Learning as transformation and empowerment: The case of African-Australian women in the Northern Territory of Australia

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Master of Educational Studies

Master of International & Community Development

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School of Education

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my guardian angels – my parents, Enock Kofi Apori and Florence Obaaku Amma Amponsaa Apori, my sister, Grace Ohenewaa Apori and my brother, Henry Nkansah-Dankwa Apori of blessed memory. Their passion, enthusiasm and legacies in education have been my source of inspiration in my learning journey throughout many unfamiliar terrains. Indeed, my transformative learning and empowering journey began with them. I am eternally grateful to them for all that I am, and hope to be. Forever in my mind, heart and soul and there they will remain for the rest of my life!
Declaration

I hereby declare that the work herein, now submitted as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the Charles Darwin University, is the result of my own investigations, and all references to ideas and work of other researchers have been specifically acknowledged. I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis has not already been accepted in substance for any degree, and is not being currently submitted in candidature for any other degree.

Signature:

Date: 30/10/14
Abstract

Over the past decade, the number of African migrant and refugee women in the Northern Territory of Australia has increased exponentially. This influx has generated a range of government and community responses to build these African women’s capacity to integrate into their host society through various forms of education. In spite of these adult education and learning programs, there is a dearth of empirical study to understand how education is used to enhance capacity building during settlement.

This study employs feminist qualitative case study to examine how African-Australian women utilise adult education opportunities to build their individual and community capacity during settlement in the Northern Territory. Purposive sampling was used to identify 24 participants whose accounts were collected utilising a semi-structured conversational style interview. The data was analysed using the theoretical and conceptual frameworks of transformative learning, feminist standpoint and women’s empowerment.

The study’s findings show that for the African-Australian women participants, education was an adaptive strategy for social and economic integration as well as a means of survival, a critical phase in reconstructing their identities and rebuilding their lives. Participation in learning activities empowered them to engage productively in the social, cultural, economic and political activities of their new society. The study demonstrates that education is a potent force which has enabled the 24 African-Australian women to find meaning in the challenges of their existence in the Australian multicultural mosaic.
The study makes a number of significant contributions including the provision of empirical data of African migrant and refugee women’s settlement and educational experiences in the Northern Territory. It also contributes to the debate and discourse on immigration, feminism and most importantly adult education and learning in cross-cultural contexts. The participants’ stories attest to transformation, empowerment and hope through adult education which can inform opportunities and educational pathways offered to other migrant and refugee groups in Australia and elsewhere.
Acknowledgements

The pursuit and completion of this study have been made possible by the invaluable support of many people. I was blessed and privileged in many ways to have some special people to support me during the course of my study, and for this I give the greatest honour and thanks to God.

First, I am indebted to my husband, Kwadwo and our children, Kwabena (Kobe), Agyemang (Agee) and Kojo who have been my constant source of love, my rock of support and encouragement. Throughout my study, they kept me grounded and encouraged me in diverse ways to strive for progress, instead of my often obsessive pursuit for perfection. My PhD journey was enriched by their company, intellectual and practical support as they provided a sounding board for my ideas and frustrations. This thesis is as much theirs as it is mine because my educational trajectory has been and is still an integral part of our family life. I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to my extended family members, Kofi Frempong-Mansoh, Felicia Asare, Emmanuel Obeng Apori, Samuel Obeng Apori, Kofi Adu-Darteh, Kofi Ntioro Apori, Yaw Saffu and Susan Saffu, whose sustaining love, value for education and words of wisdom encouraged me throughout my educational journey. I owe my family members more than I can express in words.

I have been fortunate to work with remarkable supervisors, and my heartfelt thanks go to Associate Professor Greg Shaw, Professor Ruth Wallace and Dr Jane Zhang for their tireless enthusiasm, and faith in me. They challenged, encouraged and prompted me
through endless and stimulating discussions, countless hours of reading, writing and rewriting that enriched my learning process. Their critical feedback and insights which were offered within a relationship of friendship have been immensely inspiring in this process. I will forever appreciate and treasure their friendship and support more than they can imagine. I would like to offer my sincere thanks to my former supervisors, Dr Mike Grenfell and Professor Ian Falk who believed in my PhD proposal and ability to undertake this research, and agreed to support my study even though they were both at the end of their academic careers with the University. Thank you for your valued contribution at the early stages of my study. I am also grateful to Associate Professor Brian Devlin and Professor Komla Tsey for their keen interest and encouragement for me to enroll in a PhD study by constantly reminding me of my ability to do a PhD.

Many supportive colleagues and friends offered encouragement, generous and insightful comments on various sections of this thesis. I would like to thank especially Aloysius Kamara, Martha Kamara, John Ingram, Paia Ingram, Merridy Malin, Kate Golebiowska, Catherine Koerner, Frederica Gaskell, Peter Bonsu, Esther Bonsu, Maleena Imbeah, Marie-Bernadette Harrison, Marguerite Baptiste-Rooke, Anna (Kia) Fletcher and Henk Huijser for their valuable friendship and shared understandings that were immensely beneficial for my study.

Finally, my deepest thanks and appreciation go to the African women who participated in this study for their generosity in sharing their life experiences with me. Without their stories this thesis would not have been possible, and I feel extremely honoured and privileged to share their stories in this thesis. And to my young African niece – you may not know how much your incessant questioning, “Auntie have you finished your book
about my mum?” propelled me into action several times when I was losing my own enthusiasm. I can now confidently say that I have finished “my book”.
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## Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AAFA</td>
<td>African Australian Friendship Association, NT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>Australian Broadcasting Corporation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABS</td>
<td>Australian Bureau of Statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACAL</td>
<td>Australian Council for Adult Literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AHRC</td>
<td>Australian Human Rights Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIHW</td>
<td>Australian Institute of Health Workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMEP</td>
<td>Australian Migrant English Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CALD</td>
<td>Culturally and Linguistically Diverse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCL</td>
<td>Canadian Council on Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDU</td>
<td>Charles Darwin University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRSS</td>
<td>Community Refugee Settlement Scheme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSWE</td>
<td>Certificate in Speaking and Writing English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIAC</td>
<td>Department of Immigration and Citizenship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIMA</td>
<td>Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIMIA</td>
<td>Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAEA</td>
<td>European Association for the Education of Adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECCV</td>
<td>Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>English as a Second Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FACS</td>
<td>Family and Children’s Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FECCA</td>
<td>Federation of Ethnic Communities Council of Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FGM</td>
<td>Female Genital Mutilation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FST</td>
<td>Feminist Standpoint Theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCIM</td>
<td>Global Commission on International Migration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GP</td>
<td>General Practitioner (Medical Doctor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HECS</td>
<td>Higher Education Contribution Scheme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSC</td>
<td>High School Certificate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HREOC</td>
<td>Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ICT  Information and Computer Technology
IHSS  Integrated Humanitarian Strategy Scheme
IOM  International Organisation for Migration
LOTE  Languages other than English
MCNT  Multicultural Council of Northern Territory
MDG  Millennium Development Goals
MP  Member of Parliament
NESB  Non-English Speaking Background
NGO  Non-Government Organisation
NT  Northern Territory
NTDE  Northern Territory Department of Education
NTCE  Northern Territory Certificate of Education
NTU  Northern Territory University
OECD  Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OMA  Office of Multicultural Affairs
PCA  Personal Care Assistant
PEAG  Police Ethnic Advisory Group
PNG  Papua New Guinea
PTA  Parent Teacher Association
RCOA  Refugee Council of Australia
RDH  Royal Darwin Hospital
REFLECT  Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques
RPL  Recognition of Prior Learning
RTO  Registered Training Organisation
SBS  Special Broadcasting Service
STD  Sexually Transmitted Disease
Support Group  Community Refugee Settlement Support Group
TAFE  Technical and Further Education
TEP  Tertiary Entrance Programme
TLT  Transformative Learning Theory
UN United Nations
UNDP United Nations Development Program
UNESCO United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organizations
UNHCR United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNFPA United Nations Population Fund Agency
Uni University
VET Vocational Education and Training
Chapter 1: The research and its context

The best way to help disadvantaged Australians [new Australians – migrants and refugees] is not just provide them with a monetary safety net, but to build their capacities to participate in the mainstream economic and social life of the nation … this means big new investments in education and training (Nicholson, Executive Director of Brotherhood of St. Laurence, 2007, p. 2).

This chapter provides an introductory background to the research project, which explores the role of adult education in the community capacity building of African migrant and refugee women in the Northern Territory (NT) of Australia. The chapter also identifies the problem statement and purpose of the study, the research questions, and the significance of the study. Additionally, it presents my story as an African migrant woman in Australia, a brief outline of the structure of the thesis, and a summary of the chapter.

1.1 Background

Migration is seen as a process of displacement and re-learning (Creese, 2011), which requires migrants and refugees to redefine, recreate and rebuild their identities, in their new context. In such a process, education will assist them to absorb and understand the sociocultural, economic, political and behavioural patterns of their host society.

Education has long been regarded as the most important means of building the capacity of migrants, refugees and their families for social and economic advancement (Alfred, 2003; Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2006a; Bron, 2003; Goodkind, 2002; Guo, 2006, 2010a). Several adult educators have addressed the role of adult education for transformative and emancipatory learning, community capacity building, individual and

In Australia, the rapidly changing demographics resulting from immigration creates differences and new opportunities in adult education for migrants. African migrants and refugees are the recent arrivals in Australia’s diverse multicultural population (Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC), 2009), and an understanding of their education, settlement and integration experience is critical for social cohesion and inclusion. This study is an attempt to explore and interpret how African migrant and refugee women utilise educational opportunities to build their individual and collective capacity to overcome settlement barriers and challenges. The study focuses on the types of formal, non-formal and informal learning that African migrant and refugee women experience to explicate the links that exist between education, individual and community capacity building, and how these indices can be employed to provide insights and understanding of migrant and refugee women’s transformation, empowerment, adaptation, and integration into their host society.

1.1.1 International migration and women

It is estimated that almost half of international migrants and refugees in the world are women (Global Commission on International Migration (GCIM), 2005; International Organisation for Migration (IOM), 2005; Zlotnick, 2003). Women form an increasing part of migratory movements, because economic restructuring and the shift away from male-dominated manual labour has seen the loss of male employment and increased
occupational choices and opportunities for women migrants (Inglis, 2003). The character of female migration has therefore changed, with a growing number of women migrating alone for employment reasons instead of following their male compatriots (Martin, 2004; Piper, 2005; United Nations Population Fund Agency (UNFPA), 2006). It is plausible these female migrants may face different opportunities and challenges from their male counterparts as they make adaptations and lifestyle changes to integrate into their host societies (Martin 2004; Simonen & Ndiaye, 2006) and would therefore require some form of adult education to build their capacity and facilitate their social transformation and integration.

1.1.2 Migration in Australia: African migrants and refugees

Australia is a culturally diverse nation with a strong migration history dating back to the 1700s (Jupp, 2001). Immigration has helped to shape the size and composition of Australia’s population as highlighted by Millbank, Phillips, and Bohm, who state that “Australia’s population is drawn from 185 countries and over 200 languages are spoken at home” (2006, p. 1). While people from Eurocentric backgrounds have retained numerical, cultural and linguistic domination in Australia, the increased levels of migration of people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds after World War II has contributed significantly to Australia’s current multicultural society and transformed the country into an ethno-culturally diverse nation (DIAC, 2011b).

There is limited literature and inconsistencies with respect to the trends in African migration and settlement in Australia. Although there were few Africans in the First Fleet of convicts to Australia in 1788 (Jakubowicz, 2010; Kennedy & Lucas, 2001;
Pybus, 2001), many African migrants and refugees arrived in Australia after World War II (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2008; Okai, 2001). The recent wave of African migration commenced in the 1960s as students who stayed on as skilled migrants on completion of their studies. Many of those migrants had come from former British colonies with a good command of English language, and shared common affinities and links of the Commonwealth fraternity with Australians (Chiswick & Miller, 2006; Okai, 2001). Since the 1980s increasing numbers of people from Eritrea, Ethiopia, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia and Sudan have arrived in Australia under the humanitarian refugee program (Jakubowicz, 2010; Nsubuga-Kyobe & Dimock, 2002). Currently, Africans represent the fastest growing communities in Australia, accounting for 5.6 per cent of the overseas born population (ABS 2008b; DIAC, 2007a; Hugo, 2009).

1.1.3 African migrants and refugees in the Northern Territory

The NT is the smallest migrant and refugee settlement location in Australia, with about 0.8 per cent of the national settlement target (DIAC, 2007b). Despite this, the NT cities of Alice Springs and Darwin have become homes to many African refugees. Abu Duhou estimates that “humanitarian migrants from the African continent has constituted almost 95% of the offshore humanitarian settlement program in the Northern Territory since 2000” (2006, p. 1). DIAC also reports that in the NT, “for humanitarian target group entrants over the last five years, Africa has been the only significant source region comprising almost 96 per cent of intake” (2007b, p. 21). The family and skilled migration programs have also contributed to the growth of the African population, as noted by the Multicultural Council of Northern Territory (MCNT), “the government’s intentions to create a flow of skilled labour to regional centers has put the NT in a prime
position to benefit from this steady growth in population” (2004, p. 9). Even though there was no accessible data from the ABS for Africans in the 1996 census, by the end of 2008 there were about 1,500 foreign-born Africans from many countries on the African continent living in the NT (Table 1.1). Figure 1.1 is a map of the countries in Africa.

Figure 0.1: Map of Africa
Table 0.1 Population of Sub-Saharan African countries represented in the Northern Territory 1999-2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Countries</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Botswana</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Mauritius</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burundi</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Mozambique</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cameroon</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congo</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>Seychelles</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eritrea</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sierra-Leone</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gambia</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>South Sudan</td>
<td>411</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guinea</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Tanzania</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivory Coast</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Uganda</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Zambia</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberia</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>Zimbabwe</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,476</strong></td>
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Source: Adapted from DIAC, Darwin NT, October, 2009; Commonwealth of Australia, 2005

For African migrant and refugee women adult education is a necessity. Living in a host society that is rife with change, education helps “create capacity within people to manage change in their community … [and] to define their values, cultures, and traditions in ways that they can be preserved while participating in the ever-changing broader society which at times has little respect for their traditions” (Jeanetta, 2006 p. 13). Regardless of the methods utilised, education plays a crucial role in transmitting a society’s history, beliefs and values, as well as the knowledge required for successful economic and social functions. Merriam and Caffarella (1999) draw attention to the fact that engaging in learning activities is used by adults as a coping mechanism for dealing with life events and transition. These trigger events and life transitions include such things as career and family changes that can cause adults to engage in learning activities.
For the African migrant and refugee women in this study, it is clear that the trigger events were migration, settlement and integration into a different sociocultural context – a major factor in successful settlement.

1.2 Problem statement and the aims of the study

Though migration is a prominent feature of contemporary society, there have been relatively few attempts to look beneath the surface of mass movements of people to extricate the specific experiences of women (Buijs, 1993). In spite of the current influx of migrant and refugee women from developing to developed countries, a paucity of research exists to unearth their subjugated knowledges that facilitate their social inclusion in their host communities (Boyd, 2006; IOM, 2005; Piper, 2008a). The experiences and perspectives of migrant and refugee women are neglected thereby making it difficult to understand their issues and role in the whole migration and settlement process (Berger, 2004a, 2004b; Boyd & Grieco, 2003). Women’s experiences have been defined through men’s lenses, and unless their experiences are made visible through studies such as this one, which focuses on women, their useful knowledge is likely to “remain confined within the closed space of individual experience” (Somers & Gibson, 1994, p. 174). It is therefore extremely important for new studies to explore female migrants’ experiences, as women’s experiences do not always mirror that of men. Wong calls for:

The adoption of transnational/global analysis of immigrant women’s experiences … [because] failure to do so … limits researchers’ ability to fully understand both the material conditions that structure women’s lives in diverse locations and the strategic practices different women use to counter these conditions … women and their experiences as individuals … must be brought to the forefront in migration research (2000, p. 68).
In Australia, Fincher, Foster and Wilmot (1994) suggest that the dearth of literature on women migrants is due to gender biases in historical and social research, and a profusion of misconceptions and generalisations. Additionally, the discourse that surrounds migrant women constructs them as passive appendages to men in the migration process (Kofman, 1999; Zlotnik, 1995). As mentioned earlier in the chapter, African women form an integral part of the African people who have migrated to Australia recently through Humanitarian, Skilled or Family migration streams (DIAC, 2007a, 2007b; Hugo, 2009; Jakubowicz, 2010). Although much has been written about migrants and refugees in Australia, few studies have been devoted to African migrants and refugees, and even less has been written about African-Australian women. Hugo argues that:

The [movement] of Africans to Australia has undergone substantial changes over the Post War period. However, the understanding of the consequences of this movement … is little understood … There is need for more investigations of the implications and impacts of this movement … [Australia] cannot hope to manage migration or have policies which are able to maximize its benefits to the country and minimize its negative effects if there is not a sound knowledge of the dynamics of that movement (2004, pp. 95-96)

The number of African migrant and refugee women in the NT has increased exponentially since 2000 (Abu Duhou, 2006; DIAC, 2007b) and currently outnumber that of men (see Tables 1.2 and 1.3).

