating to Australia. The women believed Australia was a land of opportunities inclusive of security, access to basic human needs and living standards, a life of peace with a good educational system. The most common reason for moving was to secure a better life for themselves and a better future for their children. Other research supports these findings as general motivations for many migrants to relocate, especially people from developing countries (Adelowo, Smythe & Nakhid 2016; Banjo 2012; Bhugra 2003; Ilo 2015; Lee 2010; Shakya et al. 2012; Yakushko 2010).

One of the resettlement issues discussed by the West African women was language, in particular accent issues, which is consistent with the women in Joseph's (2013) and Rashid's (2014) studies. Çakir (2011) highlights the importance of language when interacting with people and organisations, obtaining employment, and learning about available resources. The West African women who needed to improve their English utilised government sources. Speaking English fluently is a significant step in achieving life goals and dreams of education and employment (Borwick et al. 2013), who indicate that their study participants embraced the learning of language because it improved their employability and social networking.

Having first-hand experiences, many of the refugees were vocal in encouraging incoming migrants to make language and education a priority. Functional literacy is vital in today's society because it plays a significant role in every facet of daily life, such as opening bank accounts, understanding medication or technical instructions and signing contracts (Cree, Kay & Steward 2012). The literature is full of the detrimental effects of functional illiteracy, especially in areas such as health, education and employment. Functional illiteracy is highlighted as a major adversity in Australia with almost half the population reportedly functionally illiterate according to Richards (2012). The inability to relate within a new society could result in frustration, social isolation, loneliness and depression (Çakir 2009).

Liebig (2007) notes that migrants' inability to speak the host country's language jeopardises employment opportunities. Afolayan's study (2011) highlights differences in income among a group of African refugee migrants. Non-English speaking participants reported a 16% lower income compared to those who were proficient in English. Most host countries generally offer language training to assist new migrants to integrate.

The women in this study's embracement of functional literacy indicates that they recognised empowerment as part of their strength and resilience. A European study conducted among Turkish women migrants documented similar insights (Cakir & Yerin Guneri 2011).

Many of the participants arrived in Australia with professional qualifications. However, a significant issue for the women was when their international qualifications or previous work experience was not recognised. This is not an unusual finding with migrants (Adelowo 2012; Avni 2012; Chaumba 2017; Ip & Chui 2002). Experiences of the West African women in this current study regarding employment issues were shared by Adelowo's (2012) research participants, where they also discussed employers' demands for local experience that migrants did not have, and found difficult to achieve.

Non-recognition of previous qualifications and work experiences became an opportunity to explore alternate routes, which demonstrates elements of resilience (Snyder 2002; Sun & Shek 2012). Hardiness personality, optimist and high-hope individuals are discussed in the literature as flexible in pursuing and attaining life goals. According to theories of hope, high-hope individuals often have alternate plans and pathways to reaching their aspirations and goals in life (Snyder 2002). Achieving such means that the individual becomes flexible, as evident in the West African women's stories. Abur's (2017) study confirms the above insight among South Sudanese people who had settled in Melbourne.

The women described challenging experiences during retraining programs. Optimistic spirits were utilised in understanding these challenges as transient (Malinchoc, Offord & Colligan 1995). They never considered it as an

unchangeable or permanent state. Prioritising and being flexible demonstrates the hardiness traits of the West African women in the study (Kobasa 1979; Maddi 2002). The women often took up precarious and menial jobs to complement the income made by their partners to ensure the financial needs of the family were met. These findings align with other research conducted amongst migrants. Loh and Klug (2012) discuss the occupational downgrading of women in their cross-cities study conducted in Australia. Others have referred to the experience as 'survival employment' (Creese & Wiebe 2012).

The women believed that taking up menial jobs was part of their transient resettlement challenges and a step towards achieving their aspirations for relocation (Avni 2012). They recognised that time is required in life to achieve purposeful dreams and were determined to take one step at a time to arrive at their life ambition destinations (Bloch 1986).

The women described challenging experiences during retraining programs, others indicated that they handled issues of racism and discrimination by staying abreast with their jobs. They wanted to demonstrate that African people were just as intelligent and competent as Australian-born individuals. This finding is consistent with research conducted in Canada, where Avni (2012) explored the re-entry experiences of skilled immigrants. The current study findings are also consistent with the literature around migrants from other third-world countries, whose continents are often viewed as 'dark' and described through the colonial gaze as 'inferior' and 'other' when compared to the West (Obrist & Büchi 2008; Spivak 1990). The women's discussion of remaining relevant (hope) in their workplace further showed their determined efforts at making meaning of the new environment and in making it 'a home'.

Family life

The women told many stories about family life; a large proportion relating to children.

Children and education

One aim of this research was to explore the strategies that the women used to prepare their children for the adversities and challenges of life. The analysis of

the study found that education was a primary strategy. The women lived by example as some were enrolled in tertiary degrees.

Education and aspiration

Migrant parents attaching significance to children's education is a common occurrence in the migration literature. Adelowo, Smythe and Nakhid (2016) indicate that African people hold education in high esteem. Like the West African women in this study, Smith (2015b) found that their study participants associated education with respect, pride and confidence. The women believed that a strong educational foundation for their children would provide stability in their new country. Access to education is a basic human right and linked to poverty reduction, with potential for stability, economic development, and better lives for children, families and communities (Dryden-Peterson 2011).

One of the main reasons for encouraging children to be educated is for them to gain employment and procure a promising future (Bansel et al. 2016). However, the West African women were pragmatic in their expectations, with women stating that their children may pursue education to their capacity, including vocational training if that was what they were suited to. The women wanted their children to secure employment in any capacity, inclusive of trade jobs. This is a unique finding of the current study and not a common discourse in migration literature. The usually noted advice is for the pursuance of education to college levels (university in Australia) and beyond to secure white-collar jobs or complex careers (Raleigh & Kao 2010; Roubeni et al. 2015). This finding confirms the flexibility traits embedded in the optimism and hope elements of resilience in the individual women in this study.

The women also attempted to instil persistence in their children and an understanding of how to accept failure because if one effort failed, another can lead to success, and strength and resilience are achieved in the process. Self-esteem and self-efficacy was displayed by women in this study and helped them in various ways to resist the negative effects of racist and xenophobic acts, keeping them focused on their life goals for the future.

The women discussed students fitting into the Australian school system and their endurance in doing so. This is consistent with Kumi-Yeboah's (2016) study among West African school youths in the USA, who demonstrated resilience strategies utilising core elements such as optimism, spirituality and hope, earlier highlighted upon in this chapter. Yet, identifying the process as problematic for some refugee children and calling for solutions to it by the women, cannot be overlooked. The difficulty in fitting into the Australian education system after interrupted education, in particular for refugee children is well documented (Alford 2014; Major et al. 2013; Miller, Ziaian & Esterman 2018; Miller, Mitchell & Brown 2005; Sainsbury & Renzaho 2011) The interrupted school years of refugee children combined with high expectations of the Australian schooling system and the sometimes inappropriate enrolment into classes by age rather than ability, can affect engagement with education (Major et al. 2013; Miller, Mitchell & Brown 2005; Naidoo 2015; Sainsbury & Renzaho 2011). Empirical evidence has shown that placing refugee migrant children into classes with an unachievable level of academic expectation may challenge their hope of moving forward (Hattie & Yates. 2013; Miller, Ziaian & Esterman 2018).

Age-grouping instead of ability grouping does not recognise refugee children's past experiences, and they may find it an arduous task to fit in (Miller, Ziaian & Esterman 2018; Sainsbury & Renzaho 2011). Many studies have highlighted the need to recognise refugee children's significant break in their education trajectories. What the current study finding stresses is the outcry for Australia to find a solution to the identified problem that had led to increased drop-outs and non-completion of schooling reported in the migration literature. Scholars have identified high rates of such occurrences among children and youths of black African origins (DeCapua & Marshall 2010; Dlamini 2015; Haffejee 2015; Harris & Marlowe 2011; Naidoo 2013; Shakya et al. 2012). There is a need for the Australian Government to find better ways of resettling refugee children into schools.

Generally the women discussed the ways that they maintained discipline of their children, with some women mentioning struggles with the amount of personal freedom children in Australia have. There are many studies examining parenting difficulties and intergenerational conflicts in a new context (Creese, Kambere & Masinda 2011; Deng & Marlowe 2013; Renzaho & Vignjevic 2011; Sowole 2013). Migrants from a collectivistic society like Africa where the government has limited involvement in raising children often encounter difficulties in raising children in developed countries (Deng & Marlowe 2013). This is because of the individualistic society in developed countries and the tendency to protect children from corporal punishment, which is generally the accepted form of child discipline in Africa (Renzaho et al. 2011). There are risk factors for migrants in their transition period, such as experiencing family dysfunction and problems relating to the Western connotation of child abuse (Andrews & Bonta 2010). A few of the women reported difficulty curtailing children's behaviour with reports of children becoming stubborn or rude to parents.

Participants advised that children must be well supported in a new culture and not left to themselves. This advice came against the backdrop that some parents leave children at home while working two or three jobs. One of the women shared the story of her niece's negative outcome of living outside their African cultural training and community. Women expressed concerns about the individualistic ethos of the West eroding the collectivism of their African culture as the children developed into individual people.

There is an overrepresentation of some ethnic groups in the Australian prison system, which includes Sudanese-born Australians in Victoria (Shepherd 2016). Previous studies have discussed deep fears and concerns of the effects of raising children in a new setting and having unplanned contact with the law (Babatunde-Sowole, Jackson, et al. 2016; Deng & Marlowe 2013). Parenting issues of concern include the use of drugs and alcohol by their sons and unwanted pregnancies for their daughters (Creese, Kambere & Masinda 2011). Rasmussen et al. (2012) are of the opinion that children are

encouraged to report the use of corporal punishment on them to police. Women in the current study also discussed issues encountered in this area, but the focus was on how they overcame difficulties. There is little in the literature on overcoming these issues. This could be the result of the sparse use of strengths-based frameworks in studying migrants and their resettlement experiences.

According to this study's findings, it is possible that some African children might exploit the laws preventing physical discipline realising that it reduces their parents' power over them. This finding is significant as it has not otherwise been found in the literature. However, further research is warranted to explore this incidental finding. Gaining further insight into how migrant people can manage intergenerational conflicts would be a valuable research endeavour.

Raising sons

A few of the women who felt comfortable discussing their experiences of domestic violence expressed the hope that their male children would not be like their fathers. The women reported physical and psychological violence and abandonment from their partners. One of the women indicated that her partner might have been abusive having witnessed such examples from his own father. The women did not want their sons to see violence towards women as normal behaviour. Their essence of raising sons included the personal qualities of hope and optimism in attaining life goals for their children (Carver & Scheier 2014; Snyder 2002; Sun & Shek 2012). This finding is a significant contribution to the literature.

The effects of intimate partner violence (IPV) on the sufferer and the children are well documented in the literature (Devries et al. 2011; Outlaw 2009) and estimations of IPV in Africa suggest it is a lifetime experience. The women's strategy of ensuring a well-behaved son is important given the increasing rate of domestic violence and how offenders are jailed in Australia, which may be a detrimental outcome for the women's aspirations and dreams (hope) in relocating to Australia.

The literature has mostly focused on the male decision-making process for wives migrating to reunite with their husbands. These represent gendered accounts of women. This process makes women invisible and represents women as dependent on men (Herrera 2013). In most cases, the women were described as their husband's dependant, irrespective of their working history in their homelands. New insights are emerging about independent women migrants, including women at risk in war-related situations (Adelowo, Smythe & Nakhid 2016; Saffu 2014). There were women in the current study who fitted into the two categories. Some of the women were highly educated and were in gainful employment prior to migration. There were some who migrated as dependant spouses. There were indications that as dependant spouses, some migrant women have their autonomy and independence compromised following migration (O'Mahony & Donnelly 2007; Rashid 2011) as they are often vulnerable to economic and physical control from their husbands. According to O'Mahony and Donnelly (2007) such compromises may influence migrant women's mental health. Additionally, there is a culture of silence from West African women around IPV and a reluctance to seek help (Akinsulure-Smith et al. 2013; Mose & Gillum 2016; Ogunsiji et al. 2011). Reasons for this reluctance include a lack of financial independence and fear of deportation because they were sponsored by their intimate male partners and also for cultural/religious reasons (Alaggia, Regehr & Jenney 2012; Alaggia, Regehr & Rishchynski 2009; Mose & Gillum 2016; Ogunsiji et al. 2011).

In the current study there was evidence that some women are beginning to reject this silence as they discussed utilising available resources in Australia to overcome IPV. This corroborates similar findings from previous research conducted among the same community (Sowole 2013). Resettling into a new culture can provide possibilities for participation and resources for living (Sonn & Lewis 2009). Congruent with Sowole's (2013) findings, in the current study women discussed rejecting the abuse. Independence and autonomy are vital existential values for resilience (Borwick et al. 2013). It is a significant finding given the global spread of IPV on women (Antai 2011) and its impact on their health and quality of life (Ali, Mogren & Krantz 2013; Devries et al. 2011;

Sowole 2013). However, further focused research is warranted to ascertain trends and consider whether African women migrants are becoming more resilient against IPV as this was an incidental finding in the current study. The culture of suffering in silence by African women, especially in domestic violence situations (Akinsulure-Smith et al. 2013; Ogunsiji et al. 2011), is often mixed with the gendered accounts of migration experiences. However, the hardy personality quality of resilience of women in the current study was seen in their ability to utilise available support for domestic violence situations.

Growing old in a new culture

African people are a newly emerging population in Australia (Abdelkerim & Grace 2012) and there is a lack of culturally appropriate aged care and end-of-life care (Hiruy & Mwanri 2014). In Africa, caring for older people at home until death is an entrenched cultural practice. Growing old in an individualistic community as people from collectivistic backgrounds was discussed by some women, but in the context of hope. These women were positive and hoped that their young children may care for them as parents in their old age. The women expressed hope that their children would retain fondness for them as adults and regularly come to visit them and take care of them when they were very old. This finding is not evident in the extant literature, but the African culture of nursing the aged amongst the extended family at their home is well documented (Pharr et al. 2014).

While it could have been a concerning issue, the women discussed ageing in the spirit of hope and optimism. Healthcare and allied professionals may find this outcome useful in providing appropriate aged care services. African caregiving is inclusive of kin, friends and neighbours in their spirit of Africentricism where the collective is common interest for the wellbeing of others (Ak'bar 1984; Daly et al. 1995; Pharr et al. 2014; Schiele 2013). This highlights the importance of using Africentric frameworks in the study of African people as their concept of family and connection to their community (communal essence of living) and resilience cannot be adequately captured within the Western individualised framework of resilience. This finding confirms

that little is currently known about the African population in Australia and many areas of research are warranted.