### Table 0.2  Gender distribution of humanitarian group entrants, Northern Territory 2002-2003 to 2006-2007

<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>385</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>561</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from DIAC (2007b), NT Settlement trends and needs of new arrivals – 2007
Table 0.3  Gender distribution of non-humanitarian group entrants, Northern Territory 2002-2003 to 2006-2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
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<td>84</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>482</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>631</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from DIAC (2007b), NT Settlement trends and needs of new arrivals – 2007

The majority of these women have arrived as part of the special Woman at Risk humanitarian program, and others as skilled and family dependent migrants. Their cultural, political and socioeconomic backgrounds are fundamentally different from the wider Australian population, and present significant challenges in terms of adaptation and integration. Whilst these migrant and refugee women are working hard to reconstruct their identities and rebuild their lives, in 2007 the then Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, the Hon. Kevin Andrews, stated that “recent refugee and humanitarian arrivals from the region of Africa are continuing to experience difficulty in successfully settling in Australia, and the result is high levels of community concern” (cited in Spinks, 2009, p. 8). DIAC also reported that:

In the NT some Africans have found it difficult to manage the transition to cultural family roles that are the norm in Australia. For example, there is greater independence within the family unit for women and children in comparison to most traditional African cultures (2007b, p. 28).

Even though Africans come from different ethnic, cultural and social groups, such statements homogenised and demonised all African migrants and refugees, and impacted negatively on the African community in diverse ways. For example, these statements, among others, generated public debates (NT News, 2009; Spinks, 2009; The Courier Mail, 2008) that revealed xenophobic and ethnocentric views about African-Australians,
thus reinforcing their social exclusion. Tensions and discrimination were also exacerbated within and among the diverse African communities and the wider Australian society because “people from Africa are stereotyped and huge generalisations are made about Africans” (Pittaway & Muli, 2009 p. 22). Tom Calma (2009), former Australian Human Rights Race Discrimination Commissioner asserts that:

> It is facts, not myths, which tell the truth. And it is listening to people tell their stories that enables the wider community to begin to actually understand and relate to an experience and to humanize and personalize those who appear to be ‘different’ (cited in Moroney, 2009, p. 3).

Despite the experiences of disenfranchisement, torture and trauma that many African women have encountered due to the sociocultural patriarchal traditions and civil wars in their countries of origin, the majority of them are resilient people, who are determined and work hard to contribute to the development of their families and their community. Within a short period of arrival in the NT, many African-Australians learn English, pursue education in Technical and Further Education (TAFE) and higher education institutions, participate in the labour force, engage in their new community’s activities and secure successful lifestyles for themselves and their families (Abu-Duhou, 2006; Saffu, 2010). Such firsthand stories and experiences must be told because public opinion based on the media hardly acknowledges the fact that African migrants and refugees are “succeeding in building their lives in Australia and … contributing to the richness of our social, cultural and economic lives” (Pittaway & Muli, 2009, p. 23). This study aims to increase the level of knowledge and understanding of African migrant and refugee women’s experiences of successful change, transition and integration into the host society.
To date, the limited but growing literature on African-Australians consists of descriptive reports from government agencies and hardly explores issues relative to understanding the processes through which African migrant and refugee women acquire knowledge and skills to build their capacity and survive in Australia (Millbank et al., 2006). Harrell-Bond (1999) contends that agency in-house studies do not question the basic assumptions that lie behind their own policies and practice. Furthermore, many of these studies have been undertaken by non-Africans with limited knowledge of the diversity amongst African migrants and refugees, and their coping strategies for the overwhelming settlement challenges they face. African people researching and writing about African migrant and refugee women’s experiences can bring a depth of analysis from their own insights, experiences and perspectives. An African-Australian community leader makes the point that:

> There is so much that has been said about Africans in the last couple of years, but if you look at who is writing it, it is often done from the perspectives of everyone but African Australians … What a difference it will make if it is our voices that appear and our voices that are listened to (cited in Nield, 2010, p. 4).

This research gives a voice to African-Australian women to share their experiences to demystify the myths that surround their everyday existence, and highlight their capacities that have been built through adult education and their contribution to Australia’s sociocultural, economic and political development.

The African migrant population consists of migrants and refugees; however, there have been no integrated studies on the collective experience of both African migrant and refugee women in the NT. The only research project (Abu Duhou, 2006) on Africans in the NT focused on African refugee groups. Similarly, the majority of studies conducted in other Australian states have addressed English language literacy, health,
unemployment, housing and settlement issues of refugee groups (Atem & Wilson, 2008; Dhanji, 2009; Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) 2003; Flanagan, 2007; Manderson & Allotey, 2003; McDonald-Wilmsen et al. 2009). The few research studies into the role of education in migrants and refugees’ survival in Australia have focused on children and adolescents (Miller, Mitchell & Brown, 2005; Naidoo, 2008; Taylor, 2008), and the significance for adults, particularly women, remain relatively under-researched (Hannah, 1999). For the past decade, women have become adult education’s fastest growing client base (ABS, 2008b; Jackson, 2003; Stone, 2009) and African women as part of this client group should be a focus of research to make their issues visible. This novel study is an attempt to address this gap in the literature. While there is considerable literature that supports the need, role and effect of literacy and vocational skill development on migrant and refugee individuals (Allender, 1999; Galbally, 1978; Sivamalai & Nsubuga-Kyobe, 2009; Windle & Miller, 2012), there is limited literature on the general post-migration educational experiences of adult migrants and refugees in Australia. In particular, there is scant literature on the similar experiences of African migrant and refugee women migrating to regional Australia such as Alice Springs and Darwin in the NT.

A study focusing on African migrant and refugee women, as the most recent ethnic group arriving from a developing country was warranted. The lack of research has implications for the ability to understand the changes in migrant and refugee women’s lives resulting from the educational opportunities they have accessed, and the role such experiences play in their settlement and integration, and that of their families. It also prevents recognition that the increased feminisation of migration may be creating new
professional landscapes that provide women with educational opportunities and the ability to engage and contribute to their adopted community’s development. This study addresses an urgent need for research that provides better understanding of the subjective dimensions of migrant women’s experiences.

The above discussion particularly highlights the visibility and voice problems of African migrant and refugee women in the NT. The case study presented here therefore aims to give voice and visibility to African migrant and refugee women by examining their struggles and achievements, and elucidate the critical role of adult education in community capacity building. It also aims to explore the women’s lived experiences, and examine the learning opportunities they access, the ones they create, the coping strategies utilised in the process, and how their new learning facilitates their ability to engage productively in their host society. Better understanding of how migrant and refugee women perceive their education and learning activities and the impact on their lives and communities will highlight, and help re-theorise the social, cultural, economic and civic dimensions of migration and adult education.

In seeking to discern how the women’s participation in educational programs and activities transforms their lives and empowers them to confidently engage in Australian society, the study also aims to elucidate the capability of adult education to transform individuals and their communities into productive agents of change. This serves a wider goal of deepening our understanding of adult education’s social, cultural, economic and political role, and demonstrates empirically a number of assertions about adult education’s contribution to human and social capital, community capacity building, transformative and emancipatory learning that has already been made in the theoretical

Finally, the study aims to bring African migrant and refugee women’s lived experiences from the shadows and margins to the centre of scholarly discourse, and help to project their educational experiences and contributions as agents of development and social change so that their individual and collective development, achievements and contributions in their new society is better understood. To achieve these aims, the following questions guided the study:

**Key research question:**

What is the role and impact of adult education in the settlement and integration process of African-Australian women in the NT?

**Sub-questions:**

1. What pre-migration qualifications, skills and experience do African-Australian women possess?

2. What opportunities does migration provide African-Australian women in the NT?

3. What barriers and challenges do African-Australian women encounter in their migration, settlement and education process in the NT?

4. Why and how do African-Australian women utilise adult education opportunities to build their capacity?

5. How does African-Australian women’s capacity to operate in their community change through adult education?
1.3 Significance of the study

Usher points out that despite the growing scope and magnitude of women in international migration, “there is a noticeable gap in research and analysis on how [women’s] migration is linked to attaining development” (2005, p. 5). Women constitute almost half of all migrants and refugees around the world, and Simonen and Ndiaye assert that:

The absence of gender-specific data hinders the understanding and appropriate assessment of women’s role and needs in the migration process … [therefore] further research on female migration – at all stages of the life cycle – is necessary to understand its challenges and opportunities and to ensure the inclusion into different agendas (2006, p. iii).

It is obvious that this anomaly contributes to the continuing invisibility of migrant and refugee women to development planners, policy makers and practitioners. African female migrants and refugees outnumber men in the NT (DIAC, 2007b), but migration and settlement literature disguises their significance in settlement. Migrant and refugee women’s experiences are represented in a distorted manner, as the majority of the limited literature often describes their deficits, lack of resources and power, and frequent denunciations of injustices. Little material acquaints the public with the rich creative energies and lived experiences of migrants and refugees (Hannah, 1999; Manderson & Allotey, 2003). This study explores the lived experiences of the emerging minority group of African migrant and refugee women to uncover the actual facts about their everyday lived experiences, that “have been hidden, inaccessible, suppressed, distorted, misunderstood, ignored” (Dubois, cited in Bergen, 1993, p. 200). In order to provide appropriate settlement and educational services for African migrant and refugee women, it is important to understand them as individuals and as part of the collective that makes up Australia’s multicultural mosaic.
Australia is one of the leading immigrant countries in the world (Hugo, 2004; Jupp, 2001) but recent public debates have presented negative images of African migrants and refugees (Andrews, 2007; DIAC, 2007b). Unprecedented attention has also been directed towards asylum seekers, refugees and migrants from CALD and different religious backgrounds. Understanding the settlement, education and learning experiences that contribute to African migrant and refugee women’s ability to integrate successfully is critical to promote and maintain a positive, cohesive and harmonious multicultural social environment. This research therefore provides timely and much needed analysis for informed and critical debate and discourse on such issues.

Due to traditional settlement distribution, with the majority of migrants and refugees settling in large cities in the south and east of Australia (Taylor & Stanovic, 2005), the limited migration research and associated policies have focused on these areas, overlooking the NT, and leading to a huge gap in immigration scholarship. The process of migrant and refugee settlement and integration is inherently local and requires local research to project the real experiences and issues. With an increase in the migrant and refugee population in the NT, this study is significant and timely in providing insightful knowledge and a resource for adult education practitioners, policy makers, migrant and refugee communities and work-related organisations for the development and evaluation of policies, programs and support services for migrants and refugees.

On the issue of increasing numbers of non-English speaking background (NESB) learners participating in tertiary education, Elgort et al., (2003) suggest that education providers should “collect and analyze data on attitudes and perceptions of this group of learners … [for] new teaching and learning approaches” (cited in Taylor, 2010, p. 10).
Similarly, given the increasing demographic changes in Australian society, in which more educational opportunities for African migrant and refugees is becoming prevalent, this study is critical in helping adult education practitioners to provide appropriate programs. This knowledge and understanding is crucial for the development of education and learning policies and programs, and effective social service responses, and contribute to the few, but steadily growing, scholarly literature on African-Australians. A better understanding of African migrant and refugee women’s lived educational and learning experiences could be useful for a number of reasons. First, such an understanding may provide conceptual information and case scenarios for a group whose schemata are as yet relatively undeveloped (Sharp, 2005; Nsubuga-Kyobe, 2005; Udo-Ekpo, 1999). Second, it may offer useful insights for policy makers and practitioners to reflect on and apply to their practice. Third, studies of this nature could provide access to other stakeholders’ knowledge, actions and deliberations, and become part of a process of opening up these areas for analysis, scrutiny, debate and further research projects (Silburn, Earnest, Butcher & de Mori, 2008). This research therefore contributes new knowledge to fill the gap in the literature, makes a scholarly contribution to the ongoing adult education, community capacity building, migration, settlement and integration discourse, as well as provides useful information to guide policy makers and practitioners in formulating appropriate and relevant policies and programs to enhance practice. Such programs can also foster the development of skills and transformation of meaning-making perspectives, and improve migrants and refugees’ quality of life and effective participation in their new society.
Finally, immigration impacts on individuals, groups and societies because currently all nation states live and operate in a world “where national borders are permeable; information and ideas flow at lightning speed; and communities and workplaces reflect the growing diversity of cultures, languages, attitudes, and values” (Green, 2002, p. 12). This makes the role of adult education in building people’s capacity to survive in such a world quite critical. It is therefore imperative for policymakers and adult education practitioners to understand migration, settlement and integration issues and the impact of adult education and learning on migrants, refugees and local communities to enhance their program development and teaching and learning practices.

1.4 Theoretical and conceptual framework
This study seeks to understand how African migrant and refugee women utilise adult education and learning opportunities to build their individual and community capacity to overcome their settlement and integration challenges and inform teaching and learning practice. Transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 2000) social critical theory (Freire, 1972) and feminist theories (Collins, 2000; Harding, 1987; Smith, 1987) are appropriate frameworks for the study, as they are all associated with the critical theory paradigm. These theoretical frameworks utilise “ideological perspectives to draw attention to the needs of people and social action” (Creswell, 1998, p. 78). Theories grounded in a critical theory paradigm expose the oppression experienced by minority groups, and present opportunities for these people to talk about their lived experiences and realities. Creswell asserts that using these ideologies to interpret human experience “reflect a heartfelt need to promote social action, to lift the ‘voices’ of marginalized or oppressed people, to explore gender issues that have served to dominate and repress women, or to
bring about general change in our society” (p. 78). These perspectives have been used extensively as interpretive lenses to understand education and learning experiences in different education contexts, such as language acquisition and literacy development, counselling, cultural adaptation, intercultural awareness, women’s education, mentoring and professional development (Cranton, 2006; Freire, 1972, 1973; King, 2005; Magro & Ghorayshi, 2011; Mezirow, 1978, 2000; O’Sullivan, 2002; Shaw, 1999; Taylor, 1994, 2006; Tisdell, 2000).

1.5 Research methodology

In planning this study, it became apparent that my research journey was beyond a mere academic exercise. Rather, it incorporated a personal search toward a deeper understanding of my research participants and myself as a product of a specific cultural, social, historical, political, economic and educational context. Consequently, I needed a research approach that could be both emancipatory and empowering as I attempted to explore and present the experiences and voices of the African migrant and refugee women from the margins to the centre of scholarly discourse (Collins, 1998b; Crenshaw, 1991, hooks, 2000; Sandoval, 2000; Tillman, 2002).

Patriarchal powers have silenced migrant and refugee women’s experiences. It is only recently that academic study has acknowledged this silencing (Piper, 2008a; Simonen & Ndiaye, 2006; Usher, 2005). I therefore embarked on this study from a feminist perspective and adopted a feminist case study research approach (Reinharz, 1992) using qualitative interpretive methodology to explore African women’s migration and educational experiences. This methodology “honours the lived experiences and
knowledge of the people involved” (Gatenby & Humphries, 2000, p. 89). In relation to this study, this notion suggested a focus on how participants talk about their experiences, how they construct their own meanings around their experiences, what role these experiences have played in their settlement and integration into the wider community, and how they value and contextualise them into their everyday public and private lives. Feminist scholars argue that the multi-paradigmatic approach in feminism offers a powerful set of criteria for the reconsideration of the field of migration and migrant women’s education, believing in essence that a feminist inquiry gives primacy to women at both the theoretical and practical level (Reinharz, 1992). Because women’s lives and experiences can never truly be understood without listening to their voices, Lentin argues for consideration of “women’s own accounts of their lives as primary documents for interpreting their lives” (1997, p. 5). Therefore by centering African-Australian migrant and refugee women’s voices in this study, “we not only enhance and deepen our knowledge, we also put women’s claim to be heard … firmly on the feminist political agenda” (p. 14). Chapter 3 provides a more detailed description of the research methodology. However, before outlining the terms and definitions, and the structure of this study, it is important to explain how I came to be situated in a context that enabled my commitment to education and learning, particularly women’s education, to develop into this formal study. This study constitutes feminist research because it is a study of women, for women, by a woman. Therefore beginning with the basic feminist tenet of commencing with the self (Brewster, 1988), it is apposite to begin by “mapping where I have been” (Kamler, 2001, p. 7) in order to contextualise my research interest and the intersection between my personal experiences and the experiences of the participants in this study. Kamler (2001) argues that it is important for a researcher to work within what
one knows and still allow for a “critical engagement with experience” (p. 7). This study is in part evidence of such a critical, personal engagement, as there is a link between my own personal experiences of migration and adult education and that of the participants in the study.

1.6 Personal narrative: My story as an African migrant woman

My life journey has had a tremendous impact on my desire to research this domain, as the research topic is situated in my lived experience as an African migrant woman, wife and working mother juggling demanding responsibilities of motherhood, paid work, part-time studies and voluntary work. The study mirrors my life journey because my lived experience is made up of experiences of both domestic and international migration, as well as experiences of adult education as a student and a practitioner. I was born into a Ghanaian matriarchal society of strong and remarkable women, and progressive and supportive men, who believed in the value of education as an empowerment tool for both females and males, hence encouraging my sisters and myself through tertiary studies. After my undergraduate studies, I married and subsequently joined my husband in England where he was pursuing postgraduate studies.

Ghana, my country of origin in West Africa, was colonised by the British. One of the long-lasting legacies of colonialism on most African countries, including Ghana, was the imposition of the colonialisit religion (Christianity) and language (English) through formal education on the local populations. As a result of colonisation all forms and levels of formal education were delivered through the English language and one’s functional literacy and intelligence were measured by one’s proficiency in the English
language and understanding of British sociocultural and political institutions. As in other colonised nations, the colonial education disrupted and devalued the sociocultural, economic and political structures of Ghanaian society, as it planted the seeds for the extension and sustenance of imperialism (Meredith, 2006; Said, 1994; Wane, 2008; Watanaga’s, 1986). Said aptly refers to colonial education as the “process or policy of establishing and maintaining an empire, lingering where it has always been in [the] general cultural sphere as well as in specific political, ideological economic and social practices” (1994, p. 9).

Another practice of colonialism in Ghana was the creation of educated elites and wealth amongst people who were prepared to move from their place of birth to work elsewhere in the country or go to Britain for further education and employment; such people usually returned home with both intellectual and material wealth. This spurred a positive belief in migration in almost all Ghanaian societies. For instance, amongst my Akan tribe, there is a saying, wote faako a wote w’adee so, which literally means, if you stay in one place, you sit on your personal development and you do not progress. This saying, explains the fact that migration is not a new phenomenon to Ghanaians, and that migrants have often been hailed as dynamic and entrepreneurial members of society because they are prepared to venture beyond the confines of their communities and countries in order to create new opportunities for themselves and their families (Hill, 1997). Therefore, migration is actually encouraged in Ghana, because it is believed to bring better livelihoods and futures for migrants and their families (Manuh, 2005).

Apart from working as an adult educator and undertaking graduate studies as an adult, migration and its consequences have been a defining feature of my adult life because I
have migrated many times (England, Nigeria, United States, Papua New Guinea, Canada and Australia). In all destinations, apart from Australia, there was a very strong Ghanaian and African community that provided sociocultural links for me. Despite being foreign and different, the supportive sub-culture understood me in these host countries. At the time of my arrival in Darwin in the Northern Territory of Australia, there were few African migrants and refugees in my new community; I was discernibly different, and thus less well understood. For a migrant, nothing is as traumatic as being uprooted from one’s country of origin and familiar surroundings into a completely new and strange environment with no sense of direction. Personally, I have experienced the contradictory emotions that migration often brings; the excitement and sense of freedom that arise from new beginnings, and the simultaneous sense of loss, pain and grief that accompany departures and farewells. As an African migrant in Australia reconfiguring my identity in my new country, my sense of loneliness and alienation motivated me to support international students, and African migrants and refugees, particularly women, who were also entering new worlds distinctively different from their familiar worlds. I joined a community women’s group, the United Nations (UN) Community Settlement Support group that supported migrants and refugees in their settlement process in the NT. With the influx of African refugees in the NT in the late 1990s, I voluntarily ran cross-cultural programs for service providers and community groups that supported African refugees. I was also a foundation member of the African-Australian Friendship Association (AAFA) in the NT in 1999. This community group organised various activities and integration workshops that aimed at giving newly-arrived Africans some sense of belonging and guidance. I worked particularly with the women and children on a range of social and educational issues. During this period, they shared their personal
migration and adult education stories with me, their struggles with balancing their roles as wives, mothers, workers and students. These stories were ones of challenges, tremendous determination, overwhelming courage and resilience. As I became familiar with their stories, I was impressed by the sheer creativity and ingenuity in the lives of migrant and refugee women across all age groups. My ambition to explore and seek a better and deeper understanding of the community capacity building of these African-Australian women through adult education increased, culminating in my desire to undertake this study.

On my arrival in Australia, my passion to explore and increase my understanding of the role of women in contemporary society increased enormously. This is partly because Australia, like many other developed countries, has implemented significant policies in an attempt to recognise the latent position of women in contemporary society. Having worked in the field of education – primary, secondary and tertiary levels – I am interested in the ways in which the educational process intersects with social change. I am particularly concerned with the connections between feminist politics and the role education can play in the development of societies with a commitment to social justice. I was perturbed when I found out through my academic work that much of the writings about women of colour, particularly African women on the continent, and African women in diaspora, perpetuated stereotypes and power relations. Some of the literature misrepresented African women because they trivialised these women’s experiences. My personal experiences with African women migrants and refugees elsewhere and in the NT, and the limited literature that did not pathologise African women, prompted me to believe that there had to be a counter-narrative. A narrative of these women’s
experiences as they perceived them, as well as narratives that celebrated their resiliency and creativity in the face of insurmountable challenges.

Furthermore, my social location and value-orientation as a middle-aged African woman community advocate, with prior experiences, educational attainments and social status giving me a privilege that other African migrant and refugee women in the NT may not have, compelled me to present and herald the voices of the silenced and unheard (Alcoff, 1991; Byrd, 2009; hooks, 1989; Nzenza, 1995). Even though Nako cautions that it is “dangerous for the privileged person to speak for the less privileged because that often reinforces the oppression of the latter” (2001, p. 188), other African researchers including Adu-Poku argue that “though representing others is problematic, it remains crucial [that African researchers] speak for those groups who have remained silenced, owing to specific material, intellectual and social circumstances” (2001, p. 165). According to Alcoff (1991) “the social location of the person who speaks or writes, determines how the message is heard, and the impact it makes upon its audience and readers” (cited in Adu Poku, 2001, p. 166). Due to the social location of African researchers, they can “confront power structures … in order to build strong foundations for social change” (p. 166). By virtue of my gender, cultural, political and historical experiences, I felt I had a unique role to play in a study of migrant and refugee women, which might shed insights and offer deeper understandings that go beyond the prevailing academic categories. Consequently, I decided to study how adult education enables migrant and refugee women to be authors of their lives while undergoing the settlement and integration process, and elucidate the strategies used in dealing with challenges and barriers. In naming my migration sites, and my life and educational experiences, I locate
myself geographically, historically and socioculturally to show how my identity is shaped by migration, education and colonialism. Hall and Nelson (1996) indicate that all writers speak from a particular place, and that it is important they locate their experiences and culture in their writing. My identity and experiences are therefore a mixture of African and Eurocentric cultures underpinned by a reminiscence of the multiple influences of Ghanaian culture, which is a rich blend of matriarchal, African traditional religion, Christian and British colonialist world views (Amadiume, 1997; Dei, 2012; Donkor, 2005; Gyekye, 1997; Manuh, 2007). This study has also raised the issue of language, as English is the language of my intellectual make-up but not my emotional make-up (Rao, 1995). English is not my first language yet in this study I have conveyed my findings in a language that is not my own—but the spirit is my own.

1.7 Terms and definitions

I use the term African-Australian to encompass the great diversity of people who have migrated and are living in Australia from African backgrounds (Moroney, 2009).

I use the terms migrant or immigrant, and refugee (used interchangeably at some points in the study) to distinguish between the two main processes through which people attain permanent status in Australia. Migrant or immigrant refers to people in all categories of new arrivals in Australian society who intend making Australia their new home through defined processes in the Australian Immigration Act. This includes people who arrive in Australia as part of the Skilled or Family Visa. An immigrant or migrant is therefore a person who seeks lawful permission to come to Australia to establish permanent residence. Skilled Migrants are migrants who possess skills and abilities that
are valued and needed in the Australian labour market (DIMIA, 2003) and Family Migrants are “migrants who are selected on the basis of their family relationships with a sponsor in Australia” (Flanagan, 2007, p. 4). Refugee refers to anybody who came to Australia on a humanitarian visa. Australia’s definition of refugee is based on the United Nations Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) defines a refugee in the 1951 Convention Refugee Article 1A (2) as:

A person who owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his [or her] nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail him [or her] self of the protection of that country … [and] is unwilling to return to it (UNHCR, 2002, p. 1).

The Woman at Risk Visa is a resettlement program for refugee women who are heads of their households and their family units due to the difficulties they face in refuge. They are identified as:

Women who have protection problems, and are single heads of families, or are accompanied by an adult male who is unable to support and assume the role of the head of the family. They may suffer from a wide range of problems including expulsion, refoulement and other security threats, sexual harassment, violence, abuse, torture and different forms of exploitation (UNHCR, 2002 p. 13).

DIMIA, DIMA, and DIAC, are acronyms for the Australian Immigration Department. Since it was founded in 1945, the Department has had six different names, and for the past five years the Immigration Department has been called the Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA), the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA); and currently, the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC). For consistency, the department is referred to as the Immigration Department throughout the study, although citations refer to appropriate nomenclatures.
**Settlement and integration:** The National Population Council (1988) describes settlement as “the process by which an immigrant establishes economic viability and social networks following immigration in order to contribute to, and make full use of, opportunities generally available in the receiving society” (cited in DIMIA 2002, p. 1). The term, integration is fluid and is often used interchangeably with the terms adjustment, adaptation and acculturation, and treated as a process as well as an outcome-change in attitudes and behaviours (Guo, 2011; Jedwab, 2006). Valtonen presents both settlement and integration as processes and outcomes. She refers to settlement as “the activities and processes of becoming established after arrival in the country of settlement” (2004, p. 70) and integration as a “process by which settling persons become part of the social, institutional and cultural fabric of a society” (p. 74). In this study, the term integration during settlement refers to migrants’ ability to engage effectively in the social, cultural, economic and political activities of the host community without having to relinquish their own ethnic identity and culture (Jupp, 2003). Integration may therefore include economic integration into the labour market; social integration into the networks and civil society, which may include informal networks of friends and neighbours to formal networks of membership in organisations; and civic or political integration into the electoral and governance process.

**1.8 The structure of the thesis**

The thesis is organised in seven chapters:

**Chapter 1** sets the scene and provides background information to the study. It provides an overview of recent migration trends of African migrant and refugee women to the
NT. It discusses the research problem, aims, research questions and significance of the study. It also delineates my migration and adult education experiences and locates my position in the study.

Chapter 2 reviews relevant literature to the research topic. It provides the historical context of women in international migration, migration in Australia, African migration in Australia, and the role of education in the settlement process. The chapter proposes a theoretical and conceptual framework for the exploration of questions of women’s education and empowerment through the critical theory lens of feminism and transformative learning theory.

Chapter 3 locates the study as a feminist research. It justifies the selection of a qualitatively analysed case study in the interpretive paradigm as the preferred methodology for the study. It also provides a detailed overview of practices employed during the study, including participant selection, data collection and analysis processes, issues of research quality, and presentation of the findings.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 present the findings from the study. Chapter 4, Migration, a choice of life journeys: Opportunities, barriers and challenges, examines the opportunities, barriers and challenges that the participants encountered during their settlement in the NT. Chapter 5, Strategies to confront barriers and challenges: Adult education and learning, and coping mechanisms explores the educational strategies, factors and coping mechanisms that the participants utilised to gain knowledge, skills, power and resources required to confront and overcome the challenges that they faced and access their newly found opportunities. Chapter 6, Outcomes and achievements from adult education and
learning, focuses on the adult learning outcomes and achievements identified by the participants, illuminating the transformative and empowering dimensions of adult education. Each of these chapters opens with an extract from the participants’ data and proceeds to present and discuss the major emerging themes.

Chapter 7 provides a summary and discussion of the study’s key findings using the theoretical and analytical frameworks developed in Chapter 2 to highlight the relationship among adult education, capacity building, transformative learning and women’s empowerment. The chapter summarises and reviews key contributions made by the study and discusses implications, limitations and future research directions.

1.9 Conclusion

This introductory chapter has given an overview of the study conducted to explore the role of adult education in community capacity building of African-Australian women in the NT. It has discussed the contextual background to the study, and the aims and significance of the study as well as the positionality of the researcher, followed by the structure of the thesis. Most importantly, it discussed the tremendous increase of African migrant and refugee women in the NT, arguing that in order to provide programs and services that build the individual and collective capacity of recently arrived migrants such as African migrant and refugee women in this study, it is essential to undertake a study to expand an understanding of their lived experiences. Within this broad context, the following chapter presents a critical review of the literature relevant to this study.
Chapter 2: The literature review

Chapter 2 provides a review of extant literature relevant to this study, which explores the role of adult education in the individual and community capacity building of African migrant and refugee women in the NT. The study is embedded within the processes of social, economic and political transformation through adult education and African migrant and refugee women’s lived experiences. It is situated at the intersection of a number of disciplinary fields, including education, feminist, migration, gender and development studies. As an emerging and relatively new addition to the diverse ethnocultural minority groups within Australia’s multicultural mosaic, literature that focuses specifically on African migrant and refugee women’s education is limited.

The first section of Chapter 2 provides a context within which to position African migrant and refugee women’s settlement and adult educational experiences. It discusses international migration and women, Australia’s immigration and settlement policies, and African migration in Australia. The second section presents a review of critical theories of adult education and learning, including transformative learning and feminist theories. The final section explores the complexity of women’s education, learning, development and empowerment, and discusses research evidence in contexts across a range of countries.
2.1 Contextualising the study: International migration and women

Migration is a broad term generally used to describe the permanent or temporary movement of people from one place to another. It is topical because international migration has become a world-wide phenomenon with almost every country involved in the process as a source, transit or destination (Castles & Miller, 2009; IOM, 2005; Johnston et al., 2000; UN, 2006). Globalisation and technology have significantly enhanced the mobility of people across national boundaries leading to the labelling of this century as the “Age of Migration” due to the upsurge in international migration and the increased scale of diverse groups of people living outside their countries of birth (Castles & Miller, 2009). An estimated 200 million people live outside their countries of origin (GCIM, 2005; IOM, 2005; Pfeiffer, Richter, Fletcher & Taylor, 2008). Castles and Miller state, “there are few people in either industrial or less developed countries today who do not have personal experience of migration and its effects” (2009, p. 7).

Apart from globalisation, economic disparities between the different regions of the world, environmental degradation and political instability contribute to migration. The demand for labour in developed countries and the lack of employment in developing countries have created incentives for international migration from the latter to the former (Castles, Vasta & Ozkul, 2012). While migrants from developing countries have used migration as an opportunity to improve their quality of life, many developed countries with ageing populations have used migration to recruit skilled and resourceful people from developing countries to boost their workforce and economy (Jackson, 2010; Jones, 2008). Almost one third of all international migrants in 2005 moved from developing to
developed countries, resulting in more than half of the population growth in developed countries (Hugo, 2006; UN, 2006).

A variety of factors make people move from their original countries to a new country. For migrants from developing countries migrating to developed countries including Australia, many are pulled in search of better economic and lifestyle opportunities through education and employment (Hugo, 2006, 2009; Iredale, 2001; Jakubowicz, 2010; Okai, 1995; Udo-Ekpo, 1999). Geographical proximity, historical ties, linguistic and cultural similarities also play an important role in international migration. However, GCIM (2005) has observed that the widening gap in the “3Ds” – development, demography and democracy – between countries of origin and countries of destination are the principal forces driving increased international migration. Migrants fall broadly into two categories – voluntary and involuntary. While some people migrate voluntarily for economic considerations; political, social and environmental conditions force others to involuntarily migrate as humanitarian refugees. Despite the rationale for migration, several migration scholars attribute the motivation to leave one’s country of origin to “push and pull” factors (Castles & Loughna, 2004; Castles & Miller, 2009; Guo, 2010b; Portes & Rumbaut, 1996). Guo describes push factors as “natural disasters, war, political and religious persecution and human rights abuses, [and] pull factors as economic opportunities, a higher standard of living, social and political stability, free and accessible social services, a clean environment and a favourable educational system” (2010b, p. 143). According to Kunz (1981) refugees are “pushed out of” their original countries, whereas migrants are “pulled away from” their original countries (cited in Cohen, 1981, p. 256). Migrants are therefore primarily motivated by greater economic
advancement and better life outside their countries of origin, while refugees are forced into exile for safety and security reasons.

Since the 1960s women have increasingly played a significant role in migratory movements in most types of migration, representing about half of the world’s population of international migrants (IOM, 2005; Jones, 2008; Simonen & Ndiaye, 2006). Prior to the 1960s, studies in international migration portrayed women’s migration in an associative pattern where they migrated as dependent family members of the main male migrant. The character of female migration has since changed as women have taken on the “head migrant role within families … challenging the structures that have traditionally positioned them not as independent subjects in immigration proceedings but as legal appendages of husbands” (Jones, 2008, p. 762). The labour shortages in feminised welfare and caring industries in developed countries have opened up skilled migration for women from developing countries and created opportunities for women to utilise migration to improve the social and economic well-being of their families. Arthur notes that women just like men are “responding to the same geopolitical, economic, and social forces at the core of the movement and transfer of human capital and labor from the developing to the developed world” (2009, p. 2). The mass movement of female migrants from developing to developed countries, and the growing female migrant workforce worldwide have contributed to the “feminization of migration” (Cuban, 2010, p. 180), as women currently outnumber men in the migrant workforce (Donato et al., 2006; Guzmán, 2006; UNFPA, 2006; World Bank, 2006).

The extensive literature on gender and migration reveals that women’s decisions to migrate may not be solely based on the labour market and their socioeconomic situation,
but could be attributed to a series of cultural and symbolic elements, and gender relations in their original societies (Lipszyc, 2004). Migration experience can be empowering as “women are often moving out of patriarchal structures in communities of origin into places where they are less circumscribed by custom” (Skeldon, 2008, p. 177). While migration can contribute to women’s empowerment by opening up opportunities to develop new skills, a sense of autonomy, and bring greater social and economic independence from the patriarchal systems of cultural and social control, it can also contribute to challenges leading to women’s disempowerment and marginalisation of their voices (Hugo, 2000; IOM, 2005).

Migrant women are often constructed as being at the intersection of migrants, refugees, women, race, class, country of origin and ethnicity; and subjugated to multiple vulnerabilities of injustice, exploitation and discrimination – encountering significant challenges during settlement. These barriers include “lack of access to social services … unemployment and underemployment, devaluation and denigration of their prior learning and work experience, poor economic performance and downward social mobility” (Guo, 2010b, p. 144). Gibb and Hamdon note that migrant women generally encounter devaluation of their credentials and often require “education and re-education … to gain access to desirable professional and skilled jobs” (2010, p. 186). The Learning and Skills Council also observes that because migrant women aspire to improve their educational capital to advance their careers and a better quality of life for themselves and their children, they are prepared to “take on low-skilled or unskilled roles while they improve their English or gain a relevant qualification to allow them to practise their profession … and [they] view it in the context of being an opening to greater
opportunities” (cited in Cuban, 2010, pp. 180-181). Given the foregoing, education becomes a vehicle for migrant women to empower and transform their perspectives to integrate into their new society and obtain and maintain a better quality of life.