Spiritual strength

The interrelationship of culture with spirituality and religiosity is well documented (Boyd-Franklin 2013; Kumi-Yeboah 2016; McNamara Barry et al. 2010). Drawing resilience and strength from spirituality was a key finding in the women's stories. The women in this study discussed their spirituality residing within Christianity and Islamic religions. The women enacted their spirituality by belonging to religious institutions and participating in spiritual activities. This is congruent with migration literature (Kiteki 2016; Milco 2016; Sherwood & Liebling-Kalifani 2012; Sleijpen et al. 2016). In an Australian study, Georgiades (2015) reports on the resilience of Greek immigrants and families who highlighted their Christian faith as a significant part of their resettlement process. Shakespeare-Finch and Wickham (2010) also found African migrants' spiritual practice provided them with a source of strength and resilience during resettlement. Of note in the spirituality and religiosity discourse are women "attributing a distressful situation as a punishment from a higher power" (Sanchez et al. 2015). This helps women to make meaning of life events. The power of an individual's faith, religiosity and spirituality has been explained to help people overcome traumatic experiences by finding that life continues to be meaningful (Calhoun & Tedeschi 2014; Talib & Abdollahi 2017; Tedeschi & Calhoun 1995). Some scholars have explained that migrants turning to God in difficult times not only assists in giving meaning and purpose to their life challenges, it actually helps them to see adversity as part of God's plan for them, thus they are able to embrace it and move on, just as the current study found with the 22 West African women who participated in the research.

The West African women in this study referred to counsel and guidance from their religious leaders. This is congruent with Kumi-Yeboah's (2016) West African migrants' study participants. According to the author, the participants indicated that they received mentoring from pastors and counselling at church on what to do to be successful in their educational endeavours. It is evident that African people have trust, respect and loyalty to their spiritual leaders.

Linking new migrants to their local religious outlets and leaders is paramount in their care. Consequently, consistent with the current findings, resettlement concerns such as communication difficulties, financial challenges and loneliness/isolation have been positively handled by migrants in diverse ways that includes their religious and spiritual beliefs (Dima-Cozma & Cozma 2012).

Making meaning is universal, and mostly a cognitive function situated within beliefs and thoughts. Customarily, human beings make meaning of situations in the world around them through religion, culture or other institutions, family, work and valued causes (Sullender 1999). Making meaning about situations and circumstances in life is related to motivation and being happy and in good health (Heintzelman & King 2014). In the literature, this aspect of meaning making in resilience strategies is often displayed through optimism, faith, spirituality and religiosity, which were all clearly highlighted in the West African women's stories.

Strength from role models

In the current study, women drew strength from international role models, which strengthened them through experiences of racism and xenophobia. Roubeni et al. (2015) found African American participants drew courage from President Obama to achieve life goals. Like the women in the current study, Roubeni et al's participants were encouraged to focus on such possibilities for their children. Tedeschi and Calhoun (1995) describe the vicarious experiences through which self-efficacy can be enhanced by seeing others act successfully.

Other women utilised friends' successful resettlement in Australia to positively hold on to their own aspirations and confidence in their capacity to overcome challenging experiences. The connection of self-efficacy and self-confidence to resilience and in attaining life goals is well documented (Snyder 2002).

The women spoke with confidence and optimism as they discussed how they could look forward to the promises of the future for their family. This optimism is similar to women in studies conducted in Canada (Rashid et al. 2013; Toth 2003) and in New Zealand amongst African migrant women (Adelowo, Smythe

& Nakhid 2016). The belief in self was bolstered by seeing others achieve success (Calhoun & Tedeschi 2014; Tedeschi & Calhoun 1995). The relationship between human capacity to believe in self (self-efficacy), hardiness and hope is well established (Calhoun & Tedeschi 2014; Tedeschi & Calhoun 1995).

There was a sense of gratitude in the women's stories that they had the opportunity to begin a new life. This is congruent with other literature in Australia (Vromans et al. 2018) and in the USA (Wachter et al. 2016).

Findings of giving back to society and becoming selfless are not limited to this study. People often emerge from adversity with purpose and enhanced self-awareness to engage in altruism and help others, and that it is a vital way resilience is displayed (Herrman et al. 2011; Puvimanasinghe et al. 2014; Staub & Vollhardt 2008). The West African women in this study engaged in community and public help, ranging from visits to prisons for Christian ministerial work to volunteering as support workers, collaborating with law-enforcement to support refugee children in school overcome past hurts and achieve peaceful co-existence with other Australian students, and advocating for others still in refugee camps. Likewise, DuPree's (2017) African-American women participants who experienced interpersonal violence embraced their experiences and used their experience to empower others. Puvimanasinghe's (2014) research among African migrants in South Australia found many of the African women committed to volunteer and community work with enthusiasm. The essence of being able to give back was embedded in the women's ability to do, to be, to belong and to become (Gupta & Sullivan 2013; Smith 2015b). While other studies have discussed altruism of migrants, the experiences highlighted above are unique to the participants in this study and thus a strength of this research.

Legacy

Most of the West African women had advice for future women migrants. They reported feeling strengthened and empowered in being able to help others. According to the literature, people who survive traumatic and stressful

challenges possess a specific pattern of giving (Calhoun & Tedeschi 2014; Tedeschi & Calhoun 1995).

The women identified six resilience factors for successful resettlement in Australia for new migrants. All the women acknowledged that being able to function (language and education), putting family first, being independent from Centrelink, being law abiding, being patient and utilising social support were vital factors. The women's views were derived from their own experiences, and such experiences may be similar to other migrants. However, advancing the experiences as a resilience legacy for incoming migrants is a unique finding in this study. One distinct piece of advice was to continue to strive for advancement in employment. This advice is timely because the literature is replete with stories of migrants working in precarious odd jobs, often for financial reasons (Chaumba 2017; Merali 2008).

Emotions

Another core element of resilience strategy that was utilised by the West African women in this study were emotions, which included a sense of humour and shedding tears over their pre and post-migration life experiences. The women's sense of humour was evident while telling their stories to the researcher. On reflection, such women were able to find humour in some of their frustrating and painful experiences. Exemplars such as, "Where did you learn how to speak that English" (Tatiana) while working as a hotel house-keeper were typical. The elements of belief in self and hope were evident in the use of words such as "not give up, just keep going" (Beverly). The use of humour was identified by Toth (2003) among the immigrant and refugee women in her study that explored the resilience of women resettling in Canada.

An additional strength of African people is their sense of humour and happiness, which are strength and resilience strategies. Similar to the women in this study, Betancourt et al.'s (2015, p. 120) research study participants stated, "So if you are asking what kind of 'therapy' we have (laughter), in Somali culture we don't go to therapy".

According to Clare et al. (2014), African asylum-seekers in the UK talk about emotions to construct their resilience and strength. The women, just as those in this current study, also utilised the strategies of *rejection of pity* and *being strong*; to construct a resilient and positive social identity of a responsible citizen over past hurtful experiences. There may, however, be a downside of the strong black woman archetype. The strong black woman archetype refers to an expectation of unconditional strength of an African woman (Grayman-Simpson, Mattis & Tomi 2016). This highlights cultural implications of resilience and strength during challenging situations. The findings also indicate the need for further research to explore more subtle nuances in using diverse types of emotions for strength and resilience, especially among migrant people.

This current study supports what is described in the literature as ambiguity in the use of emotions as a resilience strategy. Kim (2009) describes ambiguity in this context as emotion regulation driven by a network of socio-contextual and cultural constraints. Indeed, the emotions worked both ways, as one of the women in this thesis who utilised it had on occasion attempted self-harm from being the sole war-survivor in a family of five. However, the use of emotion positively influenced the strength and resilience for most of the women who utilised it in this study.

Traumatic and highly stressful events are not automatic antecedents to resilience and growth. Consequently, there is no intention to trivialise the fact that difficult and challenging circumstances can produce psychological distress and negative responses (Calhoun & Tedeschi 2014; Tedeschi & Calhoun 2004). Essentially resilient people are able to utilise the same thought processes that could have worked negatively in managing highly stressful life challenges to generate positive changes for growth. The women adapted to the demands of each new environment, which proved them to be resilient. The resilience of the women was not because of migration or contact with Western culture, but inclusive of their background, resources and agency (Cakir & Yerin Guneri 2011; Hatzidimitriadou & Çakir 2009; Kadıoğlu 1997).

Adapting and growing

Similar to the West African women in this study, Shakespeare-Finch and Wickham's (2010) exploration of the experiences of Sudanese refugees resettled in Tasmania, identifies factors that both helped and hindered their process of adaptation. The authors report that their study participants stated they had learned a lot and grown stronger from their past experiences, which helped them to face the resettlement challenges in Australia. These are hardy-reinforcing statements. The same experience was echoed by Ghanaian students in Kumi-Yeboah's (2016) USA study. Consequently, past experiences are attributed as a contributory factor that sustained them through diverse hardships.

Patterson and Kelleher (2005) suggest that past competences shape and boost both the present competence and future confidence resulting in increased performance. Despite the past painful and inhumane experiences highlighted by the West African women in this study, participants reported good health and growth. Living through their experiences had developed hardiness and resilience. They became action-focused and utilised strategies to deal with their daily resettlement challenges. Researchers assert that globally, there exists a group of unique people who embrace new experiences to achieve better economic, education and social opportunities and that they often succeed in the new country because they have resilience and adaptive ways beyond those who do not (Avni 2012; Boneva & Frieze 2001).

Health

Women's health consciousness was part of their active process in remaining strong. Resilient individuals are said to have a lower risk of being ill and improved immune functioning (Jakovljevic 2017; Kobasa 1979; Maddi 2002, 2006). Healthy and sustainable living was one crucial element of resilience that was peculiar to the post-migration period of the West African women. Maddi (2006) explains that hardy personalities look after their health through regular health checks and seeking medical attention when sick. Healthy living and keeping healthy routines is crucial to psychological and emotional resilience

through eating well, getting adequate sleep, maintaining low level of stress and spending time outdoors (Snyder 2002).

Embracing healthy lifestyles represents the hardiness traits and action-focused strategy of the women. With the exception of two of the 22 women in the study, they reported keeping up-to-date with their health checks. As part of ensuring good health and wellbeing, the participants discussed a variety of strategies to combat stress. This is particularly important in individuals with hardy personality traits because mentally taking control of ecological stress is a key action strategies (Calhoun & Tedeschi 2014; Maddi 2006).

The literature around migrants discusses them generally as not seeking healthcare for diverse reasons (Al-Naggar, Low & Isa 2010; Ogunsiji et al. 2013; Sowole 2013). The adherence to healthcare checks in the current study might be related to the length of time lived in a new country. It is possible that research conducted with newly arrived migrants might yield different findings. Embracing health checks might also come from health education. Despite the above, some women still feel strengthened by discussing the need for health sensitisation among the African community. This displays a call for community health needs that may have not be captured through positivist individualistic research frameworks.

Healthcare experiences

The women in this study were generally grateful for the healthcare provided in Australia. Women described the support received during the birth of their children and their or their family members' health conditions. The experience of African women in Brisbane was explored by Murray et al. (2010) and the findings were similar to those in the current study.

Chorley et al. (2017) report that continuity of care and having health professionals of different backgrounds is advantageous. Findings as above can be incorporated into policy and uptake in practice as support for migrant women in building upon their strength for healthy living.

Social capital

Social capital, networks and support were crucial resilience strategies in the life-challenging situations faced by the women in this study. Social connection is essential to the integration of new migrants and a key factor in Australia's National Settlement Frameworks (Australian Government Department of Social Services 2016; Vromans et al. 2018). People with a hardiness personality are said to surround themselves with people that buffer their positive emotions of happiness (Abdollahi et al. 2014; Snyder 2002). People with high hopes are optimistic and adept at networking with individuals and groups that encourage them (Carver & Scheier 2014; Snyder 2002; Sun & Shek 2012).

Social support is paramount when people relocate to a new environment, such as the West African women in this study. The women in this study made friends at work, with neighbours, at social outings and at churches and mosques. Social networks helped these women to receive emotional and material assistance and services and make new social contacts. Research suggests that social support is a protective factor for migrants to survive trauma and challenges (Sherwood & Liebling-Kalifani 2012).

Social networks and support are well documented strategies for migrants in overcoming the challenges of resettlement (Bilecen & Sienkiewicz 2015; Kiteki 2016; Ryan 2011). However, less is known about how supportive networking actually develops as a resilience strategy. Though the West African women in this study reported experiences of loneliness and racism, they were able to establish support systems. They exhibited self-efficacy and availed themselves of the government and settlement services assistance. This was not true of a recent study in South East Queensland conducted by Vromans et al. (2018), where participants were said to lack self-efficacy. Vromans et al. (2018, p. 153) report emotional distress of participants, which was described as "unmet longings for interpersonal relationship and understanding".

Chu et al. (2016) explored the use of culturally based ties as sources of support between 32 West African refugee and non-refugee migrants in New York. Through their grounded theory approach, the researchers found that voluntary migrants focused less on culturally based ties in comparison to

refugee migrants. There was no difference between the cultural-ties supportive system of the refugee and non-refugee women who participated in this current study. Combining the two groups of migrants was a strength of this study.

The possibility of close, culturally homogenous networks preventing members from connecting with the broader society is raised in the literature (Rashid 2011; Wong & Wong 2006). Closed bonding networks have also been associated with ghettoisation (Ryan 2011). Canadian research with skilled immigrant workers discusses participants intentionally avoiding their ethno-community in the early period of migration because they wanted to spend time with Canadians to more quickly overcome communication and language barriers (Avni 2012). Migrants constantly negotiate their present bonds both far and near, even as they endeavour to build more new ones all around themselves (Bilecen & Sienkiewicz 2015; Ryan & D'Angelo 2018). The possible negative impact of migrants' ethnic community for migrants is also discussed in the literature (George & Chaze 2009).

The West African women discussed how they were in constant contact with friends and family, home and abroad, and how they created new friends within and outside their community (Ryan 2011). The current findings are consistent with the literature around immigrants (Adelowo 2012; Sherwood & Liebling-Kalifani 2012). Migrants often maintained connections with family and friends as adaptation strategies over loneliness and racism and dislocation from African communalism. Transnational connections were possible through modern technology via the internet. The diverse use of the internet to remain connected for support from distant families is widely been echoed in migration literature (Chib, Wilkin & Hua 2013; Rashid 2011).

Communalism (hope)

Associating with people of similar cultural background has been identified and discussed in the literature as a source of resilience. This is because it facilitates adjustment to the new land with access to emotional support of comfort, love, empathy, trust and care (Adelowo 2012; Ryan 2008).

Communally identifying with each other is a strong element of African culture. The implication of collectiveness is that group therapy and community activities should be encouraged to strengthen women as they resettle in Australia (Bokore 2013; Goodman 2004). Connecting new migrants to their local community and religious outlets is vital in women's resettlement as access to a familiar supportive system boosts resilience.

Notable in the current study was communal and socio-ecological resilience. The concept of resilience revealed in this study has a more inclusive and encompassing meaning than individual strength and measurable mental attributes than the Western connotation of resilience. Findings highlight that women's strength and resilience were linked to having hope for a brighter, stable and safe future for their original African countries, better and more inclusive educational processes for refugee children, and hope for better living conditions for refugees still languishing in camps. The women discussed their communal commitment for a better African country in various ways. Nita for instance indicated that, "This [Australia] isn't our home", and Olivia said, "We are not going to live in Australia forever". Serrano (2017) states that although it seems paradoxical, the original dreams (hopes and goals) of all migrants are the imaginations of return. Women's stories in the current study replicate Serrano's paradox. Beverly recounted the sad emotions that ensued when it was time to leave Africa. Yet, as hopeful and optimistic individuals (Bloch 1986; Snyder 2002) the women knew that neither their current home nor the refugee camps were safe for living in or accomplishing their life hopes and goals. Other scholars also subscribe to Serrano's ideas. Lee (2010) and Pine (2014) believe that migration is both a future-oriented and a backward-looking process. Gina's narrative included the hope that African children raised in Australia would someday go back and restore peace, stability and implement human rights in Africa.