It is worth pointing out that the inclusion of women’s experiences, subjectivities and interpretive voices in migration studies provide “an understanding of the migrant self as constituted through a range of intersecting … competing, forces and processes, and as playing agentic roles in these processes” (Silvey, 2004, p. 499). Furthermore, the understanding of migrant and refugee women’s experiences will help to “move beyond deterministic formulations of push/pull factors towards a deeper appreciation of the interlinkages between political-economic and subjectivity formation processes as these shape mobility” (p. 499). Migration trajectories are contextual and migration embraces all dimensions of human experience, therefore an analysis of migratory processes “should be linked to the analysis of social transformation processes at a range of socio-spatial levels” (Castles, 2010, p. 1583). The next section presents a review of African migration within Australia’s immigration and settlement policy.

2.2 Australian immigration and settlement policies: African migrants and refugees

Australia is perceived as “an immigrant society” (Jupp, 2003, p. 5) because immigration has been fundamental to its social, economic and political development (DIAC, 2008; Hugo, 2006). According to Watson (2007), apart from the original custodians of the land, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the rest of Australia’s population settled in the country within the last two centuries. Through immigration Australia’s population has since developed into “the most ethno-culturally diverse society on earth”
(Colic-Peisker, 2011, p. 566). DIAC (2010b) reported that since World War II, more than 7.5 million migrants, including 800,000 refugees have settled in the country. In the 2006 Census, the ABS recorded that nearly 24 per cent of Australia’s ethnically diverse population of over 20 million was born overseas; and half of these people were born in a non-English speaking country (ABS, 2008b). Since the establishment of the Federation of Australia in 1901, demographic and economic interests of Australia have been the driving force behind immigration and settlement policies, and the process of migrant and refugee selection has been used as a means of social and ideological control (Jupp, 2003; Vasta & Castles, 1996). Australia’s immigration and settlement policies have therefore been designed to address its demographic and economic needs as well as facilitate the full participation and integration of migrants and refugees into the wider Anglo-Australian society.

During the initial years of migration and settlement in Australia, mostly the British relocated to Australia. However, Chinese, Japanese and Afghan migrants joined the British for the gold rushes in the 1850s (Burnett & McArdle, 2011; Kabir, 2006). Despite the diversity of migrants in 1901, when the six British colonies united and established a federation, the newly formed Commonwealth Parliament passed the Immigration Restriction Act 1901 to declare a White Australia Policy. The racially defined policy articulated the fear of, and disdain for the Indigenous people, and the Chinese, Japanese and Afghan diaspora, and enhanced the government’s commitment to preserve racial and cultural homogeneity by restricting non-White British immigration (Castles & Miller, 2009; Jakubowicz, 2011; Jupp, 2007; Watson, 2007). According to Jakubowicz, the “White Australia [Policy] was more than just an attempt to keep out
people of colour; it was a drive to remove people of colour and scrub the society free of the taint of non-White ‘blood’” (2011, p. 70).

The desire for a homogeneous white Australian society proved difficult to achieve and resulted in major transformation and radical shifts in immigration and settlement policies after World War II. Apart from massive labour shortages for Australia’s economic programs, the country also needed to increase its population to fortify its military base against perceived threats of invasion from its Asian neighbours. Australia therefore relaxed its white Australia ideology to ‘populate or perish’, and embarked on a mass migration program (Colic-Peisker, 2011; Vasta & Castle, 1996). This led to waves of migrants from non-English speaking European countries such as Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, Greece, Malta, Yugoslavia and Turkey, who subsequently changed the composition of Anglo-Australian society. The perceived difficulties these new migrants posed led to the adoption of ‘assimilation’ policy which expected that the new migrants would abandon their language, heritage and cultural values, and rather fully absorb into the norms and values of the predominant Anglo-Australian society (de Lepervanche, 1984; Jupp, 2007; Vasta & Castles, 1996).

During the assimilation period, new migrants were re-socialised through immersion and contacts with Anglo-Australians in educational and workplace environments (Jupp, 1993; Vasta, 2007). Educational institutions were used to devalue the cultural and linguistic links to migrants’ countries of origin because “education was positioned as a defensive tool that could ensure Australia remained a homogenous English-speaking country with strong links to British heritage” (Hollinsworth, cited in Burnett & McArdle, 2011, p. 46). Perera and Pugliese also note that because assimilation
“demanded the systematic shedding and erasure of any cultural or linguistic differences which did not mesh with Anglo-Australia … [it] impacted at virtually every level of [migrants’] public and private life [as] … the state’s … institutions and services were designed solely for the benefit of its English-speaking subjects” (1997, p. 14). By the mid-1960s, assimilation policy had failed and was replaced by integration policy. Integration policy encouraged migrants and refugee groups to become part of mainstream Australian society without losing their individual identities. Petruchenia comments that the integration policy was supposed to be “some ‘give and take’ by both Australians and immigrant groups [but] in reality what it meant was that there was … more tolerance towards those aspects of other cultures (such as cuisine) which did not threaten the dominant culture” (1994, p. 52).

Following the great resources boom in the late 1970s, Australia required complex skilled labour to build the rapidly expanding economy and had to make a paradigm shift in its immigration policy with the introduction of a point system, which focused on the selection of migrants based on their human capital (Hawthorne, 2005). According to DIAC the points-based skilled migration program “help[s] to select skilled migrants who offer the best in terms of economic benefit to Australia … [because it] … award[s] points to the skills and attributes considered to be in need in Australia” (2011c, p. 1). The points-based skilled migration program facilitated the process for “completing students in some skill areas to gain permanent residence in Australia” (Hugo, 2004 p. 88), and encouraged many young graduating students from developing countries in Africa, Asia and the Middle East to remain in Australia (Jakubowicz, 2010, 2011). The point-based skilled migration program also opened the way for non-Anglo-Celtic
migrants from traditionally restricted developing countries to migrate to Australia (Hawthorne, 2005). Around this same period, Australia moved away from selecting refugees based on race or nationality by ratifying the humanitarian ethos of the UNHCR and subsequently accepted a large group of Indo-Chinese refugee ‘boat people’ from the Vietnam War in the late 1970s (Viviani, 1996).

The adoption of point-based skilled migration and the acceptance of humanitarian refugee migrants saw an exponential increase in visible minority groups from Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East making Australia “one of the most diverse in the world in terms of ethnicity, culture and religion” (Castles et al., 2012, p. 33). DIAC reports that out of the estimated 22 million Australian population, “the proportion of overseas born residents from European countries of birth is declining, while the proportion of migrants coming from Asia and Africa is increasing” (2012a, pp. 2-3). Australia’s overwhelmingly Christian population also changed with the increasing number of Muslims, Buddhists and Hindus from the Middle East and Asia (ABS, 2008b; Bouma, 1994). Even though the increasingly diverse immigration was economically productive and culturally enriching, there was growing public resentment for the new and emerging ethno-culturally diverse communities. There were also demands by the ethnic migrant communities for recognition of their cultures, and access and equal participation in all areas of Australian society, including education, the labour market and political representation (Castles et al., 2012; Jayasuriya, 2003; Koleth, 2010).

In response to the complexities of the increasing socioeconomic inequality experienced by migrants from ethnic and NESB, and the growing concerns for social harmony and tolerance of the ethno-culturally diverse population, the federal government
commissioned a review of *Post-arrival programs and services to migrants* (Galbally Report, 1978). Following the release of the Galbally Report (1978), the government adopted the policy of multiculturalism as a framework for managing ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity. The multicultural model supports ethnic migrant groups to retain their ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identities and co-exist harmoniously in a pluralistic society. One of its major goals was to provide resources that would redress material inequalities and assist migrant groups from diverse communities to integrate and fully participate in the predominant Anglo-Australian society without sacrificing their ethnic cultural identities and traditions. Furthermore, the policy of multiculturalism aimed at promoting equity for Australia’s different cultural traditions, shifts the focus away from a racially-based national identity, to a democratically oriented civic identity (Hafez, 2011; Jupp, 2007). Multiculturalism has since remained the defining objective underpinning the accommodation of cultural differences and diversity, and the provision of settlement services for migrants and refugees’ successful integration into Australian society.

Multiculturalism as revealed in the literature is an evolving process, and currently with new migrant groups from Africa, India and the Middle East, new challenges, opportunities and debates are emerging. These include a renewed emphasis on the importance of genuine recognition and accommodation of diversity and difference, the need to fight racism, discrimination and ethnocentrism, and create a just and equitable society (Australian Human Rights Commission [AHRC], 2010; Calma, 2007; Castles et al., 2012; HREOC, 2004; Moran, 2011). Even though the policy of multiculturalism provides all Australians including migrants from NESB certain rights, it does not
guarantee that those rights will be exercised if people are not aware of, and do not understand them. Hayes contends that, “education may be a useful agent for changing any remaining negativity towards non-English speaking migrants and minority groups” (2013, p. 62). Multicultural policies should therefore ensure that individuals are aware of their rights as citizens through education in formal, non-formal and informal contexts.

This study explores the role of adult education in building the productive capacity of African-Australian migrant and refugee women within the changing contexts of Australia’s migration and settlement policies. The next section provides a context to Australia’s settlement services and specifically focuses on adult migrant education program, particularly the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP).

### 2.2.1 Australian settlement services

Arriving in a new society, migrants require a period of time to adjust and settle. Cox refers to settlement as “a period during which immigrants need ... to find housing and a source of income, to develop or find adequate means of communicating with existing residents and to begin building a satisfactory personal and social life in their new environment” (1996, p. 1). Settlement is an ongoing process and migrants and refugees encounter challenges and opportunities; however, fundamental to successful settlement are factors including aspects of migrants’ social, cultural, economic, psychological and political circumstances; and the existing attitudes, social institutions and support services in the receiving society (Babacan, 2005; Spinks, 2009).

Australia’s settlement services focus on assisting new migrants and humanitarian entrants “settle in Australia and participate equitably in Australian society” (DIAC,
Settlement services have changed to cater for the needs of the growing diverse population within policy frameworks that have evolved from assimilation, through integration to multiculturalism. In 1979, the federal government established the Community Refugee Settlement Scheme (CRSS) as a network of volunteer groups to support all migrants, particularly humanitarian entrants during settlement. These volunteers provided assistance with a range of services, including useful information on accommodation, employment, social support and networks, and general orientation into the Australian way of life (DIMIA, 2003). Recently, there has been a renewed settlement focus on integration, community harmony and social cohesion. The federal government has therefore taken an increasing role in coordinating and working in partnership with community groups to provide “early access to appropriate settlement services [that] enables new arrivals [to] move towards active economic and social participation in Australian society as self-reliant and valued members” (DIMIA, 2003, p. 35). Currently, settlement services provided for migrants and refugees include English language programs and labour-market skill training and other social services (Spinks, 2009).

2.2.2 Adult Migrant English Program

The Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) is the federal government’s largest settlement program, providing free English language classes for eligible migrants and humanitarian entrants. AMEP clients are entitled to access 510 hours of English language tuition in their first five years of settlement to help them gain functional English language skills. AMEP clients with limited education and difficult pre-migration experiences are entitled to additional hours of tuition. AMEP is administered by DIAC, but classes are delivered by contracted English as second language service providers.
including universities, TAFE colleges, community education centres, state/territory education departments and private education institutions.

In addition to English language classes, AMEP clients who have completed 75 per cent of their basic English language studies can access the Settlement Language Pathways to Employment and Training. This training provides clients with 200 hours of employment-focused education to learn vocation-specific English. Included is 80 hours of work experience placements to familiarise clients with Australian workplace culture, employment processes, work ethics and occupational health and safety issues (Allender, 1999; DIAC, 2006; Spinks, 2009). AMEP is an integral part of the Australian Government’s settlement services and assists migrants and refugees to navigate the social, cultural and economic terrain of the new environment, facilitating migrants’ transitions into the Australian way of life. Apart from AMEP, Vocational Education and Training (VET) that occurs in TAFE colleges, higher education in universities, workplace professional training and informal learning through social activities, may be other avenues through which adult migrants and refugees, including those from Africa, can gain education that will enable them to participate equally in Australian society. The next section discusses Africans in Australia.

### 2.2.3 African migrants and refugees in Australia

Before the 1970s people of European-descent from South Africa, Zimbabwe, Mauritius and Kenya dominated migration from Africa to Australia (ABS, 2008b; Hugo, 2004; Kennedy & Lucas, 2001). Since then, African migrants and refugees have arrived in Australia in several migration waves.
Between the 1970s and 1990s, political and socioeconomic conditions in Africa ‘pushed’ many Africans to migrate to Australia as skilled and humanitarian refugee migrants. These push factors included globalisation and related consequences of economic adjustment and restructuring, political instability, civil wars, environmental and natural disasters, and poverty (Jakubowicz, 2010; Udo-Ekpo, 1999). Changes in Australia’s immigration and settlement policies in the 1970s made possible increased Black African migrants and refugees to Australia. These changes included the abolition of the White Australia Policy, Australia’s need for skilled migrants and Australia’s obligations under international agreements. Additionally, Australia’s adoption of multiculturalism with subsequent multicultural policies that allowed ethno-culturally diverse migrants equal rights and access to opportunities they lacked made Australia an increasingly attractive option for enhanced career and socioeconomic mobility (Hugo, 2009; Jakubowicz, 2010). Other African migrants have also been pulled to Australia because of its “political stability … the high standard of living, the informality of the Australian way of life … the existence of entrenched liberal democratic values … freedom and opportunities” (Udo-Ekpo, 1999, p. 238).

African migration accelerated in the 1990s, and while the majority of them arrived through skilled and family migration streams, a significant number of recent entrants include refugee-humanitarian migrants from war-torn countries. Between 1997 and 2007, Jakubowicz reports that about “136,000 people migrated from Africa to Australia as humanitarian (30%), family (15%) and skilled (55%) entrants” (2010, p. 17). The migration streams of Africans reflect a broad combination of Australia’s immigration and settlement policies that have evolved in response to economic, social, political and
humanitarian imperatives. For instance, a substantial number of medical doctors and nurses from Africa have been recruited to rural and remote areas where there is a shortage of medical personnel (Australian Institute of Health Welfare (AIHW), 2003; Mapehadzama et al., 2011). Negin and Denning state:

There are increasing number of people in Australia of African descent bringing with them potentially valuable cultural, social and economic ties … Africa contributes significantly to Australia’s skilled workforce … there are just under 3,000 medical doctors and over 4,100 nurses working in Australia who are African-born. This represents 5.4% of medical doctors working in Australia … the over-representation in skilled positions is remarkable (2008, p. 5).

African migrants in the past decade have faced substantial challenges as the majority of them “are culturally very different to the host community, often lack English language skills and have very large families … [and] experience considerable problems in entering the labour and housing markets” (Hugo, 2004, p. 89). These differences make settlement and integration processes complex, multifaceted and multidimensional as there are many transitions to undertake including cultural. African sociocultural values and practices promote collectivist rather than a Western individualistic lifestyle.

Amongst these collectivist societies, community people in general and the families in particular are identified as the principal source of normative behaviour, security, protection and support (Dei, 2012; Gyekye, 1997; Obiakor, 1991). Therefore African migrants and refugees involve the family and community members extensively in all aspects of their social, cultural, economic, and political life (Donkor, 2000; Udo-Ekpo, 1999). Valtonen (2004) observed that for migrants and refugees from cultures with a strong reliance on the extended family such as Africans, the maintenance of familial links within their new context is important to draw strength and guidance to persevere in overcoming settlement challenges. The interdependence, interconnectedness and social
support transactions such as childcare are common among women (Ojo, 2009), therefore they particularly miss the support networks from extended family in childraising. The limited studies of African communities in Australia revealed that many complained about the loss of the traditional support system they were accustomed to, and had difficulty in re-establishing and forming new networks (Casimiro, Hancock & Northcote, 2007; McMichael & Manderson, 2004). Various studies (Berger, 2004a; Ojo, 2009) present parenting as a special challenge to African migrants and refugees because African parents generally exercise authority over their children and expect obedience and respect from them, and struggle with the permissiveness and liberal upbringing of ‘Western’ children. Berger remarks that:

The role reversal caused by dependence on children who often acquire the language faster than their parents, as translators for negotiation with social institutions and as culture interpreters further shatters the already shaken authority structure and exacerbates the conflict. (2004a, pp. 21-22).

Another issue for African migrants and refugees is that they move from traditional patriarchal societies with gender specific roles into a more egalitarian Australian society of role blurring. The shifting of male and female household roles creates challenges in family relationships, particularly for African men because of “their traditional values that placed them as the head of the family giving them significant responsibility and control over their family and environments” (Farah, 2007, p. 6).

Racial discrimination, language barriers, lack of housing and information on available resources, unemployment, underemployment and social exclusion continue to present challenges for African migrants and refugees (Abu-Duhou, 2006; Nield, 2010; Udo-Ekpo, 1999). For instance Dick reports the racist remarks on the increased migration of black Africans to Australia by Associate Professor Andrew Fraser; that “an expanding
black population is a sure-fire recipe for increases in crime, violence and a wide range of other social problems” (Dick, 2005, p. 1). Such comments led to racist sentiments which impacted on African-Australians. The AHRC three-year study on African-Australians’ experiences of social inclusion and human rights in Australia reveals that they experienced “racism as part of their daily lives in a range of areas from employment, to housing, education, health services and their connection with the justice system … [and] these experiences acted as barriers to settlement and inclusion” (Nield, 2010, p. 8).