The added findings of women's resilience extending towards their African countries is a testamur that studies of trauma and life challenges must not be in isolation, but in the context of people's past; thus holistic understanding of how and what resilience means to people.

Group resilience was identified in the women's stories. In the spirit of their African communalism and sisterhood, they discussed how they supportively united around each other. Coming from a collective society, it was not unusual to have such findings within this cohort, which is situated within the literature of migrants from a collective society (Diener 2012).

Reference to the killing of relatives as ethnic cleansing by some women may also highlight the socio-political context of war as well as the communal essence of war. This may represent the deep-down healing that some refugees in this study required for their ailing West African countries, which may be masked by focusing alone on individual adverse and war-related challenges that the Western model of adversity and resilience represents. Further study may be warranted to tease out the above meaning among West African migrants in Australia.

Supporting people back home

Another important issue discussed by the women was their commitment to supporting families still in Africa. This finding is similar to other studies. Such steps were most often expressed as a responsibility but less seen as a source of support to them was the quality of frameworks and methods. This was a result of the deficit approach to studying migrants. Congruent with these findings is an Australian study conducted among 150 study participants inclusive of some African people (Fozdar & Torezani 2008). According to the authors, their study participants felt a sense of satisfaction and pride in being able to provide financial support for families in need back in Africa and elsewhere. This finding highlights the crucial aspect of gainful employment in the life of migrants, especially people from communal societies. Being employed in desirable jobs is synonymous with wellbeing and existential values of independence and autonomy (Abur 2017; Borwick et al. 2013; Lonn & Dantzler 2017; Smith 2015b). Being employed also has the added quality of socialising, mixing and integrating with their new community while contributing through tax payment, buying and paying house rents (Abur 2017; Saffu 2014). While not advocating that all migrants should be in more complex careers or

white-collar jobs, supporting new migrants in securing appropriate, not menial, jobs is vital; especially for people with academic qualifications.

Culture and resilience

One other way that hardiness personality resilience was evident in the current study was in the area of culture. The women wanted to maintain their cultural heritage for both themselves and their children (Khan & Watson 2005). Research suggests that migrants' ability to maintain their culture is associated with resilience in their new country (Whittaker et al. 2005). Mostly, the West African women in this study amalgamated their African culture with Australian society. These findings are congruent with the extant literature (Hoersting & Jenkins 2011; Rashid 2011; Sossou et al. 2008). According to Benson et al. (2012, p. 540):

> Immigrants do not merely passively absorb new cultural norms. Rather, they actively participate in the process of constructing new self-identities as they negotiate the intersection between their culture of origin and their host culture.

Generally, the West African women became flexible, learnt the nuances of the language, and followed the rules and laws of the new country, while at the same time negotiating their African culture. The literature refers to this process as biculturalism (Mistry & Wu 2010; Schwartz & Unger 2010). Biculturalism is the individual's ability to synthesise their heritage and new culture into a single and personalised balance, and manifests in practice, values and identification of individuals (Schwartz & Unger 2010). The literature indicates that children who attain bicultural capacity do better (Mistry & Wu 2010). The strength of these women is evident by achieving this, since their aims and aspirations of migration included a better future and internationally capable functional children.

The women in the study discussed singing and dancing in African groups. Dance culture and community can help in creating space and thus strength over challenges (Vissicaro 2009). It acknowledges the sociocultural context of the individual, a space where many African people cultivate strength and resilience. Spending time with friends and community provided a source of

entertainment and lightened their spirits. The women described how they created dance and youth groups to achieve the above purpose. They sang and danced and their spirits were lightened as they were distracted from focusing on challenges. This finding is consistent with the literature (Vissicaro 2009).. Vissicaro's (2009) study of two refugee groups from Sudan and East Central Africa reveals how the participants strategically utilised dance culture in their community to reconfigure space as they adapted, thus reducing resettlement challenges.

African woman and resilience (the archetype)

African culture traditionally depicts West African women as resilient. Before European colonisation, African women held important socio-economic, political and religious roles within the community (Adediran & Ogen 2011; Babatunde-Sowole, Jackson, et al. 2016). Traditionally, black African women are characterised as strong and behave likewise. The women function as the foundation to families and communities, and are custodians of knowledge and spiritual care (Ramphele 2012; Theron 2016). Such expectations have accorded them the archetype of the strong black African woman who is unconditionally reliable (Abrams et al. 2014; Casale 2011; Grayman-Simpson, Mattis & Tomi 2016; Theron 2016). This construct motivates them to not fail in times of adversity.

The West African women's stories in this study reflect this strong personality, which helped them to overcome past personal hurtful and traumatic experiences and current/ongoing resettlement challenges. This finding is consistent with Grayman-Simpson's (2016) study of African women living in the USA, where the researcher also documented the African woman archetype among her study cohorts. In another study conducted by Abrams et al. (2014), some of the characteristics of the strong black woman archetype were discussed as someone who embodies and displays multiple forms of strength, and possesses self and ethnic pride in spite of intersectional oppression, anchored on her religion and spirituality.

Summary

The findings of this thesis provide contemporary knowledge into the resilience and strength of a group of West African women in NSW. The findings suggest that a holistic approach to the study of migrants will assist in a better understanding of their resilience and strength strategies. The research outcomes indicate that understanding resilience and strength can contribute to policy and practice around new migrants from Africa. It was found that West African women in the study utilised diverse core elements of resilience to remain strong during challenging situations, both pre and post migration.

The study found that the women appreciated independence and autonomy to function as members of Australian society and contribute to its growth. Findings suggest that remaining focused on the purpose and aim of migration strengthened the women to overcome challenges and culture shocks in their new land. Invariably the findings support the need to be culturally aware in the policy and practice around new migrants from collectivistic society, especially African people.

Education and offering appropriate support is important for both migrants and the Australian people, in comfortably easing the new migrant's resettlement, while utilising their strength. In addition to giving women an opportunity to share their migration stories and development of resilience and strength through diverse challenges, this chapter also added new knowledge of resilience legacy by the women for incoming migrant women. This is a novel finding within this study group. The study also found a generally healthy group of migrant women, which negates studies in migrant women's literature. Further research is warranted to ascertain changing trends.

This study has unique areas that included discussion of communalism, which is connected to the socio-political and cultural situations in the women's home countries. Also unique was a new insight into migrant women's health practices, giving voice to the voiceless, resilience legacy for incoming migrants and creating a platform for discourse through strengths approach about IPV and insight from youths around certain aspects of intergenerational conflicts.

Arriving in a new land where everything appears strange requires making sense of the new encounter. Many things were different to the African culture where the women migrated from. The women highlighted differences both within and outside the home. They adapted to the initial shock by holding on to the familiar. They moved on quickly to engage with environments that supported their competence and wellbeing, and they amalgamated both cultures. The women utilised social networks of family and friends and were optimistic as they also made meaning of changes and new life around them. In sum, the findings indicate that diverse core elements of resilience delineated at the beginning of this discussion chapter were evident in the women's stories.

In the next and final chapter, I present the conclusion to this study, incorporating the implications of findings for relevant areas and suggestions for research endeavours.

CHAPTER EIGHT: SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

"The African race is a rubber ball. The harder you dash it to the ground, the higher it will rise." (African proverb)

Introduction

Chapter Seven situated the study findings within the extant literature. The current chapter presents a summary of the study as contributions to the thesis and explores the implications of the findings in relation to health and allied health practice and their pedagogies. Recommendations to further knowledge are also documented.

Contributions of this thesis

This study set out to explore the aspirational goals of West African-born women prior migrating to Australia and also to gain an understanding of the resilience and strength strategies they drew upon during the early transition phase in Australia. Additionally the study explored the strategies these women used to prepare their children for adversities and life challenges. The study achieved its aim and, in the process, had a number of originalities – that are explored next.

The literature

To ascertain what research was available around the strength and resilience strategies of African people, a literature research was undertaken. The review confirmed the omission of studies around resilience and strength of West African migrants, especially women living in NSW. Migrants usually encounter challenges of resettlement on top of experiences encountered prior to migration. The influence of what West African women in NSW hold as meanings to trauma and challenges were shaped by their culture and past experiences, which had not been focused in the literature. Issues around resettlement by African migrants in Australia, especially West African women, was highlighted (Babatunde-Sowole, Jackson, et al. 2016; Babatunde-Sowole

et al. 2018; Ogunsiji, Wilkes & Chok 2018; Ogunsiji 2009; Ogunsiji, Kwok & Fan 2017; Ogunsiji et al. 2011, 2012; Ogunsiji et al. 2013; Sowole 2013). Previous researchers have focused on issues around concerns for resettlement in Australia, while utilising the deficit approach. In filling the significant gap, my study built on the available research and added resilience and strength as a significant shift in focus was introduced into studying the West African migrant women in Australia. Research encouraging migrants to re-tell their stories focusing on periods that they had to be strong, is a vital shift in migration research that is required in the current climate. Supporting new migrants to utilise their strengths in overcoming resettlement challenges is profitable because it produces independent working people who are capable of contributing to the growth of the society.

However, overlooking strength and celebrating trauma-related past through diverse complex programs such as refugee health services, settlement services, settlement case coordination, complex case support, refugee minor programs, Migrant Resource Centres and specialist trauma counselling, will only continue to douse new migrants' capabilities and or encourage a continued stay on Centrelink handouts. As Hutchinson and Dorsett (2012) allude, new refugee migrants are routinely referred for specialist trauma counselling services based on an assumption of trauma. Hutchinson and Dorsett further explain that the assumptions are shaped by service delivery, not necessarily women's needs. Yet, as this study has highlighted through the core elements explored in women's stories, and supported by the literature, trauma and life challenges are often seen as normal life occurrences, and initial shock as normal human responses, but in all, trauma and shock are often seen as a call to move on in achieving life goals (Bonanno 2004; Burstow 2003; Hutchinson & Dorsett 2012; Marlowe 2010; Tsoulis 2008).

The research methods and framework

Through a storytelling methodology situated within constructivism, Africentric worldview and African feminism frameworks, the study achieved its aim. As stated earlier, there is limited research in Australia around West African women migrants, especially in NSW, and the existing studies were mainly

approached from a medicalised deficit perspective. This is the first time that the resilience and strength of West African migrant women living in NSW has received scholarship attention. This research is novel to West African people in Australia and complements previously conducted studies, in a unique way, by using Africentric qualitative and salutogenic/positive approach and theory. The salutogenic/positive approach is related to resilience because it help refocus on telling a story from a strength perspective that celebrates the adaptation strategies or resilience steps during challenging situations rather than focusing on the actual challenge (adversity/weakness); having a positive attitude towards life despite devastating and or concerning experiences.

As the researcher, I undertook both the data collection and transcription of women's stories, which was a strength to both the study and the quality of the data. In doing so, I was able to capture spoken and non-verbal details and recollect events as they occurred. The inductive design utilised and achieving data saturation during collection was a vital strength of this research. This method enabled the collection of a depth of data that cannot be attained through other methods. The study has contributed to the research community by using the women's own voices around the type of support that can be provided to new African migrant women while utilising their strength (Hutchinson & Dorsett 2012). The appropriateness of the methods and methodology allows for stories to be captured from women's perspectives.

As earlier indicated, I conducted an integrative review. The application of an appropriate conceptual model helped me not only ascertain gaps but also categorise articles and discuss findings. The framework used for the review helped me examine the interactive processes between migrants and their environment and between the risks and protective factors. Undertaking such steps can help researchers utilise appropriate theoretical frameworks in conducting studies.

This study also joins the pockets of current researchers who study African people to be situated within their worldview for holistic understanding of the work around them. For cultural specificity, some studies have proposed the Africentric worldview in studying how the African people adapt and remain

strong through their challenging and stressful life situations (Adelowo 2012; Grayman-Simpson, Mattis & Tomi 2016; Jackson & Sears 1992). The current work is a first for West African women living in NSW in this regard.

A major strength of this research relates first to the participants, who were from a variety of economic and religious backgrounds. The inclusion of both refugee and voluntary migrants enriched the collected data. Though many were Christians, some Muslims also voluntarily participated and the women were either refugee or economic migrants, recruited from across Sydney.

Success in recruitment translates to the production of quality data, yet recruitment methods are often only briefly mentioned in methodological descriptions (Kristensen & Ravn 2015). To recruit participants in closed communities or CALD groups, entails vigour and strategic planning. While it was a purposive selection of storytellers for my study, adequate coverage of the community was vital. To reduce selection bias from the snowballing technique and to achieve greater heterogeneity, I utilised multiple entry points that allowed access to a greater proportion and wider range of the African community who were also able to provide further contacts (Sulaiman-Hill & Thompson 2011). Future nursing and midwifery researchers into closed and hard-to-reach populations could consider this approach to improve the rigour of their studies. It was also imperative to sustain the momentum and firmly work through data collection among closed communities because sluggish data collection can kill morale, which is always very hard to revive. Persistently working through snowballing when conducting research amongst minority groups is key (Kristensen & Ravn 2015). The findings here are valuable in improving the often sparse detailed methods utilised in conducting research.

Researchers must value sociocultural components when conducting research with hard-to-reach communities to ease the flow of information from research participants. Being an insider may play a major role in this aspect. I was an insider as a migrant, a woman and of West African descent. The criteria can provide both merit and limitation qualities for a study. I maximised the merit qualities in strengthening the study because the women stated that they felt

comfortable relating to a researcher of their background. In most cases, the women counted themselves fortunate to be part of the study.

This dissertation utilised both Africentric and womanism frameworks to centre the African black experiences and meaning of resilience and demystify the universality of western notion of adversity, trauma and resilience

The study

As a unique study, this research has opened up avenues to researching West African women migrants in NSW from a strengths perspective, thus celebrating the tenacity of the women, and has contributed to the knowledge base in this regard. The uniqueness of study's frameworks and methodological approach has contributed to the richness of the study. In using Africentric worldviews, the women were placed at the centre of the research. Utilising African feminism (womanism) ensured that women's equality to share their own stories by themselves sits within their culture. Womanism recognises family-hood. Therefore, the African womanist/sm strand of feminism, although challenging the oppression of women, neither alienates their men nor rejects their African culture (Mekgwe 2008). Africentricism is holistic and collective in nature. As Mazama (2001) explains, through these women's worldview, this study has been able to understand what actually constitutes a challenge in their migration stories and how they utilised their resilience to overcome it. Further, as Mazama (2001) states, this study has gained a depth and rich knowledge that enabled these women to open their hearts. Use of storytelling allowed for a free and in-depth collection of events as preferred by the women while importantly giving them a voice to be heard and their migration experiences to be shared.