The high prevalence of unemployment and underemployment among African migrants has been attributed to factors such as racial discrimination, non-recognition of foreign qualifications, lack of English language proficiency and limited networks that provide access to informal employment opportunities (Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria (ECCV), 2008). Saeed (2008) claims that:

African [migrants and] refugees possess qualities and professional expertise that are much sought-after in our knowledge-based economy. Yet, they remain obstructed by short-sighted employment programs which fail to recognise participants’ strengths and potential, and which only offer pathways to jobs that are neither stable nor likely to facilitate realistic career advancement (cited in ECCV, 2008 p. 8).

In a study involving three migrant and refugee groups from Africa, Bosnia and the Middle East in Western Australia, Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2007) reported that there was the persistence of segmented labour market where racially and culturally visible migrants and refugees from Africa were allocated unattractive, low-skilled jobs inconsiderate of their qualifications. In addition, the authors found that employers actively discriminated against Africans, using ‘soft skills’ including Australian cultural knowledge, accent and Australian work experiences as reasons for not employing them. African migrant and refugee women face additional barriers in the labour market as a
result of limited educational opportunities in their countries of origin, limited access to adult education, particularly English language classes, due to their domestic and childcare responsibilities, and the multiple vulnerabilities of gender discrimination (Hatoss & Huijser, 2010; Hebbani, Obijiofor & Bristed, 2010). The impact of these issues coupled with ongoing negative propaganda fuels a lot of fear, concern and powerlessness within African-Australian communities.

Having moved to a country where many things are different, African migrants and refugees have to relearn different aspects of behavioural patterns, norms, language, and develop social networks to enable them to engage equitably with the new sociocultural milieu and manage their everyday lives. In such circumstances, Onsando and Billett point out that their “education needs to be transforming as they seek to learn, live and work in their newly and quite distinct adopted country” (2009, p. 81). Hence the critical theories of transformative learning and feminism are identified as appropriate analytical lenses for this study and will be reviewed in the next section.

2.3 Theoretical perspectives

This study is situated at the intersection of several related critical theoretical frameworks including transformative learning (Freire, 1972; Mezirow, 2000), feminism in particular, feminist standpoint perspectives (Harding, 1987; Smith, 1987), and recent perspectives within adult education focusing on how women’s education facilitates empowerment.

Historically, migration and education for survival in the new environment have been a way of life for human populations (Alfred & Guo, 2012; Bron, 2003; Kim, 2010). As part of the settlement process, migrants learn to acquire the values and ways of life of
their new society by participating in formal, non-formal and informal education and social activities. Amongst migrants and refugees from developing countries to developed countries, including Australia, the demand for education features strongly. Flukiger-Stockton (1996) notes that, “for people who have lost all their other assets, education represents a primary survival strategy. Education is the key to adaptation in a new environment … [and] is the basis upon which to build a livelihood” (cited in Hannah, 1999, p. 155).

In a study of migrant and refugee women’s adult education and learning to build their individual and community capacity, critical theories of transformative and emancipatory learning and feminism are deployed to understand their reshaped learning phenomena within the migration and settlement context. Black African migrant and refugee women in this study are not a homogenous group. Their migration, settlement and educational experiences in a dominant Anglo-Australian society are intersected with other forms of social constructions including race, gender, social class, status, ethnicity and country of origin, and this study draws on standpoint feminist theory and the concept of women’s empowerment for the analysis.

2.3.1 Adult education and learning

Adult education emerged as a field of study in the late 1920s and has since undergone several phases with the quest to understand adult learning as a distinctive process different from children’s learning. There is a substantial body of research and literature on the complex nature of learning in adulthood dating back to the early 20th century and the full analysis of these debates is beyond the scope of this study. Within the past two
decades, international and national adult education declarations have been drafted to promote and reflect economic development, democratic and emancipatory goals, and social justice. For instance, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization’s (UNESCO) Hamburg Declaration on adult learning defines adult education as:

> The entire body of ongoing learning processes, formal or otherwise, whereby people regarded as adults by society to which they belong develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge, and improve their technical or professional qualifications or turn them in a new direction to meet their own needs and those of society (1997, p. 1).

Furthermore, the objectives of adult education are viewed as:

> To develop the autonomy and the sense of responsibility of people and communities, to reinforce the capacity to deal with the transformations taking place in the economy, in culture and in society as a whole, and to promote coexistence, tolerance and the informed and creative participation of citizens in their communities … to enable people and communities to take control of their destiny and society in order to face the challenges ahead (1997, p. 1).

Welton (1988) states that the role of adult education “is to assist adults in constructing their own knowledge about their life world” (cited in Ntseane, 2006, p. 220); while Medel-Añonuevo believes the actual value of adult education and learning is “personal and social agency, enabling people to equip themselves to act, to reflect and to respond appropriately to the social, political, economic, cultural and technological challenges they face” (cited in UNESCO, 2009, p. 24). Adult learning through adult education is complex and no single theory can explain the phenomenon. However, the learning of adults is the common goal uniting the widely disparate field of adult education.

Generally, adults participate in different kinds of educational activities in order to improve their circumstances by increasing their skills, knowledge awareness and self-confidence, to succeed in the workforce, enrich their lives and change their situations.
Many societal factors influence participation in adult education activities. For instance, changing demographics, including an ageing population, re-entry of women into the workforce, and an influx of immigrants, alter the base of potential participants. Global economy and technological advances have also had significant effect on the nature of adult education (Cross 1999; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Peters, Jarvis & Associates 1991; Shaw, 2005). The current knowledge society and societal dynamism have equally resulted in changing individuals, cultural intentions and role requirements, causing adults to make decisions to participate in educational activities. Adult education has thus become an increasing necessity for living in a globalised society rife with change.

Women have increasingly taken up opportunities in education and currently outnumber males in tertiary education programs in many Western countries (Hayes, 2001; Kamler, 2006; O’Shea & Stone, 2011; Quinn, 2003). The increase in women’s participation in education has been attributed to the worldwide widening access agenda that commenced in the 1960s with UNESCO’s development of the concept of adult and lifelong education. Australia adopted the international agenda of lifelong education and learning in the 1970s, and women have embraced the opportunities in this adult education agenda as there has been an acceleration “towards mass and universal participation” (Skilbeck, 2006, p. 117). According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2010), 36 per cent of the 25-64 year old age group had obtained tertiary education in Australia, which is significantly higher than the OECD’s average of 28 per cent. Other factors for women’s increasing participation in educational activities include the professionalisation of women’s traditional skills and the advent of new roles for women in society outside the home (Cross, 1999; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Stone,
2009). In the case of marginalised women, particularly migrants and refugees, education becomes critical to enhance their capabilities to participate fully in their new society by gaining skills for the labour force, increase self-reliance, assert their human rights and independence to make decisions, and improve their ability to control resources that will help them challenge and eliminate subordination (Donkor, 2000; Pacheco, 2011).

2.3.2 Critical theories of adult education and learning

From its inception as a field in education, adult education has been perceived as “a form of education designed to overcome … the kinds of intrusions in learning of power, influence and inequality” (Brigham, 2011, p. 41). Traditionally, adult education has been part of broad movements for democratic transformation. Often referred to as ‘second-chance’ education, adult education has centred on the marginalised and socially, culturally and economically disadvantaged adults to address a range of their practical and strategic needs. As early as 1900, both Dewey and Lindeman asserted that individuals were entitled to adult education to build and sustain democracy as continued education help people foster capacities for critical reflection (cited in Brookfield, 1987). Adult education has also been viewed as an important means of bringing “democratic participation to adults who throughout their lifespan struggle to participate in social and economic decisions affecting them” (Heaney, 1996, p. 5), and has assisted communities to foster social, economic, political and cultural transformations (Baumgartner, 2001; Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982; Freire, 1972; Mezirow, 2000).

Ewert and Grace propose that “adult education’s major contribution to development may be the concept of critical reflection on experience and its role in community
transformation” (2000, p. 337); however, adult education programs are influenced by various philosophies and learning theories, and the notion of change in learners’ personal, professional and societal lives. Hill suggests that the main purpose of the various adult education and learning theories is “to provide … a conceptual framework for interpreting the examples of learning that we observe and to help us look for solutions to practical problems” (2002, p. 190). The perspectives of scholars and theorists who challenge the exclusionary models of adult learning and education fall within the broad categories of critical theory. According to Welton, “critical theory is an attempt to understand how injustice among people is sustained and reinforced by those who are interested in maintaining power over others, and how emancipatory deals are thus prevented” (1995, pp. 12-13).

Critical theories emerged from Jurgen Habermas and other Frankfurt School’s Institute for Social Research scholars’ advocacy for critical social theories to recognise adult education as a function of society influenced by politics, ideology, culture and language (Carr, 2000). Several adult education and learning scholars, including Welton, have found the contribution of Habermas’ critical ideas in adult education and learning invaluable, and describe critical theory in adult education context as a:

Promising way of building an adequate philosophical framework for our field of study [adult education] and in particular, for our understanding of adult learning and the nature of knowledge … [providing] ways to challenge and critique systems and a focus on learner-centred emancipatory education (Welton, 1993, p. 89).

For critical theorists therefore, “learning is a process of receiving and creating communicative messages or discourses about the social world” (Kilgore, 2001, p. 54). Several proponents of critical theories in education and learning have indicated that the communicative aspects, inter-personal dialogue, discourse and critical reflections that
are central to these theories offer opportunities for transformative learning (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Clark, 1993; Cranton, 2006; Freire, 1972; Mezirow, 2000; O’Sullivan, 1999; Taylor, 1998).

2.3.3 Theoretical perspectives on transformative learning

In the extensive adult education and learning literature, Paulo Freire (1972, 1973) and Jack Mezirow’s (1978, 1991, 2000) Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) has provided a conceptual framework for understanding the way adults learn in adult education contexts. TLT emerged from the works of these prominent adult educators as they attempted to create social change for marginalised and oppressed people through adult education (Cranton, 2006; Taylor, 1998). Both Freire and Mezirow share a democratic and humanistic vision of individuals and society, and focus on the dynamic interplay of psychological and social factors to explain the fundamental shifts and changes that occur in adult learning to alter the way people see themselves in relation to others in their environment. However, Freire’s emphasis is on the power of adult education in the transformation of existing social, economic and political inequities and oppression; and Mezirow’s emphasis is on the process of individual transformation of their life worlds (Clark, 1993).

Transformative learning involves a process whereby adults reflectively transform their existing beliefs, perspectives, values, attitudes and emotions that may limit their ability to reach their personal and intellectual potential (Mezirow, 2000; O’Sullivan, 2002). TLT is unique to adult education because it explains how adults change the way they interpret their world when they encounter unfamiliar experiences. It addresses adult
learning phenomenon from the perspectives of adult characteristics, social roles and responsibilities, and their everyday lived experiences (Cranton, 2006). TLT can therefore be a useful interpretive lens to understand the experiences of adult migrants and refugees’ education and learning in their new society, because as they move across social spaces they experience displacement, a sense of ‘cultural disequilibrium’. They also experience loss of family and social networks, career, and feelings of exclusion that challenge them to learn new ways and build new relationships to navigate unfamiliar sociocultural, economic and political environments. According to Mezirow, learning under such circumstances, does not only include the addition of new information, but rather the way the individual understands and interprets their world can be transformed and allow the individual to become “critically aware of one’s own tacit assumptions and expectations and those of others and assess their relevance for making an interpretation” (2000, p. 4).

Jack Mezirow’s (1978, 2000) transformative learning theory draws on Habermas’ (1984) theory of communicative competence and relates it to the concepts of instrumental, practical and emancipatory knowledge. It is a constructivist and humanistic theory based on critical theory and dependent on the notion of ‘perspective transformation’. Constructivism argues that “people create their own understanding by integrating their previous knowledge and experience with new learning within specific contexts” (Beck & Kosnik, 2006, p. 2). ‘Perspective transformation’ reflects change within learners’ central meaning perspectives and is grounded in cognitive developmental psychology and centres on the process of making meaning from our daily experiences through critical reflection and critical discourse.
Mezirow’s TLT was an outcome of his seminal work with 83 women returning to formal college studies after a hiatus in the 1970s. Many of the women were housewives and as they progressed through their academic studies, they began to question their traditional roles as wives, mothers and caregivers. They reformulated their self-conception, exploring new possibilities for personal and professional growth, and made meaning and incorporated new learning from life changing events into their everyday experiences. From his observations of the women’s education, learning and life changing experiences, Mezirow delineated 10 different phases that learners go through during the transformation process as:

1. A disorienting dilemma
2. Self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt, or shame
3. A critical assessment of assumptions
4. Recognition of one’s discontent and the process of transformation are shared
5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships and actions
6. Planning a course of action
7. Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one’s plans
8. Provisional trying of new roles
9. Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
10. A reintegration into one’s life on the basis of conditions dictated by one’s new perspective (Mezirow, 2000, p. 22).

As elucidated above, the ten-phase process of transformation results from a ‘disorienting dilemma’ triggered by a crisis such as civil war in the case of refugees, or a major life
transition including migration from a community-oriented and multi-lingual society in Africa to an individualistic-oriented and English speaking society in Australia. Such acute personal and social crisis can be debilitating and make people realise that their former ways of responding to issues are inadequate, inappropriate and ineffective. Under such circumstances, people are forced to self-examine and reassess their way of perceiving, knowing, believing, feeling and acting, and then critique their assumptions and beliefs by engaging in validating discourse with people who may have similar experiences but different viewpoints (Imel, 1998; Mezirow, 2000). Based on critical examination, reflection and discourse, people realise the universality of their experience and use their new perspective to search for new solutions and reach a perspective transformation.

TLT explains how learners construe, validate and reformulate meaning from their experiences. From these meaning schemes, which comprise specific beliefs, values, attitudes, assumptions and emotional reactions, people build meaning structures that guide their responses and actions. These meaning structures continuously undergo changes with new knowledge and experience that does not fit comfortably into existing meaning making structures (Cranton, 2006; Mezirow, 2000). A central premise of transformative learning, therefore, is the concept that people make meaning of the world around them through their experiences. People develop habits of mind or a frame of reference by absorbing values, beliefs, attitudes and assumptions uncritically and when something different happens that cannot be explained with their existing frames of reference, they question their worldview. This critical self-reflection is a rational process of discovering that previously held perceptions limit understanding and do not fully
explain the new experience. People then may engage in discourse with other people’s ideas to assist them consider their own perceptions in a new light. Mezirow (2000) explains that transformative learning takes place when the whole process leads people to open their frame of reference, discard their previously-held habit of mind, consider alternative perspectives and act differently in the world around them. Hence the critical reflection process is not only about changing one’s mind and adopting a different point of view, it is also about becoming more flexible, open and receptive to alternative ways of seeing and knowing the world (Belenky & Stanton, 2000; Cranton & Roy, 2003; Mezirow, 2000).

Although Mezirow’s (1978, 2000) TLT has been applied extensively in various adult education contexts, and continues to influence adult education pedagogies, it has been criticised for failing to adequately address the role of relationships, sociocultural contexts, extra-rational, emotional and spiritual dimensions of learning. The critics argue that contemporary societies comprised of diverse cultures and adults with multiple and conflicting roles and responsibilities, require holistic perspectives on the transformative process to navigate through the complexities of life (Belenky & Stanton, 2000; Clark & Wilson, 1991; Daloz, 1986; Dirkx, 2001; Merriam & Ntseane, 2008; Taylor, 1998, 2008; Tisdell, 2003). Nagata contends that the theory’s concept of transformation “has to balance emphasis on the rational, cognitive, and objective with the extra-rational, intuitive, imaginative and subjective” (2006, p. 46).

Despite the criticisms of Mezirow’s theory, some theorists acknowledge its ability to transform individuals who subsequently contribute to societal transformation through their actions. For example, Newman states, “our whole [adult education] profession
owes a lot to Jack Mezirow … he has provided us with a framework in which to examine and further our understanding of adult learning” (1994, p. 236). Brookfield adds that transformative learning assists “people uncover and challenge dominant ideology and then learn how to organize social relations according to noncapitalist logic” (2003, p. 224).

Another popular stream of thought in critical theory in education is Paulo Freire’s (1970, 1972, 1973) critical social theory. Freire was concerned about literacy education programs that reduced learners to “mere recipients of knowledge … [as] teachers used didactic methodologies that force-fed knowledge, engendering learner passivity and dependence” (Rusaw, 2000, p. 253). Freire (1970) argued for, and articulated a theory of, transformative learning for consciousness-raising because of his view that adult education should foster critical consciousness, liberate and empower learners through learners’ critical reflection, acquisition of functional knowledge and skills to challenge prevailing social, political, economic and cultural assumptions. He advocated for the elimination of the “banking” concept of education where knowledge was passively deposited in learners’ minds, and initiated the process of problem-posing, cooperative discourse, and “a means to establish a common base of enquiry, reflection, consensus, and action” (Rusaw, 2000, p. 254), which leads to critical consciousness. Freire also encouraged the practice of co-intentionality where teachers and learners interactively engage to inform action with the rationale that:

It is only when the oppressed [learners] find the oppressor out and become involved in the organized struggle for their liberation that they begin to believe in themselves. This discovery cannot be purely intellectual but must involve action … Reflection – true reflection leads to action (1970, p. 47).
Freire in effect promoted the belief for various forms of humanist education that transform people to challenge social inequalities associated with patriarchal culture and neo-liberal capitalist driven education and community development. With the interplay between critical reflection and action, such education changes learners from “being objects who are carried in the wake of change to individuals who create and intervene in a situation” (Magro, 2003, p. 24). Furthermore such education commits to the development of the individual’s capabilities (agency and resources), and creates space for learners to realise their ability to take control of their own destiny, confront and transform unequal power structures through a process that “prepares men for the struggle against the obstacles to humanization” (Freire, 1972, p. 90). Giroux (1985) describes Freire’s work as linking “the process of struggle to the particularities of people’s lives, while simultaneously arguing for faith in the power of the oppressed to struggle in the interest of their own liberation (cited in Jackson, 1997, p. 462).