Another important contribution of this study to scholarship was the provision of a platform to African women migrants in NSW to share their voice (Pittaway, Muli & Shteir 2009; Saffu 2014; Shakespeare-Finch & Wickham 2010) in the preferred manner they want it to be heard. The participants in the study were given a voice to express who they are and what they are capable of as strong, tough, enduring African women. Some were voluntary migrants with good jobs prior to migration, and some single-handedly migrated and were later joined by

their spouse or married men here in Australia. A significant number of these women were also war widows. All these women's stories depict strong and courageous women, pre and post migration. Their various stories had lain dormant a long time, and deserved to be told. Given the opportunity, they were able to refute how the literature had represented them, over the years, as dependent, male-appendages and with problems of victimisation and loneliness (Nawyn & Gjokaj 2014). It is an important knowledge from this cohort, given that the migration story of women has mostly been seen through the eyes of their male partner, having been presented as family dependants and appendages (Adelowo, Smythe & Nakhid 2016; Lenette, Brough & Cox 2013). Through qualitative storytelling, my study added rich insights and a balanced view into the story of migration of West African migrants in Australia by allowing women's voices to be heard and their migration stories shared, thereby giving a voice to the voiceless and silenced population (Wang & Geale, 2015). Invariably, they possess those personality traits that Selye's (1976) seminal work reveals as the distinctive way in which each individual 'takes to' stressful life occurrences.

Women told a chronological story because they found their past essential to their present and future resilience and hope. This is a vital insight for researchers in ensuring all, not part of, stories told by participants are represented in presenting outcomes (Rashid 2011; Sossou et al. 2008). The value that migrants hold to the past personal experiences of their resettlement's strength and resilience has been highlighted. The holistic view of the African women's story made possible by honouring their past experiences is an invaluable strength of this study. The holistic view was vital in not ignoring women's skills and resilience, which can be disheartening and disrespectful (Naidoo et al. 2018).

The findings conclude that migrants utilise resilience and strength that propels them towards achieving their life goals and migration aspirations. The findings also indicate that resilience is dynamic beyond individual traits, inclusive of a communal type of hope that was held with others that their original countries will be restored to safe, stable and restored African countries. The findings

conclude that West African women migrants employed diversified routes to build resilience which extend the knowledge of singular individualistic understanding of resilience (Hutchinson & Dorsett 2012). This study provides vital information on how migrants' experiences can be constructively utilised to formulate policies and protocols in building on new women migrants' strengths and support them through the early transition resettlement phase. They shared critical information that can be used to design or improve current relevant services, programs and policies culturally applicable to the African community, who are still young within the wider Australian society. The information from this study will also help support their resilience and strength (Hutchinson & Dorsett 2012) and wellbeing in resettling to a new land. It is a novel study for this cohort, therefore a strength in contributing vital knowledge to this less-studied group of the Australian community.

As the migrant cohort of continental black Africans continues to grow in Australia, their strength and resilience need to be acknowledged and understood. In the process of understanding, their strength strategies can be utilised in providing quality and appropriate healthcare and resettlement processes within multicultural Australia.

Notable is the insight that the study provided on the importance of past personal experiences, and therefore the need to focus more on holistic exploration of migrants' trajectories (Rashid et al. 2013; Sanchez et al. 2012). The West African women's stories did not commence in Australia. Appreciating that their resilience and strength was situated in holistic understanding and exploration, means research should not be about Australian living alone. Studies around migrant women have cautioned against short-sightedness when discussing women's emancipation by considering resilience of women as a direct off-shoot of migration and contact with Western culture to the neglect of their background, their resources and their agency (Cakir & Yerin Guneri 2011; Hatzidimitriadou & Çakir 2009; Kadıoğlu 1997).

The study demonstrates that there were diverse sources of the resilience and strength (Hutchinson & Dorsett 2012) of the West African women participants, inclusive of the Africentric worldview and the strong African woman archetype.

In this study, the aspect of the hardiness personality of the women upon which resilience strategies hinges have been added. Hardiness qualities of the women emerged during their pre-migration challenges, yet studies, including the reviewed literature, have been less vocal on the period. Further, the women's African strength as a woman has been highlighted as a vital essence in their resilience. Self-efficacy through role-modelling was not in the reviewed literature but was identified in the women in this study. Utilising the strengths-based framework and definition plus incorporating the core elements of resilience added the advantage of holistic understanding to the resilient processes of the women in this study within an ecological lens.

The knowledge gained in this study deserves recognition within a multicultural Australia where African migrants in general, but especially the women, are a newly emerging community. Further, the lessons learned about the West African women in this study is valuable in situating women's voice and the knowledge achieved from their voice within the international research community at large, as well as the international resilience research.

Experiences of existential values such as independence and autonomy experiences identified in this study have generally received limited attention in contemporary literature (Borwick et al. 2013). A common reliance on quantitative methodology may have accounted for this. Khawaja et al. (2008) adds that another reason may be how variables were defined in past studies. Empowering migrants and their community with hope is important in enhancing their capabilities as well as community capabilities to ascertain their improved wellbeing. African migrants and the women in this study contribute to the economy and social life of Australia (Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2011).

Limitations of the study

The study depicts the experience of 22 West African women living in Australia whose pre-migration experiences and relocation status, beliefs and levels of education were diverse; therefore might not be relevant to other African women migrants. Nonetheless, the themes from the data demonstrate solid

commonalities as a group, in their use of the core elements of resilience as earlier delineated. Consequently, the rich data that were generated from the women's stories are testament to migrant women from West Africa currently residing in a metropolitan city in Australia.

The sample size of the women who voluntarily participated in the study means the findings are not generalisable to a larger population. That said, the provision of a detailed step-by-step process of the study renders it reproducible and strengthens the research outcomes.

The restriction to Sydney as a location was as a result of the women introduced to me through snowballing mainly residing within this neighbourhood. Although it appeared to be a constraint, the sample was rich in that it adequately represented a diverse number of people from West African countries who had migrated to Sydney. The study set out to explore the resilience and strength of women. The data reveal a mostly culturally dictated thread of strength that had been developed prior to migration; therefore there may be little or no difference in resilience and strength among African women living across Australia's towns and cities.

Finally, the restriction of time for completion and financial support often experienced by any thesis endeavour are acknowledged as further limitations in considering study participants outside metropolitan Sydney. The limitations attest to the need to conduct more research among the new but upsurging African population within multicultural Australia.

Implications for policy, nursing, midwifery and allied health practice

Global demographics continue to endure a major change in diversification from improved migration processes (Boucher & Gest 2018; Kuo 2014). The African population, especially women, is growing rapidly within multicultural Australia, contributing to the reversal of population decline in the Oceania region (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA) 2017).

As a multicultural society, the continued rapid growth of new migrants and increasing multiculturalism of Australia (Millbank, Phillips & Bohm 2006) has vital relevance to the practice of health professionals and allied workers. Every day, nurses, midwives and allied health professionals interact with individuals, their families and communities. In most cases, health professionals' contact may be at the most vulnerable periods of their lives. These professionals need to develop knowledge of the culture and history of new migrants, especially the newly emerging African population in Australia (Abdelkerim & Grace 2012; Udah 2016) focused on in this study. As Buse, Burker & Bernacchio (2013) posit, practitioners need to make ardent effort in familiarising themselves with research, history and practices of the diverse cultures that they serve. The knowledge will equip professionals in providing optimal care by applying it to their practice (Esegbona-Adeigbe 2011).

Human capacity (resilience) to overcome and thrive over migration and resettlement challenges must not be underestimated (Bonanno 2004). Consequently, there is the need to encourage strengths-based research and practice. Strengths-based research and practice ensures that both researchers and practitioners shift focus from a deficit approach into supporting migrants in using their strengths and capabilities in overcoming health challenges and cooperative with their care.

Knowledge (cultural variation) about how people perceive and react to life challenges and consequent resilience is an important outcome of this study that has implications for practice (Buse, Burker & Bernacchio 2013). Despite pre and post-migration life challenges, women's views and how they overcame the challenges were very different to the Western medical model of treating trauma and life challenges (Bonanno 2004; Bonanno & Mancini 2008). Consequently, health workers need to work with African women in their chosen but safe way to handle trauma or life challenges. Nyagua (Nyagua & Harris 2008) was a medical doctor in the village areas of Sierra Leone prior migrating to Australia. The authors expound that service providers should endeavour to approach services for West African migrant women from their point of cultural beliefs in providing adequate healthcare. As health professionals, nurses,

midwives and allied health would benefit in understanding African people's interpretation and handling of trauma, and migration life challenges (Byrskog et al. 2016).

Women's resilience and strength indicates their utilisation of diverse core elements of resilience that is situated within socio-ecological domain. Pre migration, women's hardiness was fully developed and evident through their ingenuity and resourcefulness. Drawing on these and other core elements in the post-migration period means that it would be useful in supporting women in their resettlement and overcoming challenges if they are explored by practitioners. The strategies utilised by these women and the ability to situate it within the literature continues to show that support is required in reinforcing the strategies to enhance their resilience as they resettle in Australia. The implications are that the core elements of resilience and strength displayed by these West African women can be explored for their healthcare needs and compliance. As detailed under the implications for education section below, these core elements of resilience can be learned if required.

It is imperative for health professional to find ways to support migrant women to optimise their health and successful re-establishment. Globally, migrants' health has substantial impact on improving women's health. Such ways would include outreach programs to where new migrants conglomerate and access women through outreach via religious and community groups

Societal impact is a key area for consideration. Successful integration is dependent on how society receives new migrants to ensure they do not feel isolated (Wille 2011). The West African women's stories reveal experiences of discrimination and racism, though they displayed determination and challenged its occurrences. Policy and practice needs to work more on programs that encourage mingling of new and settled Australians.

Australian society has much to do in strengthening the resilience of new migrants such as the women in this study. All the women reported experiences of racism and discrimination at diverse levels relating to them and their

children. Researchers have discussed the negative influence of discrimination on migrants and policies have been put in place to dissuade acts of discrimination and racism at individual, organisational, communal and societal levels (Correa-Velez, Gifford & McMichael 2015). The policies may have become law in Australia, yet migrants continue to describe experiences of racism and discrimination (Fozdar & Torezani 2008; Simich & Andermann 2014). This indicates that more is needed to make new migrants welcome, and treated as Australians with all its ramifications. A review of current laws might be warranted through regular discourse and/or consideration given to other ways of making African blackness acceptable within multicultural Australia (Correa-Velez, Gifford & McMichael 2015; Udah 2016). Encouraging youth programs to achieve social cohesion (Abubakar 2016; Correa-Velez, Gifford & Barnett 2010; Ungar 2008) and prevent unhealthy rivalry between diverse cultures that have come to call Australia home, is vital, especially in keeping youths off the streets and engaged with how to better their lives. There is a need for a debate around the issue of blackness, recognising the issues they face as Africans in Australia, so that together there can be some meaningful and lasting solution thus strengthening the capabilities of new migrants.

Failure to both acknowledge and deal with systemic and institutional racism is a challenge in continual encouragement for migrants to utilise their resilience and strength as they resettle in Western countries. Education to reorientate the negativity about African people and their continent is vital (Dei 2011) to actualise a break away from the racism and non-acceptability that women and family experienced in this study. Respecting, learning and identifying with African people's culture may involve embracing the storytelling lifestyles, connecting and creating rapport with the community and embracing the African people. A great initiative by the Victorian Police in Melbourne for Somali-Australians is laudable but workable initiatives should not be limited to Police and law-enforcement section alone.

There is no doubt that Australia is, and will continue to, experience migration from African countries due to civil and political unrests therefore, in search of better socio-economic and political stable opportunities African people will migrate with their culture, knowledge, skills and experience (Clayton 2005).

African people are strong and resilient. They have identity situated in their culture and purpose situated in securing a better and humane life. African people have a lot to add to Australian society as their value of life parallels that of Australia's ethos and dreams. There is a need for equality and diversity and valuing the African migrant women rather than making them victims of their circumstances within Australian society. Racial profiling is dangerous as it only highlights a single story about a group or an individual.

Migrants are valuable carriers and resources of international knowledge (Saffu 2014) who can "help all of us learn what it feels like to move between cultures and language varieties, and thus perhaps learn to become citizens of the global community" (Delpit 1995, p. 69). African people migrating to Australia should not be seen as a threat, but embraced as potential contributors to the growth and stability of Australia (Abur 2017). Including African people as representatives of the discourse of how well they can be supported in Australia will be valuable. Evidence suggests that African people in Australia socially and financially contribute to their new society. This thesis is evidenced-based and policy and practice would find it useful in servicing new migrants' resettlement.

Underemployment, low-paying jobs, or what is also referred to as precarious jobs, require consideration. The women in this study expressed their appreciation of a new life in Australia and the support provided. Women articulated further the need for access to respectable employment, rather than precarious jobs. As previously indicated, Australia is ranked high globally in the resettlement of migrants, but will need to find better ways to improve employment experiences and xenophobic attitudes (Abur 2017; Fozdar & Banki 2017). Doing precarious jobs was discussed as leading to keeping two to three jobs to provide for family, with a significant impact on the family through absent parents. Leaving these vital areas unattended can derail migrants' life goals, some of which have been discussed in this study.

Another area requiring government attention is the nature of employment available to migrants, which was also strong in the women's stories. Often, they took up precarious employment as hopeful individuals who regularly

found alternate routes in achieving life goals. One of the women sustained a back injury through such a job and was unable to work due to constant pain. The issue of unemployment or employment in less desirable jobs compared to credentials is unacceptable (Fozdar & Banki 2017). The government could look at redirecting funds to provide more quality jobs for new migrants.

The current focus and funding that provides automatic assessment for psychological traumas to refugee migrants is another area for review. The literature indicates that psychological treatment should be reserved for only those who require it (Bonanno 2004; Hutchinson & Dorsett 2012). Medicalising by focusing on psychological aspects of trauma does not support the resilience and strength of people who survived the trauma (Hutchinson & Dorsett 2012; Marlowe 2010). Tsoulis (2008) recounts the story of a young refugee man who was admitted to a mental health ward because his symptoms from a sustained back injury at work through menial jobs was quickly linked to his trauma background, instead of treating his condition. Tsoulis further highlights the pressure to meet funding demands that often result in pressure on refugee migrants to access services they did not require. These are the type of funds that need to be reshuffled and utilised where needed most. While this study does not downplay the place for psychological support, such resources should be reserved for those who actually require it (Bonanno & Mancini 2008) to free dollars for other areas in genuine need. More strengths-focused studies would support this venture. As highlighted elsewhere, imposing trauma issues over existential values of daily living may be a futile effort (Hutchinson & Dorsett 2012; Ryan, Dooley & Benson 2008).

I have no doubt that funding and promoting strengths-based related programs will cause extra stress on the Australian health dollar. The solution may include rechannelling funds for healthcare services to compulsory mental health assessments of new refugee migrants (Hutchinson & Dorsett 2012) into supporting vibrant and positive-approach programs, including provision of more jobs. The Australian population continues to grow exponentially through migration, but job provision is growing arithmetically, which cannot support the needs of the people. Rechannelling of funds from government purses to

support strengths-based programs that will encourage new migrants to utilise their strengths during resettlement may also be required in the area of job provision. We need to remember that unemployment or underemployment both have significant impacts on human health. Being unemployed or underemployed have significant impact on human health.