Freire (1972) discusses dialogue, interactive engagement and critical reflection as important elements in the process of change and empowerment. For him, transformative learning is emancipatory, liberating and empowering at both the personal and societal level, as it turns learners into agents of their own transformation, providing them with a voice to construct their own meaning of their world. Freire’s critical social theory is about ‘conscientizing’ oppressed and marginalised grassroots people for social change, and his work has had significant influence on the development of critical perspectives in studies in education for societal change and empowerment. Merriam, Caffarella and Baumgartner describe Freire’s ideas on transformative learning theory:
Freire’s theory emerges from the context of poverty, illiteracy, and oppression and is set in a larger framework of social change … in Freire’s approach, personal empowerment and social transformation are inseparable processes (2007, p. 140).

For the past three decades, TLT has developed into a comprehensive account of adult learning, and an approach that utilises discussion and learner critical-reflection to develop critical insights into life experiences and understanding of forces of oppression, and ways of constructing coping mechanisms to control their reaction, which O’Sullivan aptly describes as:

Learning [that] involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feeling and actions … such a shift involves our understanding of ourselves and our self-locations; our relationships with other humans and with the natural world; our understanding of relations of power in interlocking structures of class, race, and gender; our body-awareness; our visions of alternative approaches to living; and our sense of the possibilities for social justice and peace and personal joy (2002, p. 11).

For migrants and refugees, these changes involve risk taking and exploration of new roles in a sociocultural, economic and political context that is entirely different from the one that they have left behind in their original countries. In using TLT in the analysis of black women’s experience, some theorists argue that Mezirow’s (1978, 2000) perspective transformation and Freire’s (1970, 1972) critical social theories are insufficient to analyse the race, gender, class and ethnicity that form these women, and that cross-pollination from other critical theories such as feminism helps to unmask the power structures that support the dominant group’s status quo (Collins, 1998b; hooks, 1989; Ng, Stanton & Scane, 1995). Feminism overlaps and intersects with critical reflection, consciousness-raising, social justice and power shifts that are central in transformative learning theory, and makes it possible to create alternative perspectives to challenge and change the inequalities that women face. The next section presents a review of feminism and feminist standpoint theories.
2.4 Feminism: Feminist standpoint perspectives

Women’s powerlessness and inequality are varied, but generally, they are constrained by societal and gender ideologies that promote and reinforce patriarchy (Kabeer, 2000; Lather, 1991, Stromquist, 1995). Over the years, masculine epistemologies have marginalised women by devaluing and excluding their knowledge, and creating social constructions of women as subordinates to reinforce male dominance; hence “women’s culture, history, and lives have remained underground and invisible, relegated to the underside of men’s culture, history and lives” (Nielsen, 1990, p. 10). In the struggle to achieve parity status at the social, economic, cultural and political level, women have used strategies “that seek to present social reality and the world from a woman’s point of view”, [and] feminism is viewed as the broad context within which this struggle must be conceived, understood and sustained” (Ngwainmbi, 2004 p. 93). In Mikell’s view, feminism refers to the different “approaches [employed] to addressing the unequal status of women relative to men, with the goal of mediating gender differences and providing women with a repertoire of valued roles and statuses within society” (1995, p. 420). The key concern of feminism is therefore “valuing and reclaiming women’s voices, concerns and actions” (Emejulu, 2011, p. 387).

Feminism has meant different things to different women over different periods of time. Olesen argues that the many ‘feminisms’ denote “conflicting views … [however] these many voices share the outlook that it is important to centre and make problematic women’s diverse situations as well as the institutions that frame and influence these situations” (2003, p. 333). The various perspectives and types of feminisms and feminist movements include liberal, socialist, radical, postcolonial, postmodern and post-
structural feminism. Each of these perspectives has its own particular view of the roles and rights of women, but all focus on working to change the identities, status and opportunities for women in society. Three main feminist strands – feminist empiricism, feminist standpoints and feminist postmodernism/posstructuralism – have been identified as alternate ways of understanding the varied strategies for feminist meaning making, knowledge seeking and knowledge production (Stanley & Wise, 1993; Tong 1989). While some authors view the diversity and differences in feminism as problematic, others see it as beneficial and symptomatic of feminist action; because all feminists share women-centred issues and concerns that continue to motivate them and underscore the need for feminist, women-centred research (Lather, 1991).

2.4.1 Feminist Standpoint Theory (FST)
African migrant and refugee women in the NT form an integral part of African migration to Australia as skilled, family and humanitarian refugee migrants (Abu-Duhou; 2006; ABS, 2008b; DIAC, 2007b, 2009; Saffu, 2010). However, their experiences have been absent in the “actualities of their everyday worlds” (Smith, 1987, p. 107), resulting in a partial and distorted perspectives of their lived experiences. Feminist standpoint theory (FST) was adopted as an appropriate analytical lens for this study because its “interpretive framework [is] dedicated to explicating how knowledge remains central to maintaining and changing unjust systems of power” (Collins, 1997, p. 375). FST advocates for the construction of knowledge from women’s everyday lived experience, and uses that knowledge politically to question dominant knowledge and institutional practices that are based on men’s experience, because it claims that knowledge is socially situated, and marginalised people such as women produce less
partial and distorted knowledge than the people in privileged and dominant positions.

FST provides an epistemology that focuses on the production of knowledge that leads to emancipation from oppressive social conditions (Brooks, 2007; Collins, 1997; Harding, 1987; hooks, 1989; Smith, 1987).

FST emerged from women’s liberation movements between the 1970s and 1980s as a feminist critique of mainstream scientific methods, and provided a more coherent explanation of the social world from the vantage point of women’s lives. According to Walby, the development of feminist standpoint theory was “intended to help create an intellectual space for feminist analysis in what was seen as an inhospitable, even hostile environment” (2001, p. 488). This was also an attempt by feminists to deal with the issue of articulating women’s experience of their world as organised through practices of knowledge production, and theorise women’s position as rational, logical outcomes of the natural order of things because scientific methods claimed to be objective and value-free, yet they excluded women’s experience (Harding, 1991).

FST, initially propagated by Sandra Harding (1987, 1991), a feminist scientist, and Dorothy Smith (1987), a feminist social scientist, has been reframed and articulated by other feminists (Collins, 1997; Hartsock, 1997; hooks, 1989). It is grounded in Marxist and Hegelian notions of the standpoint of the ‘proletariat’ with the idea that knowledge is situated socially and that an individual’s position in society shapes and restricts what they know or are allowed to know (Harding, 1991; Hartsock, 1997; Smith, 1987). Hartsock explains that, “like the lives of the proletarians in Marxist theory, women’s lives in Western capitalist societies also contained possibilities for developing a critique of domination” (1997, p. 168). This means that “individuals’ daily activities or material,
lived experience structures their understanding of the social world” (Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 10) and that the work and activities that people engage in shape their identities, consciousness, knowledge and experience. Feminist standpoint adheres to critical theory and the socialist feminist perspective that women in a gendered society have a particular social class position giving them “a special epistemological standpoint which makes possible a view of the world that is more reliable and less distorted than that available either to capitalists or to working-class men” (Jaggar, 1988, p. 370). Therefore knowledge production starts “from where women as … knowers … are located in their everyday worlds rather than in an imaginary space constituted by the objectified forms of sociological knowledge” (Smith, 1987, p. 153).

FST contends that women and other marginalised people occupy positions in society as ‘others’ or ‘outsiders’ enabling them to see their own positions and that of the dominant systems (Collins, 1998b; Harding, 1991, 1993; Parker, 2001). Women and other marginalised people’s views, referred to as the ‘outsider within’ perspective, provide a more holistic knowledge, and can be used to improve their own conditions and that of insiders. Outsiders within the dominant culture have the ability to produce a distinctive and more complete analysis of society and make visible realities that are obscured to insiders, because they often know about the way things work within their own groups as well as the groups that are inside and dominating them (Collins 1998b). Due to their marginalisation, women can operate as “critical strangers” (Harding, 1991, p. 124) of social norms, because they have fewer interests in ignoring social orders and can afford to be critical. Therefore, “starting off research from women’s lives will generate less
partial and distorted accounts not only of women’s lives but also of men’s lives and of
the whole social order” (Harding, 1993, p. 56).

As a critical social theory, standpoint theorists acknowledge the importance of
maximising objectivity by being reflexive. Harding states that “strong objectivity
requires strong reflexivity” (2004, p. 136), meaning that instead of eliminating external
factors from empirical research, factors that influence knowledge production processes
such as race, gender, social class and ethnicity, they should be included. Black
standpoint theorists have elaborated on the critical social aspects of feminist standpoint
theories using the concept of ‘intersectionality’ to address the issues of how gender,
race, social class, ethnicity and other identities and experiences of exclusion and
subjugation interact to shape the social realities and multiple dimensions of black
women’s experiences (Collins, 1998b; Davis, 2008; hooks, 1989; Parker, 2001).

Utilising intersectionality discourse to analyse black women’s lived experiences helps to
understand the effects of the “interconnected axes of oppression and identity” (Echtle,
2005, p. 1757), and “makes visible the multiple positioning that constitutes everyday life
and the power relations that are central to it” (Phoenix & Pattynama, 2006, p. 187).

FST challenges positivist normative thinking based on men’s knowledge, and creates
space for dialogue about the different lived experiences of women to address the issue of
“voice” and “unlearning to not speak” (Piercy, cited in Allen, 1996, p. 259). The
opportunity that standpoint feminism offers women to share their lived experiences of
oppression, struggles and systemic barriers, assists in raising women’s consciousness
providing a conceptual framework for change and transformation. By focusing on
knowledge production as “empowering the subjects of study by helping them forge
liberatory, self-understandings” (Anderson, 2004 p. 35), feminist standpoint theory offers a perspective that can stimulate a new way of thinking and acting leading to changes in extant practices.

FST enables researchers and everyday women to share experiences that have been ignored and are limited in most social science research because dominant discourses fail to allow representation of minority groups and their experiences. Research underpinned by FST focuses on women’s lived experiences and realities. It is particularly interested in inquiry focused on agency, power relations, voice, individual experience, shifting positionalities, complex and multiple identities, and socially constructed knowledge, as is the case in this study of African migrant and refugee women’s settlement and educational experiences (Collins, 2000; Harding, 2004; Hesse-Biber, 2006; hooks, 2004; Reinharz, 1992; Smith, 2004). Feminist standpoint inquiry therefore provides women with the sense of power, unity and solidarity of being heard, which is often lacking in other conceptual frameworks. Feminist standpoint becomes a privileged, alternate vantage point for analysis, opening up an area of research that is vital in order to balance our knowledge of a more inclusive and complete social world.

As discussed earlier in this section, the main goal of feminism is to reduce the inequalities between men and women. However, Stromquist notes that:

“this cannot be obtained merely through demands for human rights … [and] for this to occur, internal action (e.g. consciousness-raising and empowerment) must precede external action (e.g. pressuring the state) … women, consequently, need education to find forms of personal and collective awareness and, after being so prepared, to demand their rights as human rights” (2006a, p. 150).
2.5 Women, education and empowerment

Women today … [are] involved in [adult education] in such large and increasing numbers as social conditions of our lives change. More importantly women … [are involved] in adult education as we consciously articulate our interests, needs and values (Miles, 1989, pp. 1-2).

Since feminist analyst Angela Miles (1989) commented on women’s increasing involvement in adult education for social change, other feminists have equally provided empirical evidence of the potential of adult education in women’s empowerment and capacity building (Barr, 1999; Hayes & Flannery, 2000; Leicester, 2001; O’Shea & Stone, 2011; Stromquist, 2002; Thompson, 1995). As noted in the above literature review on feminist perspectives, feminists conceptualise women’s equality and status in a variety of ways. However, one factor that persists throughout the feminist literature is ‘power’ and ‘empowerment’ of women to build their capacity to enable them challenge patriarchal ideologies and gain equality with men in social, economic, cultural and political decision-making processes. Education has been identified as the means by which women can gain power to control their lives because “education serves as the basis for the promotion and improvement of women’s status and as a tool to support their role as equal partners in society (Ballara, 1992, p. ix). Apart from feminists, women’s education, development and empowerment have been identified as important initiatives and commitments in gender equality and development goals for international development agencies, national governments and non-government organisations to address women’s powerlessness and inequality through education in formal, non-formal and informal contexts (Kabeer, 1999; Rowlands, 1995; Stromquist, 1995; UN, 2001; UNFPA, 2004; World Bank, 2003, 2008).
The next section presents a review of literature on the concepts of women’s empowerment, and development-focused adult education and training strategies that aim to change women’s consciousness and build their capacity to discover their inner strengths, expand their self-determination, and transform their lives individually and collectively.

### 2.5.1 Conceptualising women’s empowerment

Empowerment as a concept originated in the 1960s as a collective process with a strong political meaning when the notion was adopted by feminist and women’s organisations, black civil rights social movements, and advocates of popular education who were engaged in various struggles for social justice, equality and democratic forms of social change and action (Batliwara, 2007; Gaventa, 2002). By the 1990s, education and development organisations used empowerment as a term for human resource development and motivational practices to increase the human and social capital of disadvantaged groups, particularly women and poor people. Bisnath indicates that as standpoints of feminist and women’s movements, the concept of women’s empowerment was “explicitly used to frame and facilitate the struggle for social justice and women’s equality through a transformation of economic, social and political structures at national and international levels” (2001, pp. 11-12).

Women’s empowerment strategy was seen as a more powerful and transformative way for women’s social struggles, which challenged patriarchy and other intersecting structures of race, social class, ethnicity that determined women’s societal position and circumstance. Through women and empowerment initiatives, feminists introduced a
gender dimension to theories of conscientisation and education and “incorporated gender subordination and the social construction of gender as a fundamental category of analysis in the practice of social change and development” (Batliwara, 2007, p. 559).

Various bodies, including feminist and women’s movements, governments, development agencies and organisations of civil society have adopted and promoted the concept of ‘women and empowerment’ as a process of social transformation, a working strategy and a tool of analysis for women’s advancement in development intervention programs. For instance, the 1995 Fourth UN Women’s Conference in Beijing played a critical role in adopting the concept of women’s empowerment as a demonstration of its commitment to gender equality and women’s advancement. The Beijing Platform declared “women’s empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all sphere of society, including participation in the decision-making process and access to power, are fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace” (UN 1995, Para 13). Also at the 2000 UN Summit, all the member states unanimously committed to eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to eliminate gender inequality and poverty by 2015; and proposed Gender equality and women’s empowerment as the third of the eight MDGs to further exemplify the significance of women’s education and empowerment leading to social transformation (UN, 2000).

Despite the numerous initiatives and programs that adopt the women’s empowerment approach, there is no consistency in its meaning in the burgeoning literature, as it is used in a wide range of contexts and means different things to various people (Moserdale, 2005). The multiple definitions for empowerment offered in the feminist literature contend that the conditions of women’s subordination result from the disempowerment
imposed by people in positions of power and dominance through existing socioeconomic, cultural and political structures; therefore, an understanding should go beyond institutional definitions of power and incorporate the idea that “the personal is political” (Rowlands, 1995, p. 102). Reeves and Baden distinguish between the different feminist perspectives of power that contribute to the maintenance of inequality between men and women as “power within” or self-confidence, “power with” or the capacity to organise with others towards a common purpose, and the “power to” effect change and take decisions, and “power over” others” (2000, p. 35).

Kabeer asserts that power is central to women’s empowerment, which implies that the denial of power leads to women’s disempowerment. She draws on feminist concerns with ‘power over’ and ‘power within’ agendas and describes power as the “ability to make choices” (Kabeer, 1999, p. 436). Kabeer therefore stresses ‘choice’ in conceptualising empowerment as “entailing a process of change … [and] the expansion in people’s ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied them” (p. 437). She further adds “the essence of empowerment is to enhance women’s capacity for self-determination” (p. 462). Kabeer suggests that people’s ability to exercise choice depends on changes in three interrelated and indivisible dimensions namely, resources, agency and achievement. In her analysis, resources include economic resources and the various human and social resources that facilitate the individual’s ability to exercise meaningful choice. Access to such resources “will reflect the rules and norms which govern distribution and exchange in different institutional arenas” (Kabeer, 1999, p. 437). Agency is the individual’s ability to clearly identify and define goals, and use resources to act on them to create new opportunities.
Often referred to as the individual’s ‘decision making’ capacity, and ability to make purposeful choices, agency embodies the meaning, motivation and purpose that propel individuals to pursue various activities that challenge power relations. This may involve “bargaining and negotiation, deception and manipulation, subversion and resistance … and more intangible, cognitive processes of reflection and analysis” (p. 438).

Achievements indicate the attainment of well-being outcomes after individuals have applied their agency and accessed resources. These three dimensions are inter-dependent as each builds on the other to produce a positive spiral of empowerment.

Rowlands (1997) on the other hand, brings a broader analytical perspective to the women, education, development and empowerment discussion. She draws on Foucault (1980) and feminist perspectives about power and argues “empowerment is a process; that it involves some degree of personal development, but that this is not sufficient; and that it involves moving from insight to action” (Rowlands, 1997, p. 15). On the notion of women’s empowerment, she adds that it is “a process whereby women become able to organise themselves to increase their own self-reliance, to assert their independent right to make choices and to control resources which will assist in challenging and eliminating their own subordination” (p. 17).