This study found a group of healthy and health-conscious migrant women, resulting from the research frameworks adapted for the study. This finding could be used to encourage migrants' use of healthcare by suggesting that they create time for themselves and their health needs. The women reported undertaking healthy lifestyles such as holidays, walks on the beach to prevent stress, eating healthily and embracing health checks. However, some requested a sensitisation of their African community for health checks. There are implications for healthcare providers, especially nurses and midwives who are the first point of call for most migrants.

Individualised care may be paramount in this regard to encourage women to utilise their inherent resilience in embracing needed and freely available healthcare in Australia. With the request for health sensitisation for the African community, building on African migrant women's strengths to boost their skills set may be vital. Recent studies among the cohort indicate that practical steps like community gardens and/or a community kitchen would be a great prospect to build on their healthy eating and lifestyle (Babatunde-Sowole et al. 2018; Sowole 2013). Health literacy will build on women's strength also.

The women in this study appreciated the chance for confidentiality in their use of healthcare and the opportunity to choose a healthcare provider, which may have also boosted their uptake of health checks and general healthcare. Provision of more appropriate practitioners who would continue to meet the needs of migrant women like those in this research is significant. The literature indicates that women's health services are stretched and may be struggling to meet demand (Peters 2010). Nurse and midwife training can be improved as they are encouraged and supported into taking up specialised women's healthcare.

Awareness of and supportive nursing and midwifery care is important. Pre migration, some women were battered or witnessed experiences of war, including sexual exploitation, family fragmentation and displacement as well as horrible living in refugee camps, although they were inherently strong. The experiences may have a resounding impact on their physical and psychological health. Having survived such lives, healthcare professionals in Australia must establish ways to support women with such experiences to optimise their health and successful resettlement. The gynaecological and obstetric healthcare needs of such women is important. Midwifery care of women during pregnancy and childbirth is therefore critical. Health professionals coming in contact with these women should endeavour to work with these women rather than enforcing the mental health system of treatments on them, and endeavour to see the women's stories from their own perspectives and treat them accordingly. Previous studies have emphasised this point among West African migrants (Nyagua & Harris 2008; Sowole 2013).

In their early years of relocation, women migrants would benefit from health professionals' support for access to sources that can promote the effective use of the core resilience elements they possess. This includes encouragement and direction of new African women migrants to join their community and religious groups so that that they are accessible for the health programs being provided to their community for the various health interventions, and not lost within the Australian wider community.

Women might not only require help with understanding how the Australian healthcare system works, but may also need support to know how to access the available resources for their advantage and in improving their health. The use of venues and the women's trust in their religious leaders can be capitalised upon in their healthcare.

The women made use of opportunistic healthcare services, drawing strength through their access to communal and religious gatherings; all identified strength through their beliefs and practice of religion. Outlets for the above gatherings are paramount when women reach out for health service delivery such as discussions on health screening and healthy lifestyles, especially

given there were calls to sensitise the community. While most of the current group of women practice a healthy lifestyle and utilise screening, previous studies into the community have identified issues with health screening and healthy lifestyle (Babatunde-Sowole et al. 2018; Sowole 2013).

Health professionals at community and hospital levels need to utilise this avenue; it has proved productive in the past because it was suggested by the women themselves. Such opportunities would be outlets for programs like African cultural night programs. Such programs could include health talk as they afford a greater chance to reach women. The literature has confirmed the success of these opportunistic healthcare practices (Nwankwo et al. 2011; Peters 2012). Recent studies have suggested wellness clinics and women-only access along with availability of female practitioners in such centres as a way of improving health screening. This suggestion is reliable because they were West African women's ideas in prior studies (Sowole 2013).

West African women fall into hard-to-reach populations for research purposes (Liamputtong 2007), but utilising unusual locations (Campbell et al. 2007; Sowole 2013) proved successful in this regard. The findings reveal that all the women identified resilience from their spirituality and they acknowledged themselves as practicing Christians or Muslims. Many Western countries including Australia are presently focused on reinforcing health and legislative systems (Johnsdotter & Essén 2016; Varol et al. 2017; Zurynski et al. 2017). The above suggestions of utilising unusual locations like religious outlets and social gatherings underscore the need for policy-makers and healthcare providers to think more broadly in achieving their aims.

The women discussed how they drew supportive counsel from their religious leaders and the respect they have for community leaders. With documented evidence of positive outcomes from opportunistic health programs (Ogunsiji, Wilkes & Chok 2018; Sowole 2013), health programs would continue to benefit through this avenue. Coordinated effort with religious groups and their leaders offers further access to reach women for health education and encouragement into health checks and screening programs like blood pressure; said to be a killer disease among African migrants. Studies have documented the powerful

role of church pastors and the inherent health promotion benefits (Baruth et al. 2008; Clay, Newlin & Leeks 2005; Demark-Wahnefried et al. 2000; Gross et al. 2018).

Faith-based programs will yield successful compliance for good health outcomes. Faith-based programs promote adherents, reaching many people of the community who use the centre. Integrating faith-based programs in health-related programs, including exercise, is one way to further access and boost the resilience of these women. Sermons can be utilised as avenues to communicate the importance of women's health (Bopp & Fallon 2013; Cotton et al. 2006; Gross et al. 2018; Sowole 2013; Vu et al. 2018). Effective partnership with community organisations that women frequent will also achieve similar outcomes as discussed above; but at communal group level serving as avenue to reach the non-religious people in the community.

The inclusion of information throughout the lifespan is a vital implication arising from this study. Migrants continue to experience shock on arrival in their new countries, and the women in this study narrated that, albeit from their strengths-based lenses. While the Australia Immigration Bureau may currently have some information on its website regarding these issues, such as drastic changes in weather, changes to family relationships especially regarding non-acceptability of domestic violence, and expectations of local experience before employment can be secured, reinforcing these issues all through the immigration processing period and upon approval for migration, can mitigate some of the shocks for migrants on arrival.

Women's concern for their children's education indicates that there is a need for improved educational programs for children of refugee background. The women discussed how they continued to support and encourage their children in their education. Finding a better supportive solution to the effect of the significant gap in school years for refugee children requires attention. Further efforts by the education department in collaboration with the refugee community in particular is warranted.

The understandings of migrant resilience obtained from this study can support in the strategies to design interventions for people experiencing adversity or psychological issues or general health challenges leading to profitable lives in their new countries.

Women's strength in choosing to be healthy and acting accordingly could support health professionals in treatment decision makings to enhance their care. Utilising resilience and salutogenic standpoints in educating patient is imperative in reinforcing the capabilities of migrants to take control of their health. Resilience is a valuable health promotion strategy because salutogenic implies positive approach. Utilising this process in encouraging migrants to focus on factors that can sustain their health rather than illness diagnosis [deficit approach] will be a valuable step (Viken, Lyberg & Severrinsson 2015). The above steps could greatly enhanced the health status of Australia within the global community.

Implications within a global context of multiple African international diasporas

This thesis has implications within the global context of multiple African international diasporas. It is relevant to an international audience because many countries are facing an influx of migrants from diverse parts of the world. African people migrate for diverse reasons, yet there is little literature depicting their experiences, attitudes, values and beliefs. Without this understanding, health professionals, services and systems will remain unequipped to address the unique needs of these populations. Resilience strategies enacted by African migrant women represent a valuable resource for ensuring wellbeing in women, their families and new communities.

Implications for health professionals' education

Australia prides itself as a multicultural nation. Consequently, current ethnic groups will continue to grow while new ones attempt to establish themselves, such as the African people in this study. An increasing number of African people call Australia home, as evidenced by statistics referred to earlier, for reasons inclusive of social, political, economic and war issues. Refugees have

endured trauma and adversity of great magnitude, yet they are strong and resilient. This study highlights the importance of past life experiences, therefore the past life of African refugees in particular are of great importance in services that may be offered to them in Australia. The training curriculum for the diverse providers of services to migrant people must therefore be thoughtful in its teaching of those who will care for potentially traumatised women and their families.

Service providers involved with migrants at diverse levels need to be culturally capable of providing acceptable services. The curricula of all areas involved – medical, nursing, midwifery and allied workers – should include cultural sensitivities and competencies in graduates. The curricula for all service providers should ascertain that there are effective strategies that prepare or equip new graduates in ensuring that they can effectively support/enhance the resilience and strength of new migrants. The literature suggests that preparing nurses and midwives should not only be about health literacy (McCleary-Jones 2012; Sand-Jecklin et al. 2010). It should inculcate the use of suitable health literacy assessment tools and confidence-building interventions (Shieh, Belcher & Habermann 2013). All other areas of training of service providers should inculcate the above methods in their training of potential graduates.

One other area for cultural training of service providers is to inculcate the essence of spirituality and religiosity in the curriculum for potential graduates to first understand their own spirituality to be able to appreciate other people's views and strengths in this regard. There is no end to knowledge, therefore there should be committed ongoing in-service after tertiary training at workplaces to ensure currency in care of the culturally diversified nation of Australia.

In diverse ways through this study, it was evident how the African people overcame their life challenges. Health and allied health professionals might need to consider this seriously in offering support. In dire situations where Western psychological medicine/support might be crucial, harnessing the trust that these women have in their spiritual representatives, such as religious

leaders, might be paramount in getting the need for treatment across. In other words, work with their religious and community leaders to achieve success.

This type of knowledge must be included in university curricula and training of new health and allied staff and other sources of service providers. While some work is being done, much more is required in achieving adequate cultural support and transformation of this new and upsurging African community.

While the use of spirituality and religiosity constructs may not be completely new, one is drawn to the findings of a recent study among a group of health workers in South Africa (Brown, Elkonin & Naicker 2013). A dominant theme in their findings was the issue of lack of training in religion and spiritualty therapy; therefore these health practitioners felt that there were competency concerns, despite their willingness to embrace the method (Brown, Elkonin & Naicker 2013). This will be an important issue in the education and training of new nurses/midwives and initiating in-services at workplaces around above the discussed concepts. The significance of adequate training of health professionals to meet the increasingly diverse population of Australia and to ensure optimal care is reiterated through this study.

Additionally, is a need for greater awareness and increased sensitivity to the past experiences of new migrants in particular. Many refugees migrating to the shores of Australia have suffered trauma during war or at refugee camps. Experiences of rape or atrocious acts being committed on their loved ones or human beings like them expand the type of healthcare services required. Many of these women would pass through the care of health professionals at one stage or the other while living in Australia. The curricula of diverse care providers – health and allied – should maintain or regularly improve as necessary on being appreciative, supportive and culturally sensitive to past experiences.

Collaborative effort among service providers for migrants, especially women, is implicated in the findings of this study. Working together to support women and their families will ensure adequate utilisation of the women's strength both for

their health and for successful resettlement (Viken, Lyberg & Severrinsson 2015).

Another area is to reflect diversity in health professional staffing. The women in this study indicated that many African nurses find it difficult to keep their jobs due to non-acceptance and bullying. Others work under pressure of meeting their financial needs. Employing more African health professional will help healthcare staffing which should reflect the demographics that they serve to ensure no member of the population is underserved. Health care employing diversity of staff is both moral and humanly right to do (Oba 2018).

Issues around youths growing up in a new culture were raised by women. A way to solve this might include the rethinking of social construction but not necessarily about coping and adapting alone in new culture. Collaboratively, promote programs that facilitate their hopes, potentials, dreams and aspirations (James 2014; Oba 2018).

Recommendations for future research

No study is an island. As the research community continues to seek knowledge around a phenomenon, the conclusion of such study opens up the opportunity for further studies. This thesis shares realities about knowledge production. Future research is required to consolidate the development of policies and programs that can support the resilience and strength of new migrants in successfully resettling in Australia. Studies that would accommodate convergent and divergent ideas may be required to enhance government policy in building on migrants' resilience and strength towards resettlement in Australia. The women in this study were refugees and economic migrants. Research may be required that individually considers the two categories. While having both in this study enriched the data collected, studying refugee migrants and economic migrants separately would allow for comparison.

More research amongst African-Australians is warranted, as this young and growing community within Australia presently has a limited research focus.

Conducting research among West African migrant men for convergence and divergence to explore gender-related resilience and strength during resettlement is urgently needed. The African migrant men can also be studied for convergence and divergence and gendered insights of African people's resilience. Generally, more research amongst African-Australians is warranted. Conducting research among African migrant men for convergence and divergence to explore gender-related resilience and strength during resettlement is advised. After all, the literature has indicated gender as one of the variables that promotes human resilience (Bonanno & Mancini 2008). Another demographic variable highlighted was greater education, which might be an interesting area to explore (Bonanno & Mancini 2008).

Research focusing on interventions that promote transitions and build resilience both at individual and community levels would be valuable ventures for migrant groups. Based on a wish from the women, future studies could be conducted on a larger scale to include government agencies in exploring how new migrants and their families, especially children, can be empowered based on issues of school gaps from years as refugees in camp sites and their struggles in fitting into the Australian school system. While pockets of studies are now available on the actual problems, finding solutions for refugee children as advocated by some women in this study, remains dormant.

Some findings have not been prominent in contemporary literature. These areas require future research to ascertain possible new trends. The current study found that women were thorough with their health. This is not a common finding around migrant women. Further studies may be warranted. For instance, research on migrant women is replete with women being overwhelmed with the stress of resettlement of their family, therefore finding no time for themselves, especially their health. The current study found that many of the women made their health their priority, which became a source of their strength. The women also included this point as part of their resilience legacy for incoming women migrants. This study also found that women utilised available resources to mitigate their abusive intimate partners.

Further research is warranted to ascertain trends and consider whether African women migrants are becoming resilient against IPV, as the current finding is not only incidental but may also not be robust enough to challenge current research outcomes about women's silence on the issue. Leaving a legacy for incoming migrants is sparse, and might need to be highlighted more in studies around intergenerational issues, communal hopeful resilience for home countries and solutions to successful resettlement of refugee children into Australia's school system. While studies have highlighted the gap, as did Beverly, the literature is sparse on advancing solutions or discussing the need for a solution; heard as a heart cry by women like Beverly for all refugee children, irrespective of country of origin.

A comparison of current study research outcomes with resettlement strategies of non-African migrant women is vital in ascertaining cultural differences on how people of different backgrounds exercise resilience and resettle into Australia. The process might yield constructive insights into handling CALD people's adversity and challenges in a more culturally acceptable manner than the dominant Western model. A recent study (Vromans et al. 2018) advanced similar views. Comparing the current study research outcomes with the resettlement strategies of non-African migrant women is vital in ascertaining cultural differences on how people of different backgrounds exercise resilience and resettle into Australia.

One of the aims of this study was to explore women's commitment to, and the process of instilling resilience in, their children. Exploring similar insights within children of a non-African group would be a rich research area that could contribute to child, adolescent and family nursing. A lot has been documented on migrant children and youth around deficit-conducted research.

The current research was a retrospective study of West African women who had migrated and lived in Australia for a minimum of two years. A prospective study may reveal different findings and is warranted for an in-depth understanding around the focused topic and focal group of this research. A longitudinal study like one conducted in Sweden (Anjum, Nordqvist & Timpka 2012) may be a worthy research endeavour in the Oceania region among

West African women. As Vromans et al. (2018) indicate in their study, developing rapport and trust in a longitudinal research would offer richer insights to women's stories, or as in the case of this thesis, a richer story of resilience and strength.

Women highlighting the under-representation of the African-Australian community workforce is an indication of the need to establish an African Nursing Group in Australia. This would facilitate community resilience strategies for new migrants relevant to African people's value of communalism.

Concluding remarks

This qualitative storytelling research explored the resilience and strength of West African women in Australia at resettlement. Findings indicate that despite the women's pre-migration trauma and post-migration challenges such as war/camp experiences, educational and occupational barriers, loss, discrimination, occupation insecurity and re-credentialing, they were strong at diverse stages of the experiences and overcame multiple challenges during their resettlement process and successfully resettled in Australia. Some strategies utilised were congruent with the literature, while others were unique to this study. The uniqueness of the study among the study cohort included the explication of the core elements of resilience and their explorations in women's stories. The findings suggest that West African women migrants employ diversified pathways to build resilience, which extends the knowledge of the singular individualistic understanding of resilience.

The study group demonstrated through their life stories and experiences shared that there is life after trauma, and that such lives could be positively geared. This debunks the traditional deficit model of absoluteness of health. Their stories highlight the issues of the emerging population of African-Australians and the need to conduct more research around them for empirical support in relating with this new community. It is a vital scholarly effort to highlight the African-Australian capabilities, especially with policy-makers demanding empirical justification for the continuation of the current

psychopathological handling of every issue relating to new migrants (Simich & Andermann 2014).

Currently, we know that both research and practice appear to deliberately overlook qualities of strength in migrants while emphasising a deficit model of care and research endeavours (Hutchinson & Dorsett 2012; Simich & Andermann 2014). The findings of this thesis suggest that there is a need for a big shift in focus for both research and practice.

African people are strong and resilient and the essence of their living – Ubuntu – propels them to always embrace success over life challenges. The above accentuates culture as vital to [indigenous] African people's resilience because it is essential to their identity, belongingness and the transfer of cultural values from generations (Babatunde-Sowole, Power, et al. 2016; Theron, Theron & Malindi 2013). A unique new knowledge from this group of women was in relation to the resilience legacy advanced for incoming women migrants and the detailed explication of the phenomenon for women. These unique insights of offering legacy amongst the West African-born Australian women may become part of policy and strategies aimed at supporting incoming migrant women in achieving successful resettlement in a new land. The study reinforces the current discourse about the factors associated with resettlement adversity. The literature reviewed has been built and expanded upon, with none of the reviewed literature delineating the core elements of resilience as done in this thesis. Through the use of an Africentric worldview, the cultural aspect of the resilience of the African people is highlighted in this women's story.

This study has contributed to migrant women's health by advancing the understanding of West African women's challenges and sources of strength when resettling in Australia. Understanding how resilience is built during migration can allow clinicians to tailor referral and practice to support women's transition in a new society. The women utilised diverse resilience strategies that span connection with family, healthcare and professionals and education arena – indicating that these women had interactions with people of diverse environments justifying the socio-ecological inclusion in this study

(Bronfenbrenner 1979; Viken, Lyberg & Severrinsson 2015). Working together across settings has also been part of ecological approach which can enhanced migrant women's ability for their health and resettlement process (Viken, Lyberg & Severrinsson 2015).

"Here's to the women who will change the narratives of African women: may we know them, may we be them, and may we raise them" Dr. Ola Orekunrin, Black African woman who founded Flying Doctors Nigeria.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Letter to migrant resource centres and other facilities for accessing women

Appendix B: Letter to Settlement Services International for potential emotional support for women

Appendix C: Flyer

Appendix D: UTS Ethics Approval

Appendix E: Information sheet for participants

Appendix F: Consent form

Appendix G: List of free counselling services in Sydney

Appendix H: Demographic questions and storytelling guide

Appendix I: Interview / probing guide

Appendix J: Published peer-reviewed journal article and approval to use in thesis

Appendix K: Approval letter from Taylor & Francis publications

APPENDIX A: Letter to migrant resources centres and other facilities for accessing women

Dear Sir/Ma,

My name is Olutoyin [Toyin] Sowole and I am a doctoral student at the University of Technology, Sydney. I will be conducting research with West African migrant women to collect their stories of strength and resilience during their early resettlement years in Australia. I would like to recruit women for my study through your organisation. Before I approach women to interview however, I need to submit an application to the university ethics committee. One of the requirements of an ethics application is that I provide evidence of support to recruit women through your organisation. If you could please confirm in writing by return email, your willingness to assist such as through allowing me to display a poster and flyers in your premises, it would be much appreciated.

Kind Regards,

Toyin Sowole

Olutoyin Sowole RN, CM, BN (Hons) 1st class, Masters Mid

PhD Candidate

Faculty of Health @ UTS

PO Box 123, Broadway NSW 2007, Australia

Dear Director,

My name is Olutoyin [Toyin] Sowole and I am a doctoral student at the University of Technology, Sydney. I will be conducting a research with West African migrant/refugee women to collect their stories of resilience and strength during their early resettlement years. Settlement Services International [SSI] has a well-represented NSW-based Migrant Resource Centres and Multicultural Services as Board members. Many of the women for the study will be accessed through these MRCs.

It is possible for emotional stress to occur during the recall of life past stories, I am therefore writing to request a contact name and phone number in SSI, that the women may ring for help in emotional situations of recalling their stories.

Your help in this instance, would be much appreciated.

Kind Regards,

Toyin

Olutoyin Sowole RN, CM, BN (Hons) 1st class, Masters Mid

PhD Candidate

Faculty of Health @ UTS

PO Box 123, Broadway NSW 2007, Australia

APPENDIX D: Ethics approval

HREC Approval Letter - UTS HREC 2015000029

From: Research.Ethics@uts.edu.au

Sent: Tue 19/05/2015 12:09 AM

To: Debra Jackson; Michelle DiGiacomo; Olutoyin Sowole

Subject: HREC Approval Granted

Dear Applicant

Thank you for your response to the Committee's comments for your project titled, "New Application

West African migrant women in Australia: stories of resilience and strength". Your response satisfactorily addresses the concerns and questions raised by the Committee who agreed that the application now meets the requirements of the NHMRC National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007). I am pleased to inform you that ethics approval is now granted.

Your approval number is UTS HREC REF NO. 2015000029

Please note that the ethical conduct of research is an on-going process. The National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans requires us to obtain a report about the progress of the research, and in particular about any changes to the research which may have ethical implications. This report form must be completed at least annually, and at the end of the project (if it takes more than a year). The Ethics Secretariat will contact you when it is time to complete your first report.

I also refer you to the AVCC guidelines relating to the storage of data, which require that data be kept for a minimum of 5 years after publication of research. However, in NSW, longer retention requirements are required for research on human subjects with potential long-term effects, research with long-term environmental effects, or research considered of national or international significance, importance, or controversy. If the data from this research project falls into one of these categories, contact University Records for advice on long-term retention.

You should consider this your official letter of approval. If you require a hardcopy please contact Research.Ethics@uts.edu.au.

To access this application, please follow the URLs below:

*if accessing within the UTS network:
http://rmprod.itd.uts.edu.au/RMENet/HOM001N.aspx

* if accessing outside of UTS network: https://remote.uts.edu.au , and click on "RMENet - ResearchMaster Enterprise" after logging in.

We value your feedback on the online ethics process. If you would like to provide feedback please go to: http://surveys.uts.edu.au/surveys/onlineethics/index.cfm

If you have any queries about your ethics approval, or require any amendments to your research in the future, please do not hesitate to contact Research.Ethics@uts.edu.au.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Marion Haas

Chairperson

UTS Human Research Ethics Committee

C/- Research & Innovation Office

University of Technology, Sydney

E: Research.Ethics@uts.edu.au

I: http://www.research.uts.edu.au/policies/restricted/ethics.html

P: PO Box 123, BROADWAY NSW 2007

[Level 14, Building 1, Broadway Campus]

CB01.14.08.04

INFORMATION SHEET

Title of Research: West African migrant women in Australia: stories of resilience and strength (UTS Approval Number: 2015000029)

WHO IS DOING THE RESEARCH?

My name is Mrs Olutoyin Sowole and I am a student at UTS. My supervisors are Dr Michelle DiGiacomo, Professor Debra Jackson, Professor Trish Davidson and Dr Tamara Power

WHAT IS THIS RESEARCH ABOUT?

This research is to explore the resilience and strength of the West African migrant women in Australia especially during their early resettlement years in Australia.

IF I SAY YES, WHAT WILL IT INVOLVE?

I will ask you to take part in an approximately 60 minutes' long discussion (interview). The interview session will be audio taped, transcribed and analysed to be written as a scholarly thesis. The findings will also be written into journal articles and form part of conference presentations

ARE THERE ANY RISKS/INCONVENIENCE?

The research has been carefully designed therefore no risk/inconvenience is anticipated. However it is possible that discussing personal health experiences may become emotionally upsetting for you. I will provide suitable telephone numbers of free counselling services that you may wish to access.

WHY HAVE I BEEN ASKED?

This study is about West African migrant women living in NSW. As a West African migrant woman living in NSW and over 18 years of age, your tenacity, strength, resourcefulness and resilience through the difficult periods of your resettlement into Australia is an important part of this study. This study will provide you with the opportunity to share those experiences and from your point of view. This study will generate insights into those difficulties often faced by African migrant women and enrich society awareness at all levels of government. This study will therefore provide us with the opportunity to help future African migrant women resettling in Australia and indeed other migrant women from diverse backgrounds. Your name is not necessary as a participant and confidentiality is assured. All forms of identification will be removed from the information that is collected during the interview.

DO I HAVE TO SAY YES?

You do not have to say yes because participation in the research interview is voluntary

WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF I SAY NO?

Nothing. I will thank you for your time so far and won't contact you about this research again.

IF I SAY YES, CAN I CHANGE MY MIND LATER?

You can change your mind at any time and you don't have to say why. I will thank you for your time so far and won't contact you about this research again.

WHAT IF I HAVE CONCERNS OR A COMPLAINT?

If you have concerns about the research, please contact my primary supervisor Dr Michelle DiGiacomo on 9514 4818.

If you would like to talk to someone who is not connected with the research, you may contact the Research Ethics Officer on 02 9514 9772, and quote this number (UTS HREC Approval Number: 2015000029).

UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY SYDNEY

CONSENT FORM

I_____agree to participate in the research project "West African migrant women in Australia: stories of resilience and strength" being conducted by Mrs Olutoyin Sowole of the University of Technology, Sydney for her doctoral degree.

I understand that the purpose of this study is to explore the strength and resilience of West African migrant women living in Australia during the early years of their resettlement in Australia.

I understand that I have been asked to participate in this research because I am a woman who has migrated from West Africa to Australia and can therefore provide important information for the research that will be audio-recorded. I understand that my participation in this research will take approximately 60 minutes and will involve me discussing my experiences of migrating to Australia at a mutually agreed public venue. I am aware that I will be provided with a list of experienced free local counselling services I can access if the process becomes distressing for me.

I am aware that I can contact Mrs Olutoyin Sowole on 0426088612 or her supervisor Dr Michelle DiGiacomo on 9514 4818 if I have any concerns about the research. I also understand that I am free to withdraw my participation from this research project at any time I wish, without consequences, and without giving a reason.

I agree that Mrs Olutoyin Sowole has answered all of my questions fully and clearly.

I agree that the research data gathered from this project may be published in a form that does not identify me in any way.

_____   ___/___/___

Signature (participant)

_____   ___/___/___

Signature (researcher or delegate)

NOTE:

This study has been approved by the University of Technology, Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about any

aspect of your participation in this research which you cannot resolve with the researcher, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Research Ethics Officer (ph.: +61 2 9514 9772 Research.Ethics@uts.edu.au) and quote the UTS HREC reference number. Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome.

Free counselling service in Sydney

Facility	Contact number
Auburn Community Health Facility	(02) 8759 4000
Blacktown Community Health Facility	9881 8700
Camperdown Mental Health Services	9515 9000
Crisis Counselling	9677 1962
Darlinghurst Community Health Centre	8382 1990
Doonside Community Health Facility	9881 8650
The Hills Community Health Facility	8853 4500
Hurstville Community Health Centre	9570 2877
Katoomba Community Health Facility	4782 2133
Merrylands Community Health Facility	9682 3133
Mt Druitt Community Health Facility	9881 1200
Parramatta Community Health Facility	9843 3222
Penrith Community Health Facility	4732 9400
Prince of Wales Community Health Services	9369 0400
Rockdale Community Health Facility	9087 8300
Ryde Community Mental Health Centre	9858 8300
Southcare Miranda	9540 7956

Source: NSW Health Community Centres Facility Services sites

Demographic Characteristics

Age group (circle one):

18-24   25-30   31-35   36-40   41-45   46-50   51-55   56 and above

Marital status: (circle one):

Married   Single (never married)   De facto   Divorced   Widowed

Current residency status:

Australian permanent resident ------- Australian citizen ------- Other (specify) --------

Educational status: (circle one):

Secondary education   Tertiary education   other:

Religion: Christianity   Islam   Other (specify)

West African Country of birth: (circle one):

Ghana   Liberia   Nigeria   Senegal   Sierra Leone   Togo   Other: ---------

Number of years in Australia: (circle one):

0-5 years   6-10 years   11-15 years   16 -20 years   21 years and over

Occupation prior to migration: _____

Current employment status in Australia: (circle one):

Full-time Part-time Casual Unemployed

Current occupation: _____

Storytelling topic guide

Leaving home country

- ❖ Can you please tell me about your reasons for leaving your home country?
- ❖ What was the journey like?

Arrival to Australia

- ❖ Can you tell me about when you first got to Australia?
- ❖ What were your early years of living in Australia like?
- ❖ Can you think of anything you would have liked to have been/be different?

Impact of migration

- ❖ In what way did these experiences (departure, journey, arrival) affect you (and your family)?
- ❖ What is life like now for you (and for your family?) (Ask about a typical day in her life).

Strength and resilience

- ❖ During difficult times, what helped you get through it?
- ❖ What would you say are the most important things in your life?
- ❖ In what way do you look after your own health and wellbeing (and your family, if applicable)?
- ❖ What would you do differently if you have the opportunity?

Future outlook

- ❖ In what way have your experiences shaped the way you prepare your children for the future, if at all?
- ❖ What would your advice to future West African migrant women be in preparing for migration or resettling successfully into Australian culture?
- ❖ What might help them to have a positive experience during their migrations?
- ❖ What do you want for your future (for your family's future, if applicable)?

Are you trying to say…..?

Do you mean……?

Is this what you are trying to say…..?

You have just said…..? Is that correct?

Would you elaborate on that…?

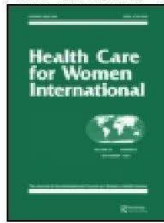Can you say some more about that….?

How did that come about….?

Did that discourage you from….?

What is /was your initial reaction … to them/the scenario?

How did you think you have come out of the experience…?

Can you give a more detailed description of what happened?

Do you have further examples of this?