Rowlands (1997) identified three empowerment processes: personal, collective and close relationships. Though multi-dimensional in nature, these three processes of empowerment do not occur independently, rather they are integral and complementary, and mutually reinforce each other, and “positive changes in one dimension can encourage changes in either the same dimension or in another” (Rowlands, 1997 p. 127). For instance, increased personal empowerment enhances the individual’s ability to
participate fully in society and increase collective empowerment. While Rowlands recognises the complexities of empowerment as a concept and a practice, she asserts that:

There is a core to the empowerment process … which consists of increases in self-confidence and self-esteem, a sense of agency and of “self” in the wider context, and a sense of dignidad (being worthy of having a right to respect from others) (1997, pp. 129-130).

Stromquist (1995) espouses the view of empowerment as a socio-political concept including cognitive, psychological, economic and political components. The cognitive component provides women with in-depth knowledge and understanding of the causes and conditions of their subordination, leading to awareness about patriarchy, their sexuality and legal rights, and “the need to make choices that may go against cultural or social expectations … [and] acquiring new knowledge to create a different understanding of gender relations” (Stromquist, 1995, p. 14). The psychological component is concerned with the positive feelings that give women strength and belief that they can change their situation by themselves. Often, women are socialised to be subservient and allow men to control and make decisions on issues that affect their lives, whereas the psychological component reverses this aspect of women’s ‘learned helplessness’. It enhances women’s development of self-esteem, self-confidence and the competence in making decisions at both the personal and societal levels to improve their conditions. The economic component increases women’s capacity to generate and control economic resources independently. The political component gives women the ability to analyse their subjugated social position, organise and mobilise for social change because “collective action is fundamental to the aim of attaining social
transformation” (Stromquist, 1995, p. 15). It also involves leadership abilities that enable women to help and represent others.

Inherent in the various definitions of women’s empowerment are frequent references to women’s ability to gain power and control over resources in order to challenge the ideology of patriarchy and gender-based discrimination, and develop intrinsic capability and critical consciousness to understand their circumstances and the social environment leading to action (Batliwala, 1994; Kabeer, 1999, 2001; Narayan, 2005; Rowlands, 1995, 1997; Stromquist, 1995, 2002; Tsey, 2010; UN, 2001; UNFPA, 2004; Wallerstein, 1992; World Bank, 2008). Women’s increased knowledge, sense of agency, self-confidence and awareness of gender equity are also highlighted as core values of their empowerment that help to build their capacity to control both material and non-material resources. This culminates in Young’s statement that, despite the differences in feminists’ conceptualisation of empowerment:

[It] is about people, taking control over their own lives: gaining the ability to do things, to set their own agendas, to change events in a way previously lacking. This may include affecting the way other people act consciously or unconsciously forcing changes in behavior (1997, pp. 371-372).

In summary, the various concepts of women’s empowerment focus on women’s subjectivity and consciousness-raising as critical aspects of the processes of change. Empowerment is viewed beyond women’s participation in development activities to include transformation and validation of women’s experiences and abilities and ways of thinking, doing and being (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1997; Belenky & Stanton, 2000). It involves capacity building and decision making power to overcome “negative social constructions” (Rowlands, 1995, p. 103). It therefore opens up new opportunities for women to be productive and create new directions in their lives.
However, there are suggestions that external agents can provide “facilitative power” and “support in ways that encourage the disempowered to free themselves of traditional dependency” (Friedmann, 1992, p. 77), because “empowerment is a process one undertakes for oneself; it is not something done ‘to’ or for someone … the heart of the idea of empowerment involves people coming to a sense of their power, a new relationship with their own contexts” (Lather, 1991, p. 4). Stromquist contends that consciousness-raising is an important aspect of empowerment and argues that the concept of empowerment, as “a process by which oppressed persons gain some control over their lives … has been crucial in the debates seeking to transform gender in society and is a process firmly fostered through … [various] forms of learning” (2008, p. 212). Kwapong also asserts that “women’s empowerment comprise building their capacity … for governance and socioeconomic advancement … [and] that access to education, literacy … [and] productive skills and capital facilitate the empowerment of women” (2005, p. 137). She explains the significance of adult education in capacity building activities for women’s empowerment as:

Adult education … is crucial to enhance women’s capabilities to be able to organize themselves, to improve their skills for generating income, to increase their own self-reliance, to assert their independent right to make decisions or choices, and to be able to control resources which assist them in challenging and eliminating their subordination (Kwapong, 2005, p. 6).

From these perspectives, it is apparent that women’s empowerment exemplifies both individual and collective transformation that can be achieved through adult education and development for empowerment that aims at “helping individuals attain greater economic, political, and social power” (Inglis, 1997, p. 9). The next section discusses examples of research evidence on women’s education, development, and empowerment in particular contexts across a range of countries.
2.5.2 Women, education and empowerment – research evidence

The concept of women’s empowerment is increasingly being used as a tool to understand, influence and analyse women’s social, cultural, economic and political transformation. The adult education, gender and international development literature is replete with empirical evidence of women’s education resulting in the renegotiation and transformation of their roles, responsibilities and status. In many of these studies, women’s level of education and functional literacy and their improved socioeconomic conditions are important indicators of their empowerment. In some of these studies, women’s empowerment is assessed through participants’ feelings, behaviours and perceptions including their levels of self-esteem, self-confidence and self-efficacy. These behaviours relate to new and improved practices at the local and national levels of household decision making and decisions concerning the well-being of family and community members (Batliwala, 1994; Kabeer, 2001; Malhotra, Schuler & Boender, 2002; Medel-Añonuevo, 1995; Moserda, 2005).

The empowerment potential of adult education is articulated by UNESCO:

Adult education empowers individuals because it opens avenues for communication that would otherwise be closed, expands personal choice and controls over one’s environment, and is necessary for the acquisition of many other skills. It gives people access to information through both print and electronic media, equips them to cope better with work and family responsibilities and changes the images they have of themselves … [it] is the key with which individuals can unlock the full range of their talents and realize their creative potentials. It gives disadvantaged people [women] tools they need to move from exclusion to full participation in their society (1997, p. 17).

Various studies around the world particularly in developing countries have established that adult education is crucial to women’s empowerment (AUSAID, 2011; Burchfield, Hua, Baral & Rocha, 2002a; Burchfield, Hua, Iturry & Rocha, 2002b; Jejeebhoy, 1995;
Medel-Añonuevo, 1995; UNESCO, 2009). The UN and the World Bank have been at the forefront of identifying women’s education and empowerment “as one of the key constituent elements of poverty reduction and as a primary development assistance goal” (cited in Malhotra et al., 2002, p. 3).

UNESCO’s (2005, 2007) studies in Bolivia, Mexico, Nepal and Nicaragua found that women participating in adult education programs had higher levels of self-esteem and confidence. The studies conclude that “adults of all ages who continue to participate in education have greater access to information and knowledge that are important for forming views and taking action with respect to key social and political issues” (cited in UNESCO, 2009, p. 20). Kwapong studied rural women in Ghana to find out how adult education could be used to facilitate empowerment and reveals:

> a high level of participation in decision-making in the home and community and economic independence … It is obvious that access to literacy or education, information or knowledge resources, natural or material resources, productive skills and capital facilitates the empowerment of women” (2005, pp. 2-6).


Burchfield et al. (2002a, 2002b) conducted longitudinal studies on the role of integrated education and literacy programs on women’s personal and collective empowerment. Using social, economic and political development indicators, the authors concluded that the participants were empowered because they were in control of many aspects of their
lives. Kagitcibasi’s study of functional literacy and women’s empowerment in Turkey suggests that “a high level of self-efficacy was achieved [and] reading even at a very basic level increased the mobility of the women in the public domain” (2005, p. 486).

Through longitudinal qualitative studies conducted in different contexts in Brazil, Stromquist’s (1997) found that literacy program participants became deeply aware of their environment and had greater confidence about engaging in a variety of social activities. In a subsequent study involving the evaluation of girls and women’s education for social change, Stromquist (2006a) indicated that education helped to acquire intellectual skills and habits that were conducive to social change. In India, Gupta and Yesudian’s (2006) study of the dimensions of women’s empowerment found that women’s education was the most important and consistent predictor for increased household autonomy and social mobility. The women became assertive as they gained greater knowledge about their rights and developed attitudes towards gender and domestic violence. They increased their engagement in community activities, took up leadership roles, and made autonomous decisions within their family and communities. Their findings confirmed prior studies by Egbo (2000) in Nigeria, Hindin (2000) in Zimbabwe, and Malhotra and Mather (1997) in Sri Lanka. Niranjana’s (2002) study of the anti-liquor movement mounted by the women in the Mahila Samakhya literacy group in India also demonstrates how the women’s education exposed them to new ideas that empowered them to collectively participate in protests and campaigns to challenge male prerogatives in their community.

An international development organisation, ActionAid (1993) developed a participatory learning and empowerment approach, Regenerated Freirean Literacy through
Empowering Community Techniques (REFLECT). The program’s holistic approach, based on Paulo Freire’s (1972) consciousness-raising in literacy education, has been used in adult education particularly adult literacy programs to facilitate empowerment and social action among women in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Ashe and Parrott (2001) studied the impact of women’s participation in a REFLECT program in Nepal. They found that apart from gaining greater self-confidence, and increased participation in family and community decision-making, the women participants were also very keen to send their children to school, because of their awareness of the importance and benefits of education.

A Caribbean study of the effect of adult education on women and sustainable development by McLean reports, “adult education transforms learners by continually engaging them in sense making and meaning making process that build the capacity for changing values and dispositions” (2009, p. 1). In another study in the Caribbean, Ellis notes that, women participating in non-formal education “gained self-confidence, recognized ways in which they could be more self-reliant, and realized that they could manage on their own” (1995, p. 90). She further observes that the women “were not only prepared to question and challenge women’s existing reality, but had become so empowered that they were willing to act to change it” (p. 90). In conclusion, Ellis suggests that the women recognised a need for change in their lives and that of the people around them, and with their education, they “were better able to articulate the desired change” (p. 90).

Studies on education and empowerment that have been conducted in developed countries (Australia, Canada, UK, US) focusing on women in Indigenous, migrant and
refugee populations have reported that the participants gained self-efficacy, self-confidence and self-esteem. The majority of the participants explained their feelings of independence and confidence, and ability to perform several tasks such as engaging in digital and information technology, and further studies; and being competent to deal with government officials and service providers. The majority of migrant and refugee women associate education with possibilities for empowerment, the ability to make informed decisions and a voice within their ethnic and host communities, upward social mobility and economic advancement through wider participation in the market economy. Birch, Kenyon, Koshy and Wills-Johnson write, “adult education help … people to build their skills … [and migrants] use adult education as a first step back into the world of organized learning … adult and community education [also] enables migrants to interact more satisfyingly with the local community” (2003, p. 7).

Tsey’s (1997) comparative study of Indigenous women from the developed nations of Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the US, and developing country, Ghana, in adult education and health, observed that educated Ghanaian women were more informed and had the ability to manage health issues better in their families. He concludes that, “education … is a tool for liberation … and educational attainments translate directly into better health” (Tsey, 1997, p. 77). He further adds that for Australian Indigenous women even though they live in a developed country, the “lack of formal education is a barrier to Aboriginal social and health improvement” (p. 77). Daniels’ 2008 study of women in VET, and O’Shea and Stone’s 2011 study of mature-aged women in university in Australia, report increased self-esteem, self-confidence and self-efficacy, as well as social capital networks among the participants. Hannah (2008) points to
education as “a key site” for the promotion of empowerment for migrants and refugees. Hatoss and Huijser in their study of Sudanese refugees in Australia make the connection between education and empowerment when women “view education as an avenue to gain agency to change their lives and their society” (2010, p. 156).

In Canada, Fenwick studied the impact of formal English classes and workplace learning on migrant women, and states:

[They] developed a sense of personal worth, rights and the boundaries they could push to defend their rights … Their everyday learning … ‘on the line’ [workplace] strengthened [their] confidence and intimate connections … the English language program nurtured confidence and social connections and allowed women to discuss work conditions and consider actions for change (2008, pp. 125-126).

Beiser and Hou’s (2001) longitudinal study of Southeast Asian refugees in Canada reported that education and particularly, proficiency in English language, gave them psychological empowerment and enhanced their ability to develop new social resources and increased their sense of internal coherence and self-worth. Conversely lack of education and language skills contributed to social exclusion, unemployment, low self-esteem and depression. Guo has conducted extensive studies on Chinese migrants’ settlement issues in Canada, and reports that education empowered Chinese migrants to “enhance mutual understanding between immigrants and mainstream society; hence shortened the social distance between the two groups (2004, p. 188).

Schuller et al. (2004) undertook a comprehensive study on the wider benefits of learning involving 145 case studies in Britain, and the findings demonstrated that the participants who were mainly women from poor and low socioeconomic backgrounds had transformed lives through adult education. They indicated that the confidence and self-esteem that the participants gained from education had positive impact on their family
relationships, employment, further studies, involvement in community and civic activities and their general health and well-being. Cakir and Guneri (2011) explored the factors that contributed to the empowerment of Turkish migrant women in the UK. The findings revealed that higher levels of education and English language proficiency were significant predictors of empowerment. They also note “a good command of the host-country language … [provided] greater empowerment … for migrant women in coping with the demands of daily life in a new cultural environment” (Cakir & Guneri, 2011, p. 225). Jackson’s study of migrant women in the UK lists the two-fold benefits of their engagement in education and learning activities as follows:

The women develop skills (including language skills) but also use their informal and non-formal learning to develop … ‘relational capital’ … which can enhance a sense of belonging for migrant women (2010, p. 238).

Jackson further explains that ‘relational capital’ “enables the women to develop clearer knowledge and understandings about their relationships within their competing worlds” (2010, p. 251), enhancing access to valuable community networks and moving from ‘exclusion’ to ‘inclusion’ in community activities.

In the US context, England (1997) suggests that the increase in access to education with employment outcomes for women led to women’s economic independence and assertiveness that resulted in the rise of divorce and single motherhood. This was attributed to the economic empowerment, and the freedom that education gave women to enable them to leave unhappy relationships.

The link between women, education and empowerment effectiveness was also established by the three female Prime Ministers in the Commonwealth, Julia Gillard (Australia), Sheikh Hasina (Bangladesh) and Kamla Persad-Bissessa (Trinidad and
Tobago) during the October 2011 Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Australia. They organised a special session titled *Empowering women to lead*, and spoke candidly about women’s education and empowerment and how education has empowered them with the knowledge and skills to negotiate the processes of ‘becoming leaders’ and ‘being leaders’ (Kanwar, Ferreira & Latchem, 2013).

In both developed and developing countries, the research evidence suggests that important connections exist between adult education and the multiple dimensions of women’s empowerment because “with increased self-confidence and social capital, with a stronger sense of themselves as people and as learners … these first tentative steps into learning will be the catalyst that enables them to fight back against existing [male] power and privilege” (McLachlan, Tett & Hall, 2009, p. 346). Adult education has been viewed as critical in the process of women’s empowerment as highlighted by Pomary’s (1992) statement that: “No matter how we run away from it, the foremost agent of empowerment is education: education is the only passport to liberation. Education contributes to sustainable development. It brings about a positive change in our lifestyles” (cited in Kwapong, 2005, p. 4). The research evidence from the various women’s education, development and empowerment programs illuminates how adult education has been utilised to equip women with knowledge and skills to perform their adult roles as citizens, family members and productive workers; given them ‘voice’, and the “power to act on our [their] own behalf to change a situation” (hooks, cited in Daniell, 2003, p. 74). The transformative and empowering aspects of education are captured in Thompson’s assertion that, “We think of education as a tool. Something to
help us change our lives and help re-create the world in a different way … [and] as a way to challenge the present order of things (1997, p. 91).

2.6 Conclusion

The chapter has presented a review of a wide variety of literature relevant to the analysis of this study. The framing of the research commenced with a discussion of the sociocultural, economic and political contexts in which the study is situated. The historical overview of the changes and patterns in immigration and settlement policies and the subsequent changing profile and needs of migrants and refugees were discussed. Apart from contextualising the study, this discussion attempts to make connections of the participants’ “personal issues with larger issues to link the public and the private” (Pocock, 2003, p. 11).

Various aspects of migrant and refugee women’s issues, particularly of African-Australians, were reviewed to highlight the gap that justifies this study exploring the role of adult education in women’s capacity building during settlement in the NT. The literature revealed that women’s migration, settlement, integration and educational experiences are understudied aspects of international migration, particularly of Africans in Australia (Commonwealth of Australia, 2012; Hugo, 2009).

The critical theoretical assumptions, namely transformative learning and feminist standpoint that inform the study were also reviewed. An attempt has been made to highlight how these critical theories widen knowledge creation and provide space for understanding the multiplicity of experiences, ways of being and identity in order to challenge dominant patterns of valuing some knowledges over others. Grant et al. point
out that the absence of women’s voices in academic discourse kept “their problems on the margins of educational research and preserved them as the others in the academic community” (2004, p. 186). It is also apparent in hooks’ (1990) feminist analysis that gender research in education has been complicated by the failure to address different ethnic and racial group experiences. This study is an attempt to fill that gap in the literature.

As an emerging ethnic community within the Australian multicultural mosaic, African migrants and refugees have been described as a group with no integrative capacity due to sociocultural and linguistic differences (Andrews, 2007; DIAC, 2007b). Fine asserts that it is important to analyse “not just the decontextualized voices of Others, but the very structures, ideologies, contexts and practices that constitute Othering” (1994, p. 70). In this study, I challenge the hegemonic discourses that limit African migrant and refugee women’s access to the meaning making process in migration and educational theories by placing them at the centre of analysis. In bringing the voices of previously silenced African women to the fore, this study not only addresses the gap in scholarly literature, but also deconstructs the patriarchal discourses and systems of oppression that silence these women’s voices and disrupt the exclusionary trend of “privileging some voices in the academic domain … and failing to include others” (Vande Berg, 1997, p. 89).