Resilience of African migrants: An integrative review

Olutoyin Babatunde-Sowole, Tamara Power, Debra Jackson, Patricia M. Davidson & Michelle DiGiacomo

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Resilience of African migrants: An integrative review

Olutoyin Babatunde-Sowole[a], Tamara Power[a], Debra Jackson[a,b], Patricia M. Davidson[c,d], and Michelle DiGiacomo[c]

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ABSTRACT

African migrant women represent a rapidly growing cohort of new arrivals in many countries. Many of these women demonstrate strength and resilience throughout the stressful migration process. In this integrative review, we explore the literature on African migrants' resilience using an ecological framework. Nine peer-reviewed journal articles and six grey literature documents were reviewed. Key internal and external factors in achieving resilience were identified, discussed, and diagrammatically represented using Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Framework under micro-, meso-, exo-, and macro-levels. Our findings show that the capacity for resilience demonstrated during migration could have implications for policy and practice.

In a world currently marked by dynamic demographic changes through international migration, it is important to understand how migrants adapt to migration and acculturation experiences and demonstrate resilience in their host countries. Until recently, there has been little focus on African migrant women's resilience, yet they are a prominent and influential group within their communities. The purpose of this review was to ascertain factors and characteristics of African women's resilience in the context of migration. Understanding more about African women's resilience can be a valuable resource for health care professionals who can support health and well-being in women, their families, and new communities.

Emerging data over the past decades suggest that migration research could benefit from using a strengths-based approach, such as resilience, in understanding the experiences of migrants (Hutchinson & Dorsett, 2012). Whilst there has been some documentation of resilience of migrant women in European and North American studies (Çakir, 2009; Cakir & Yerin Guneri, 2011; Chung, Hong, & Newbold, 2013), less is known about the resilience and strength of African migrant

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women. Migrants include refugees from war-torn areas and voluntary immigrants. Voluntary immigrants are essentially skilled migrants who leave their country in search of employment opportunities (Pottie, Ng, Spitzer, Mohammed, & Glazier, 2008).

The percentage of women migrating internationally is greater than their male counterparts. By 2009, women comprised over 60% of all migrants worldwide (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division, 2009). War and government instability in parts of Africa are increasingly leading to more women becoming international asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants to the Western world. The number of African people migrating to the United States of America outnumbered those from Europe, Asia, and Latin America (Blankson, Spears, & Hinson, 2012; Logan, 2009). The Canadian census in 2009 also showed an increased rate of African migrants (Statistics Canada, 2009). In the United Kingdom, the numbers of African migrants are even greater, perhaps due to its proximity to the African continent. In 2008, the African-born population in the UK was approximately 0.5 million at an 855 male to 1000 female ratio (United Kingdom National Statistics, 2009). A significant increase in numbers of African people arriving into Australia (Abdelkerim & Grace, 2012; Khan & Pedersen, 2010) and New Zealand may be due to the adoption of the refugee quota systems as well as a rise in skilled immigrant intake into these countries (Adelowo, 2012). Women are also being increasingly resettled under the "Women and Girls at Risk" program in Western countries under the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) (Guerin, Allotey, Elmi, & Baho, 2006). Under this scheme, Europe, Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand agree to receive asylum seekers, of whom 47% of refugees in 2010 were girls and women (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2012).

Despite the increasing migration of African people, particularly African women, there is little research depicting their resilience. Resilience is crucial to basic human existence and survival; and for the purpose of this article, resilience is conceptualized as the ability to overcome life challenges and transform such challenges into positive growth (Gillespie, Chaboyer, & Wallis, 2007). The aim of our article was to ascertain factors associated with resilience and strength of African migrant women.

Historically, Africa and its peoples have been represented as a "dark continent," marked by disease, war, and famine (Obrist & Büchi, 2008; Poncian, 2015). Stigmatized conditions and practices pervade the literature describing African people. Such studies investigate the effects of infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS (Drummond, Mizan, & Wright, 2008) and female genital mutilation (Berg & Denison, 2013; Bjälkander et al., 2012; Browne, 2014). Also frequently explored are chronic diseases such as obesity, cardiovascular disease (Drummond, Mizan, Burgoyne, & Wright, 2011; Hall, Thomsen, Henriksen, & Lohse, 2011), intimate partner violence (Akinsulure-Smith, Chu, Keatley, & Rasmussen, 2013; Ogunsiji, Wilkes, Jackson, & Peters, 2011), and mental illness caused by trauma and

adversity during the migration process (Schweitzer, Melville, Steel, & Lacherez, 2006; Venters et al., 2011). Migration has also been documented as contributing to the incidence of postpartum depression among African migrant mothers in Australia (Murray, Windsor, Parker, & Tewfik, 2010).

In some cases, negative stereotypes about African migrants have resulted in barriers to health services. For example, African residents who were living in Victoria, Australia, were restricted from participating in blood donation because of the perception that the broader community of Africans carry blood-borne diseases or have a tropical disease (Polonsky, Brijnath, & Renzaho, 2011). Such an outcome may restrict the possibility of successful treatment for patients of African descent who need compatible blood products (McQuilten, Waters, Polonsky, & Renzaho, 2014). Arthur (2009) also documented evidence of racism experienced by African migrant women in the United States. Researchers found that migrant women face more racism and discrimination than men and have less access to economic resources and English language skills improvement (Remennick, 2005).

In spite of the stress of migrating and adapting to living in a new country, it is vital to highlight that many migrant women are resilient as they reestablish their lives in a new culture (Kuo, 2014). In this article, we examine literature on resilience and how African migrants report their adaptation to a new culture. Our review includes both African women and men due to the dearth of studies on the resilience of migrant women. We argue that the ways in which resilience is enacted by African migrants, and their capability to face migration challenges, is critical knowledge for the international research audience. Resilience strategies enacted by African migrant women, in particular, represent a valuable resource for ensuring well-being in women, their families, and new communities.

Methods

We conducted an integrative literature review using a systematic approach and the preferred reporting items for systematic meta-analysis framework (PRISMA) (Moher, Liberati, Tetzlaff, & Altman, 2009) to identify factors influencing, and strategies for, developing resilience in African migrant women. For quality appraisal purposes, the included papers were reviewed for design, sample, setting, data collection method and analysis, clarity of writing, generalizability, and reflexivity. This approach has been used successfully by other researchers (McGarry, Simpson, & Hinchliff-Smith, 2011; Robinson & Spilsbury, 2008) as adapted from Mays and Pope (2000).

Search strategy

Between May and June 2014, electronic databases including Academic Search Complete (Ebsco), Scopus, Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL), Medline (Ovid), PsychInfo, and Multicultural Australia and Immigration Studies (MAIS), were searched for peer-reviewed material published between 2004 and 2014. Boolean terms were derived in consultation with a health librarian. Our search

terms were keywords and derivatives of "Africa*"; "women*"; "migrant*"; "immigrants*"; "refugee*"; strength*; and "resilien.*" Additionally, we searched the grey literature with variations of the same keywords. The Social Science Research Network and the Google search engine were used to access grey literature. Additional material was sourced by manual hand searching of reference lists.

Eligibility criteria

Articles were included if they explored the resilience of African migrant women or their adaptive strategies. Due to the paucity of literature, identified articles reporting on both men and women were included, although we aimed to focus on African migrant women. We included papers written in English, published in peer-reviewed or grey literature (reports and theses), and containing participants aged 18 and over. All study designs were included. Studies were excluded if they mainly focused on psychopathology or trauma experienced by participants, or if resilience or strength was not discussed. We excluded conference abstracts, book reviews, and research depicting internally displaced people, African American, or African Caribbean populations.

Evaluation and analysis

We extracted data reflecting author/year, country/setting, population, study design, and aims from the collected literature and entered it into a spreadsheet to facilitate analysis (Tables 1 and 2). We used a critical appraisal tool to systematically evaluate the peer-reviewed journal articles. As there are no formal methods for weighing appraisals in integrative reviews, none were undertaken during this process. We used an adapted version of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1989; Mental Health Foundation of Australia [MHFA], 2005; see Figure 1) to organize the findings and examine the interactive processes between migrants and their environment and between the risks and protective factors. Internal and external factors interact and influence resilience. Complexities in these interactive relationships depict the human environment, particularly for migrant people. The framework also depicts links between the person's inner resources, family resources, external systems, and the larger environment that are capable of affecting resilience and well-being (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 2002; Wise, 2003). The adaptation of the ecological framework is novel in the study of this cohort and migration literature.

Results

We included 15 articles in the review (Figure 2). The articles were primarily qualitative ($n = 14$) and published in peer-reviewed journals ($n = 9$). Six grey literature documents were included. All studies consisted of experiences and displays of resilience by study participants. The literature predominantly centered on experiences of refugees from East, Central, and Northern Africa. Some studies included people from non-African countries based on the view that they were also refugees. The

Table 1. Peer-reviewed literature exploring resilience of African migrants ($n = 9$).

First author (year)	Country/setting	Population	Design/method	Aims
Anderson & Doyal, 2004	England	62 women from 11 African countries receiving HIV treatment in five specialist clinics in London	Qualitative—Self-administered questionnaire for demographics and in-depth semistructured interviews	Investigate the particular needs and experiences of African women living with HIV in the UK
Bentley et al., 2014	USA	59 Somali Muslim refugees from East Africa	Quantitative—Questionnaire/survey	Examine the influence of religiosity on the relationship between traumatic exposure and post-traumatic stress disorder symptom severity
Khawaja, White, Schweitzer, & Greenslade, 2008	Australia	23 Sudanese refugees [12 F]	Qualitative—Semistructured interviews	Examine the premigration, transit, and postmigration descriptions of the participants to determine their difficulties and how they coped and adapted.
Lenette, Brough, & Cox, 2013	Australia	4 single Sudanese refugee women with children from diverse African countries [Congo, Burundi, and Sudan]	Qualitative—Ethnography and in-depth interviews	Explore resilience as a process during everyday activities among the women
Lloyd, 2014	Australia	20 refugees mainly from the North, East and Central African countries [13 F]	Qualitative—Face-to-face semistructured interviews	Explore participants' experiences of new health environment in developing health literacy practice including how they construct and disseminate information.
Obrist & Büchi, 2008	Switzerland	20 [9 F] sub-Saharan African people	Qualitative—Case studies and group discussions	Explore resilience as a process during everyday activities among the women
Orton, Griffiths, Green, & Waterman, 2012	United Kingdom	26 Asylum seekers [16 F] from 7 African countries	Qualitative—Focus groups and interviews	Explore experiences of life as an asylum seeker living with HIV in UK.
Schweitzer et at., 2007	Australia	13 [4 F] Sudanese refugees	Qualitative	Identify and explain the coping and resilience of participants
Shakespeare-Finch & Wickham, 2010	Australia	12 [6 F] Sudanese refugees	Qualitative—Semistructured interviews	What helped/hindered participants in adapting while in Sudan, enroute and in Australia?

sample sizes ranged from four (Lenette, Brough, & Cox, 2013) in an Australian study to a UK study of 62 African people (Anderson & Doyal, 2004). There were 112 women documented as participating in these studies, although four articles did not provide numbers of women contributors. A methodological challenge during the search was the lack of clear definition of resilience; instead, it was often

Table 2. Grey literature exploring resilience of African migrants ($n = 6$).

First author (year)	Country/setting	Population	Design/method	Aims
Bailey, 2012	United Kingdom	Three women (representing African Women's Empowerment Forum [AWEF])	NA	Explore the sense of belonging and agency amongst a group of African asylum-seekers and refugees
De Tona, & Lentin, 2010	Ireland	Three case studies	NA	Explore migrant women's organizations' contributions to changing lives of migrant women
Mwanri et al., 2012	Australia	Recent African migrant intakes	NA	Discuss author's perspective and literature on community resilience with focus on recently arrived African refugees
Hashimoto-Govindasamy & Rose, 2011	Australia	Sudanese refugee women	Qualitative—Ethnography using group interviews	Evaluate a Sudanese women's exercise program from the perspective of a community development strength-based approach
Adelowo, 2012	New Zealand	15 African immigrant women	Qualitative—Interviews	To explore the women's stories of adjustment to NZ, including barriers and how they navigated
Webb, 2013]	Perth, Western Australia, Australia	11 Rwanda refugee University students [4 F]	Qualitative—Interviews	Explore meanings ascribed to available social support by Rwanda refugees during transition to university

used interchangeably with coping, adaptation, and "helps." We did not reject papers that met inclusion criteria due to poor quality.

Findings

Strategies for resilience

Internal factors

The internal or personal factors are represented in the microsystem level of Bronfenbrenner's framework. These are thoughts and behaviors as well as personal values and skills of the participants (MHFA, 2005), which are used to maintain equilibrium and achieve positive outcomes during the migration and resettlement challenges.

Personal qualities and inner strength of the participants were depicted in different ways. For example, cognitive strategies were used by North African Sudanese men and women (Schweitzer, Greenslade, & Kagee, 2007). For these people, achieving cognitive resilience was explained in relation to educational and
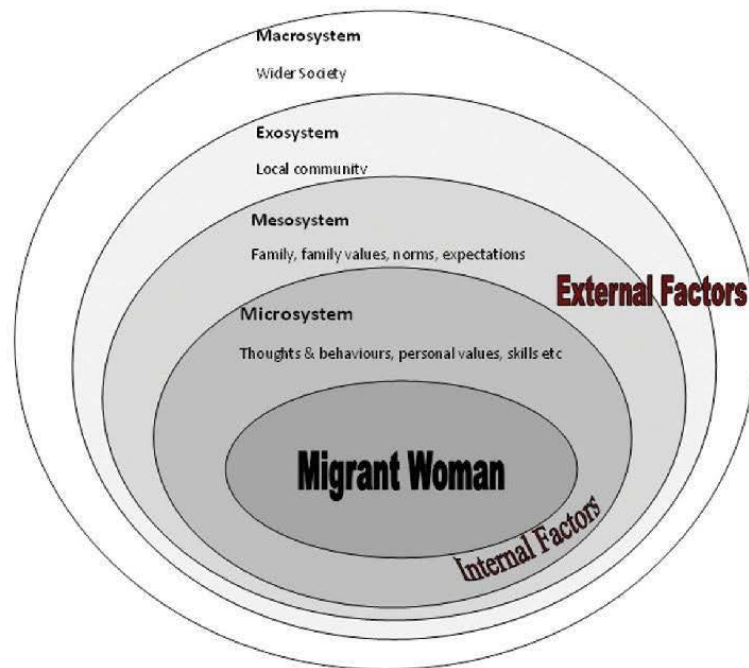
Figure 1. The levels of influence affecting resilience in African women.

employment accomplishments. Khawaja, White, Schweitzer, and Greenslade (2008) explained that the North African participants used cognitive strategies to mentally reconstruct the migration stress in relation to their current achievement and growth and acceptance of difficult situations while having an aspirational focus.

Sudanese refugees reported enacting social comparisons to assist in adapting to life in Australia (Schweitzer et al., 2007). The participants were able to appreciate freedom in Australia when comparing their own situation with others still in Africa and refugees currently being held in Australian detention centers. Other researchers highlighted personal resources such as hopes and goals, having a positive attitude, using spirituality or religiosity that involved prayer and faith, and the individual's sense of growth and strength (Adelowo, 2012; Anderson & Doyal, 2004; Khawaja et al., 2008; Orton, Griffiths, Green, & Waterman, 2012; Shakespeare-Finch & Wickham, 2010).

Spirituality and faith

Spirituality and religiosity were vital sources of strength and resilience in many of the studies. This included faith in a "Higher Being" or in traditional myths and
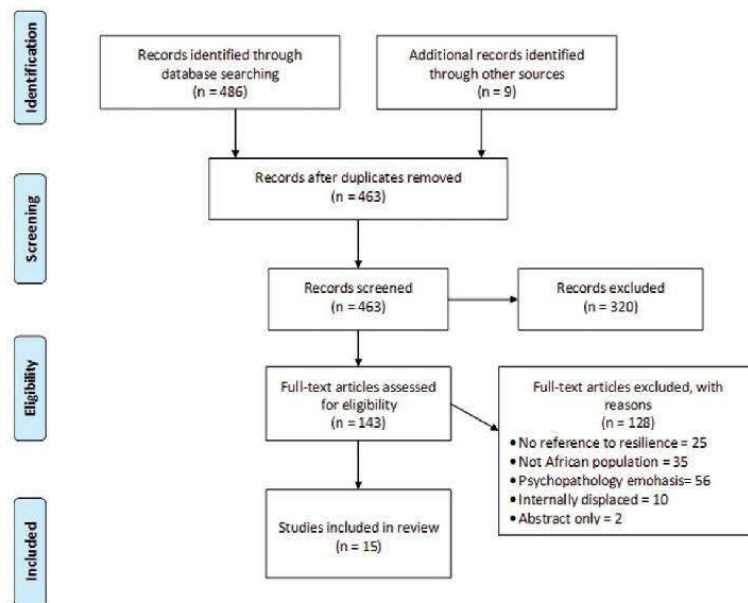
Figure 2. PRISMA flow diagram depicting literature search and screening process.

folkloric beliefs (Adelowo, 2012; Obrist & Büchi, 2008). In one study, participants undertook religious activities that included cleansing rituals during travels to their homelands to protect their health and for continual strength to overcome their migration challenges (Obrist & Büchi, 2008). Shakespeare-Finch and Wickham (2010) found that refugees' belief in God through prayer and faith helped them to stay strong and endure trauma and resettlement stressors in Australia. As one of the participants said, "I'm praying rather than just get sad" (Shakespeare-Finch & Wickham, 2010, p. 38). Likewise, women's reports of their HIV status revealed extraordinary resilience in the face of disease and residency status (Anderson & Doyal, 2004). The women in the Anderson and Doyal (2004) study drew strength from their religious and spiritual beliefs in staying strong through their HIV experiences. Schweittzer and colleagues (2007) found that spiritual beliefs also instilled a sense of control and will to live in Sudanese participants.

Researchers from the United States suggested a possible difference in the way that spirituality or religious beliefs impact on migrants (Bentley, Ahmad, & Thoburn, 2014). In their quantitative study of 59 Somali refugee Muslims from East Africa, Bentley and colleagues (2014) found that participants' religious practices did not protect them against post-traumatic stress disorders resulting from experiencing war and torture prior to migrating to America. According to the authors, the relationship between trauma and religiosity was important in the

studied group; however, the quantitative study design limited capacity to collect contextual information that may have explained responses.

External factors

The external factors are represented in the model as the meso-, exo-, and macro-systems level characteristics (Figure 1). These levels involve constructs of family and associated values, norms, and expectations (MHFA, 2005). In addition, the factors involve the local and wider communities of the migrants, which they used to help maintain equilibrium and achieve positive outcomes during the migration and resettlement.

Communalism

Communalism is central to Afrocultural ethos (Mbiti, 1970). The West African axiom, "I am because we are" and "since we are, therefore I am" (Mbiti, 1970, p. 141) illustrates the essence of communalism. It indicates interdependence and that the individual is responsibly linked to others in their social milieu (Boykin, Jagers, Ellison, & Albury, 1997). Communalism was a prominent factor highlighted in the reviewed studies. The sense of communalism was intertwined with the support that some of the participants received in achieving resilience to adapt to life in their new country. Despite being from different African countries, being African was a communal bond. One Sudanese participant stated, "So many different people came from Africa.… We become brothers, so everything we just cooperate together" (Shakespeare-Finch & Wickham, 2010, p. 38).

Communalism was also used by the African women in a New Zealand study (Adelowo, 2012) who reported developing resilience by remaining connected to their home countries, as well as associating with other migrant women in New Zealand. Additionally, the women utilized support from families, established connections at work, and accessed available New Zealand government support. Some of the participants stayed in touch with their homeland, not only for support but also to fulfill their social duties of providing financial and material aid to those remaining in their countries of origin (Adelowo, 2012; Obrist & Büchi, 2008).

Food represented communal ties, and eating African dishes was another way of keeping their memories of home alive (Adelowo, 2012; Obrist & Büchi, 2008). Others indicated that being connected to the local ethnic community groups and churches provided support during difficult periods (Adelowo, 2012). Many of the women recognized that the relationships they developed with people in their new country reduced their feelings of isolation.

Participants' use of technology was another reported form of communalism (Adelowo, 2012; Khawaja et al., 2008; Obrist & Büchi, 2008). Strategies for resilience in the context of migration challenges involved making efforts to stay in touch with friends and relatives, through communication technologies like short message service (SMS), email, and Skype. Striving to live in harmony with others

and accessing carer support as provided by the government were other docu-mented resilience strategies (Adelowo, 2012; Anderson & Doyal, 2004; Orton et al., 2012).

Communalism was also implicated in knowledge levels among some African refugees. The 20 participants in Lloyd's (2014) study, who were mainly Afri-can refugees living in Wagga Wagga, Australia, displayed communalism in building understanding about health in their new country through knowledge and information pooling. Knowledge and information pooling is a process whereby the fragments of knowledge that the migrants possess are pooled together to create a more comprehensive picture of a situation and are shared (Lloyd, 2014). Lloyd (2014) highlighted that the process was a meaningful, purposeful, and culturally congruent collective adaptation strategy in the use of health services and health literacy.

Empowerment

The ability of the migrants to become empowered in their lives individually and as a community, relative to the stressors and trauma of migration, was vital. The African migrants' resilience drove them to establish associations for networking to resist marginalization while encouraging their integration into the new country's culture (Bailey, 2012; De Tona & Lentin, 2010). Mwanri, Hiruy, and Masika (2012) also highlighted the need to empower new African refugees as a community to build their resilience, and they further discussed how an empowered community offers their individual members the opportu-nity to use their skills and resources to collectively meet community needs (Mwanri et al., 2012).

The external sources of strength and resilience also included social support. Participants in several studies reported sourcing support from family, making friends, and becoming a part of the local community, and through accultura-tion or financial settlement assistance provided to them by government (Adelowo, 2012; Schweitzer et al., 2007; Shakespeare-Finch & Wickham, 2010). The strong sense of determination and optimism in 11 Rwandan refu-gee university students, however, shaped the way in which they viewed the available social support differently (Webb, 2013). Seeing themselves as regular students requiring no special treatment on the campus, these Rwandan refu-gees resisted using and becoming dependent on the accessible refugee support within the university.

Researchers described developing resilience as a dynamic process because it is inherently social, involving not only a person's inner resources but also external resources (Lenette et al., 2013; Obrist & Büchi, 2008). Lenette and colleagues (2013) discussed the resilience of the four Sudanese single parents in their study as being person–environment connected. The resilience discus-sion in all of the reviewed articles depicted that the internal and external fac-tors were interwoven rather than operating in isolation. This attests to the

usefulness of the ecological framework for this review (Adelowo, 2012; Lenette et al., 2013; Lloyd, 2014; Schweitzer et al., 2007; Shakespeare-Finch & Wickham, 2010).

Discussion

In this review, we have highlighted the resilience of African migrants, which is vital given the increasing international migration to other countries around the globe. The evidence can be used to assist health care professionals working with African migrants to develop resilience in Western countries. Nearly all of the included studies in this review were heterogeneous in terms of populations and gender, which limits the application and generalizability of results. Most of the reviewed articles were published within the previous 5 years, which underscores the relatively recent emphasis on resilience of African migrants.

We learned from the reviewed literature that African migrants' resilience involves cognitive strategies and communalism. These elements are consistent with previous findings in the migration literature. Emphasizing the importance of support through a qualitative study, the domestic women workers from the Philippines in van der Ham, Ujano-Batangan, Ignacio, and Wolffers' (2014) study identified social support as a significant factor in the development of their personal strengths and resilience to migration experiences. In addition to receiving support from friends and family, people access support from their ethnic communities to overcome challenges. Correa-Velez, Gifford, and Barnett (2010) discussed the desire of the refugees in their study in integrating with their ethnic community as a form of support because it boosted their levels of morale and well-being. The refugees were 97 youths living in Melbourne, Australia, originating from 11 different countries including 68% born in Africa, 27% born in the Middle East, and the remaining 5% born in Eastern Europe and Southeast Asia. They were all attending English language schools as recently arrived refugees.

In a qualitative study of immigrant women's resilience in Canada, Rashid and Gregory (2014) found that immigrant women used cognitive strategies and personal resilience to overcome migration adversities. All four women were professionally educated prior to migration, but two of them could not secure employment that aligned with their educational qualifications. Consistent with the literature in this review, the women in Rashid and Gregory's (2014) study engaged in further education to improve their employability by undertaking language and computer skills for improved career prospects.

Religious beliefs and spirituality have been reported as useful in overcoming diverse issues in migrants' lives. As explained in the literature, women see faith and spirituality as a strong source of resilience because it creates a base upon which to plan their futures and provides the capacity to make meaning of their migration settlement challenges (Gladden, 2012; Kalathil, Bhakta, Daniel, Joseph, & Trivedi,

2011). Religion has been well documented as a common source of resilience for African refugees (Sherwood & Liebling-Kalifani, 2013). Religiosity and spirituality, which is often demonstrated through personal beliefs and value systems, were also evident among the Mexican Latino immigrants in the United States in achieving positive resettlement and acculturation and reducing acculturation challenges (Sanchez, Dillon, Concha, & De La Rosa, 2015; Steffen & Merrill, 2011). The importance of religiosity and faith in shaping and building the resilience capacity of African migrants cannot be overemphasized. Health care workers may be well positioned to support migrants' integration of experiences and adjustment (Gladden, 2012).

Empowerment is a key outcome of resilience. Similar empowerment for migrants was explicated in a study that explored the lives of Turkish migrant women who positively reestablished themselves into a new culture (Cakir & Yerin Guneri, 2011). Additionally, it has been documented that African women are strengthened and empowered if given the opportunity to verbalize their experiences or emotions (Clare, Goodman, Liebling, & Laing, 2014; Sherwood & Liebling-Kalifani, 2013). Likewise, listening to African migrant women's stories is foundational in planning social change for tackling the gender inequalities and health problems that the social status of these women may entail (Pavlish, 2005).

In their study that looked at the protective nature of Afrocentric worldview while comparing the perceived stress and psychological functioning of 112 African American young adults, Neblett, Hammond, Seaton and Townsend (2010) found that spirituality, positive affect, and communalism (Afrocentric worldview) operate as sources of resilience and achieving adaptive outcomes to stressful situations and other negative circumstances.

Successful communication is vital for the effective use of health care and knowledge transfer among migrants to achieve positive adaptation. The use of knowledge pooling in achieving resilience is an important aspect of the findings. The stress and adversity of reestablishment into a new culture served as a motivator for information seeking for the participants in Lloyd's (2014) study. The resilience of African migrants in the literature reviewed has demonstrated the diverse contribution from various fields in achieving resilience of migrants. For example, as explained by Hersberger (2011), the contribution of library and information services to resilience is vital. In recognizing people with negative life experiences, Hersberger (2011) believes that library personnel's knowledge of the concept of resilience can advance the services provided to their patrons whose negative experiences can impact the information that they seek. In another paper, the authors emphasized the power of knowledge and information for new settlers into a new country, especially because of the information landscapes that may not only be new, but could also be complex and difficult to navigate (Kennan, Lloyd, Qayyum, & Thompson, 2011). Information that new settlers may seek includes how to access basic needs such as housing, employment, education, and health. In this scenario, the library

and information services become useful. The information may also assist the new arrivals to become information rich and socially included in their new countries.

In accordance with the conceptual framework, considering the migration experience within the context of the host culture is important in the lives of African migrants. Essentially, our review has drawn attention to the paucity of research centering on Australian-dwelling West African migrant women's resilience. Discussion of the strength and resilience of voluntary migrants has, thus far, been minimal. Most research we located during our review focused on refugees. For example, Sudanese refugees are well studied, likely because of lengthy periods of conflict that resulted in the displacement of many into the developed world. The North African Sudanese, however, are not a homogeneous group (Tempany, 2009). Additionally, the amount of study on the North African Sudanese group might have skewed the research worldview of the African people. The majority of research on refugees, in general, centers on psychopathology rather than resilience in their migration stories (Hutchinson & Dorsett, 2012).

Kanyoro suggests that the empowering of the African migrant community is important (2002). Referred to as community hermeneutics, it is a process of creating community awareness about concepts such as patriarchy that are capable of diminishing African women from using agency to achieve resilience in difficult times (Kanyoro, 2002; Pavlish, 2005).

We applied an adapted Bronfenbrenner ecological model in this review to demonstrate how supportive environments contribute to the inherent resilience in African migrant women as well as the significance of context in achieving migrant resilience (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Graham, 2011). The interdependence of each systems level—micro, meso, exo, and macro—can facilitate healthy environments for human resilience; therefore, the resilience of migrants rests heavily on the strength of all elements of the system. The ecological model has strengthened this article by highlighting the importance of the government in providing services and resources to migrants in their resettlement, which can help to reduce blame on the migrants for their circumstances by others (Pulvirenti & Mason, 2011). Additionally, our use of the framework attests to the fact that migrant resilience is achieved with support of external sources including the wider community beyond just friends, families or their own ethnic communities (Pulvirenti & Mason, 2011). The adaptation of the Bronfenbrenner framework to this review also increases our understanding that the strengthening of human relationships within a nurtured environment is a positive step towards achieving and increasing resilience of migrants. Nurses, midwives, and allied workers caring for migrant women, therefore, could consider adopting the framework to inform their contact with migrant people.

Limitations

This review is a general discussion of African migrants. Further research into people from specific regions of the African continent may assist in exploring

convergence and divergence of issues presented. Although the population of interest in our study was women, the paucity of literature necessitated the inclusion of studies that included men. We were unable to examine just the women's experiences separate to those of men, which disallowed a focus on the gendered experience of migration. For future research, it will be valuable to explore literature on African men's resilience and compare and contrast outcomes with women. A number of articles were excluded due to their focus on psychopathology. Additionally, due to our requirement that papers be written in English and the focus be on migrants entering developed/industrialized nations of the world, other relevant works may have been excluded.

Conclusions

Women derive a number of sources of support from families, communities, and the wider societies around them. This review highlighted the ways resilience is enacted by African migrants and their capability to face migration challenges. The importance of African migrants' resilience to the welfare and healthy settlement of their families into a new culture, and indeed the benefits to the new communities, cannot be overemphasized.

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