Through this analysis, it is hoped that practitioners and policy makers will have insights and a broader understanding to advance and develop their work in migration, settlement, integration and education in relation to marginalised and minority groups, particularly African migrants and refugee women. Research with African migrant and refugee
women is needed to advance discussions of their experiences and realities for the purpose of informing policy direction, adult education teaching and learning practice, as well as to broaden theoretical frameworks within the field of migration, and adult education and learning. The next chapter provides details of the research methodology utilised, which was guided by the theoretical frameworks reviewed in this chapter.
Chapter 3: The research methodology

Until lions start writing their own stories, tales of a lion hunt will always glorify the hunters (African proverb)

Chapter 3 focuses on the method employed in exploring the role of adult education in building the community capacity of African migrant and refugee women in the NT. The chapter first maps out the feminist theoretical perspectives that influenced the research methodology, followed by a discussion of the research methods employed in the study, and ends with a review of the issues and challenges of researching minority groups, such as African migrant and refugee women, in the dominant Eurocentric Australian context. There is also a discussion of my own migrant positioning as an African-Australian female researcher doing research with African-Australian women “people from back home” (Merriam et al., 2001, p. 406).

The main objectives of this study were to listen to and hear the stories, and then to explore African migrant and refugee women’s settlement, integration and educational experiences to gain better understanding of the factors and strategies that have contributed positively and negatively on their learning trajectory. The following research questions guided the study to capture the participants’ lived experiences in a respectful manner that legitimates women’s voices as sources of knowledge. As outlined in Chapter 1, the key research question is:

*What is the role and impact of adult education in the settlement and integration process of African-Australian women in the NT?*
The sub-questions are:

1. What pre-migration qualifications, skills and experience do African-Australian women possess?

2. What opportunities does migration provide African-Australian women in the NT?

3. What barriers and challenges do African-Australian women encounter in their migration, settlement and education process in the NT?

4. Why and how do African-Australian women utilise adult education opportunities to build their capacity?

5. How does African-Australian women’s capacity to operate in their community change through adult education?

### 3.1 Conceptual and theoretical framework

As previously discussed in Chapter 2, feminist standpoint perspectives provide the theoretical framework underpinning this study (Harding, 1987, 1991; Smith, 1987). The feminist standpoint is an appropriate framework for this study as it enables the women participants to tell their stories the way they experience them, thus giving ‘voice’ to a marginalised group with differing experiences and perspectives from their new, mainly Eurocentric, society. The construction of knowledge varies across people and individuals, therefore it is important to provide a framework that encompasses differences and allows individual people’s perspectives to be understood. Reinharz for instance, argues that feminism is not a method but a perspective that can be used to develop innovative research methods. She states:

Feminist researchers do not cynically ‘put’ women into their scholarship so as to avoid appearing sexist. Rather, for feminist researchers females are worth examining as individuals and as people whose experience is interwoven with other
women … feminists are interested in women as individuals and as a social category (1992, p. 241).

From the foregoing, feminist perspectives provide good grounds to analyse gender politics and gender conflict that places “women [as] agents of knowledge and power in defiance of laws and interdictions forbidding [their] significance” (Sylvester, cited in Mapedzahama, 2007, p. 105).

Feminist research is primarily an approach that is rooted in feminism and “connected in principle to feminist struggle” (Sprague & Zimmerman, 1993, p. 266). Hence, feminist research is an integral part of the process to discover and understand the forces of oppression for women, and includes the responsibility and commitment to create change and liberation for women from subordination and oppression. Through feminist research, the ‘excluded other’ is made visible; and a number of scholars credit feminist theories for having “politicised the research process” (Rice & Ezzy, 2000, p. 18) by actively challenging the dominant political practices and power structures of patriarchy and oppression (Collins, 2000; Fonow & Cook, 1991; hooks, 2000; Olesen, 1994).

Feminist theorists challenge conventional research methods that are developed from male perspectives, and advocate for research methods that allow women to talk about their own experiences and perspectives (Harding, 1987; Oakley, 1981; Reinharz, 1992; Smith, 1987). Feminist research approaches thus act to legitimise the experience of the person being studied; particularly they legitimise women’s experiences, knowledge, voices, and prioritise “women as knowers” (Olesen, 1994, p. 160). Additionally, feminist research mainly highlights the political and ethical aspects of sociological research and is concerned with the process of reflexivity, where the researcher is intrinsically and significantly connected with the research process and outcomes.
Feminist research methodology has often been criticised for its over-emphasis on
gender, reliance on personal experience instead of conventional scientific method,
rejection of hierarchy, and its emancipatory and transformative goals. Hammersley
(1995) contends that the privileging of gender in feminist research removes other aspects
of the phenomenon being studied, and that the emphasis on direct experience rather than
scientific method is premised on the idea that women have uniquely valid insights. He
also added that the goal of emancipation is not unique to feminist research. In
responding to such critiques, feminist scholars including Ramazanoğlu maintain that
feminist research methods are not “privileged ways of accessing reality but are varied
explorations of validating knowledge produced from different standpoints” (1992, p.
209), expressing the political commitment of feminist research as a process of
discovering and understanding oppression and subordination, and women’s liberation,
transformation and empowerment. There is not one social standpoint that is superior in
all forms of knowledge in feminist research, and the most important thing is that people
are able to examine the impact of their personal standpoint (Smith, 2002).
Generally the voice of women, and particularly migrant and refugee women, is suppressed and devalued because of the circumstances of living in an unfamiliar and foreign land with limited human, social, cultural, economic and linguistic capital. The feminist research method focuses on women’s knowledge and experiences, taking an epistemological position that women’s stories and experiences can be “legitimized as knowledge and that women’s beliefs and ways of knowing and thinking (their ‘subjective truths’) can count as knowledge” (Harding, 1987, p. 3). Feminist research embodies the theoretical complexities of social relationships and situated experiences and calls for methodologies that allow for the representation of women’s voices as sources of knowledge. Ralph indicates the importance of feminist researchers, recognizing and identifying that the women engaged as participants are “often actively working to change the conditions of their oppression” (1988, p. 139).

This study is relevant to feminist perspectives because it creates opportunities and environments for women’s meanings and values to be expressed and explored as part of an evolving process of discovery in marginalised women’s education and learning. Educational institutions are active participants in socialisation processes, and embedded within them is the ongoing work of gender socialisation, identity construction, enculturation and the development of sexual identity—processes that are a direct focus of feminism. These confirm Sylvester’s suggestion that “there are many interpretations of women, [and] many dailiness that women experience” (1995, p. 953). As a feminist study ‘for’ and ‘with’ African migrant and refugee women to explore their educational experiences, it embraced the participants’ (the researched) experience as a reflection of “real sociological knowledge” (Crompton, 2001, p. 68). Listening to and hearing the
women’s voices, and learning from their experiences, are vital to the feminist reconstruction and understanding of the world. Using a feminist approach in this study allowed me to explore and examine the multi-layers and different meanings within the participants’ stories to find out the role of adult education in building the individual and collective capacity of the participants, their family members and their communities for successful integration into their host society.

3.2 Research process

3.2.1 Qualitative inquiry

There are several research designs or methods to consider for any given study and the choice of a particular research design or method is dependent on the nature of the research problem. Several authors (Bryman, 2001; Creswell, 2005; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Merriam, 1998) argue that the actual suitability of a research paradigm derives from the social phenomena to be explored. In choosing a research paradigm and subsequent research design and methods, reference is made to the theoretical and philosophical frameworks that ground a given study as well as the procedures and processes employed for the study.

Research methods differ by virtue of the theoretical and philosophical assumptions that underpin them. There are two methodological traditions of research; quantitative (positivism) and qualitative (post-positivism) (Castellan, 2010). Within quantitative forms of research, knowledge creation emphasises a scientific approach. The researcher adopts the position of an objective person, who collects facts about the phenomenon and then builds up an explanation of the phenomenon by arranging the facts in a chain of
causality (Bryman, 2001; Creswell, 2005). The quantitative research paradigm basically posits that one reality exists and that this reality is quantifiable and can be generalised.

Conversely, in qualitative forms of research, the ontological assumption emphasises the subjective and diverse nature of reality, and requires the researcher to explore and report participants’ views and diverse opinions. The epistemological assumption demands a close proximity between the researcher and the data being studied, which means that a qualitative researcher needs to spend time in the field to be familiar with, and understand the phenomenon in order to report on it, and the qualitative researcher brings personal values and interpretation to the narrative. The researcher should consider the participants and contexts, and work on the details before generalisation, using an inductive approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Merriam, 2009). The qualitative tradition is humanistic and interpretive, and it is about a reality that is socially constructed rather than objectively determined. It deals with the deeper understanding, meanings and subjectivity of social phenomena. Therefore, the task of the researcher is not to gather facts and measure how often patterns occur, but rather to appreciate the different constructions and meanings that people place on their experience (Creswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1990).

The problem and purpose of this study are embedded in feminist narratives of African migrant and refugee women’s lived migration and educational experiences, requiring a research approach that would not objectify the African-Australian women’s voice. Therefore, a qualitative approach underpinned by a theoretical framework that draws selectively on feminist perspectives guided the exploration of the women’s experiences through migration and multicultural concepts, and the educational and sociological
theories of emancipation, transformation and empowerment. This makes power and inequality central to the analysis of the nature of adult migrant and refugee women’s settlement, integration and educational experiences in the NT. Because women are at the centre of this research, the decision to adopt a qualitative methodology for the study was strongly influenced by feminist perspectives, as feminist qualitative methodology “honours the lived experiences and knowledge of the people involved” (Gatenby & Humphries, 2000, p. 89). It also “begins from where women as … knowers … are located in their actual everyday worlds rather than in an imaginary space constituted by the objectified forms of sociological knowledge” (Smith, 1987, p. 153).

A quantitative research method would have made it possible to elicit general information from a large number of participants, but this study was about an un-researched group of African migrant and refugee women, and I was more interested in obtaining detailed, personal stories from a relatively small number of the group without the imposition of preconceived ideas. Qualitative inquiry is appropriate for such studies where the research topic calls for exploration and in-depth examination because theories do not exist to explain it, and variables are not easily identifiable (Creswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Merriam, 2009). In such a situation, there is a need to understand the essence of the participant’s experience from their own perspective, because the meaning of each participant’s experience constitutes reality, and a qualitative approach is suitable for “studying how meanings and interpretations are constructed” (Liampittong & Ezzy, 2005, p. 2) by people whilst they are interacting with their social worlds. Cannon, Higginbotham and Leung also contend that “qualitative research methodologies are best suited to document and describe the experiences of women who have been excluded
from the most basic building blocks of existing theories” (1987, p. 2). While migration and feminist scholars have explored the experiences of different groups of women in the Australian ethnic mosaic, the experiences of African migrant and refugee women have not been reflected in the literature. Therefore, it was useful in this study to explore their lived experiences so they could be incorporated into the knowledge about Australian women.

Quantitative research methods of survey and questionnaire would also have enabled me to commence the study with a set of theories to test (Denscombe, 2003); however, in this study I was looking for meanings and interpretations to emerge from the personal stories that the participants narrated from their experiences and perspectives because “one of the significant ways through which individuals make sense of and give meaning to their experiences is to organize them in a narrative form” (Mishler, 1986, p. 118). By telling me their stories, the participants make sense of their lives because the process “transforms [the] mere succession of actions and events into a coherent whole in which these happenings gain meaning” (Polkinghorne, 1997, p. 13). Johnson-Bailey observes that this method “gives preeminence to displaying data in its original state, which is acknowledged as a trustworthy way of giving ‘voice’ to participants” (2006, p. 125).

Qualitative methods capture the full range of participants’ perceptions and interpretations allowing participants to share both their experiences without limiting them to categories and meanings pre-defined by the researcher (Shakespeare-Finch & Wickham, 2009).

African migrant and refugee women have suffered hegemonic silencing of their lived experiences. Since the goal of this study was to explore their migration and educational
experiences, it was pertinent to adopt qualitative methodology because its exploratory research process is in tandem with feminist author, Lentin’s argument, to consider “women’s own accounts of their lives as primary documents for interpreting their lives … because they reveal the women’s meanings [and] their intersections of their understandings” (1997, p. 5). Mapedzahama also argues, a “qualitative approach [is] … best suited to explore the ways in which women understand and give meaning to their social world” (2007, p.121). Additionally, the qualitative design was appropriate for the study because it is flexible and the research process continuously evolves and unfolds, providing a deeper understanding of situations in their uniqueness and the meanings of the interactions in particular settings for the participants in that setting (Patton, 1990).

Qualitative researchers begin with the daily existence of individuals, focusing on the ways that explorations of personal experience enable us to build more comprehensive pictures of social reality (Kasper, 1994). Similarly, this research began with the African migrant and refugee women as individuals, who as a collective form an integral part of the emerging African-Australian community. According to Cole and Knowles:

Clusters of individual lives make up communities, societies, and cultures. To understand some of the complexities, complications and confusions within the life of just one member of a community, is to gain insights into the collective (2001, p.11).

Through qualitative research, social and human problems are explored as the qualitative researcher “builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting” (Creswell, 1998, p. 15). As a researcher in a study that aimed to represent the ‘voices’ of the ‘voiceless’ African-Australian women participants, the qualitative approach enabled me to enter the worlds of the participants, get to know them and intimately represent and interpret their worlds.
Data gained through an animated, responsive and sensitive manner are glossed “with the meanings and purposes of those people who are their source” (Cohen & Manion, 1994, p. 37). For a minority and marginalised group, the process gives space for the participants’ individual stories and privileges their perspectives because it allows their oppressed voices to be heard. The process also assists me as a researcher to note and understand any changes, shifts and growth in the women’s gendered self-identities. In effect, a qualitative methodology is useful in learning how to effectively understand the meaning people make out of their experiences and how their interpretations influence their reactions.

### 3.2.2 Rationale for the case study

The method chosen to explore and examine the role of adult education in building the community capacity of African migrant and refugee women was the qualitative case study research method (Merriam 1998). Case studies were initially developed for sociological research in Chicago in the 1920s, but are now generally accepted as a legitimate strategy, and researchers conventionally use case studies across a variety of disciplines (Reinharz, 1992; Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994). Qualitative case studies are prevalent in the field of education. Merriam points out that case study research “has illuminated educational practice for nearly thirty years” (1998, p. 26). Bromley in highlighting the distinct advantage of using case study approach as opposed to other research designs in education and applied social sciences writes:

> Case studies get as close to the subject of interest as they possibly can … partly by their access to subjective factors (thoughts, feelings, and desires) … Also case studies tend to spread the net for evidence widely, whereas experiments and surveys usually have a narrow focus (1986, p. 23).
The qualitative case study research method is consistent with the underlying feminist theoretical perspectives of this study because it embodies reflexivity and subjectivity in the research process. Feminist scholars widely use this approach in research to examine contemporary real-life situations; as they assert “case studies are essential for putting women on the map of social life” (Reinharz, 1992, p. 174). Kelsey contends that “feminist case studies are dedicated to giving back to participants by giving ‘voice’ to the ‘voiceless’ in the hope for social change by raising consciousness and informing policy and practice” (2006, p. 125). Case studies reveal the lived experiences and self-stories of important events in the participants’ lives. They open “voices, visions and feelings … demanding to be heard” (Denzin, 1995, pp. 14-18). Case studies also provide powerful means of learning through experiences and “represent an interesting … deeply personal stories, evolving out of an individual’s experiences” (Colbert, Trimble & Desberg, 1996, p. xiii). Qualitative case studies are appropriate for exploratory research when investigating rich complexities of social phenomena and their environments because “the foremost concern of case study research is to generate knowledge of the particular” (Stake, cited in Schwandt, 1997, p. 13). Case studies therefore enable the researcher to capture the nuances and particularities of the social phenomena and give the research studies flexibility to probe emerging themes with emphasis on detailed contextual analysis of events or conditions and their relationships.

The case study research method has been differentiated from other research designs by what Cronbach (1975) refers to as “interpretation in context” (cited in Merriam, 1998, p. 29), providing “intensive descriptions and analyses of a single unit” (p. 19), allowing “a detailed examination of one setting, or a single object, a single depository of documents
or one particular event” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 54). Case studies are particularly helpful in situations where the researcher has little control over the events being studied, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon that occurs in real life contexts with unclear boundaries between the phenomenon and the context (Schwandt, 1997). Making the decision to use case study as opposed to other research designs also depends on what the researcher wants to know. Yin (1994) suggests that a case study approach is the preferred strategy in addressing ‘how’, ‘what’ and ‘why’ questions, such as those motivated by this study, because generally the ‘what’ questions may be exploratory and the ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions may be explanatory. This study utilised a combination of exploratory and explanatory questions in order to capture the similarities, variations, contradictions and fluidity of the participants’ adult education experiences, and the contextual nature of the use of adult education opportunities and their role in building the participants’ individual and collective capacity for integration.

Another reason for adopting the case study approach is its ability to reveal details about a unique phenomenon and atypical case such as African-Australian women in the NT. Abramson underscores the value of unique or atypical cases when he states:

First, since such data are rare, they can help elucidate the upper and lower boundaries of experience … atypical cases … are essential for understanding the range or variety of human experience, which is essential for understanding and appreciating the human condition (1992, p. 190).

The case study approach helped to highlight some of the complexities that such diversity brings to the development and implementation of adult education that might contribute to the empowerment and socioeconomic well-being, as well as a culturally inclusive vision for a literate and multicultural Australia.
Given the broad scope of the method, the case study approach provides a framework to view life and society as reflected in this study, because this study seeks an in-depth understanding of the role of adult education in building the community capacity of African-Australian women in the NT. I was investigating a contemporary phenomenon in the context of wider educational enactments situated in a particular geographical region and political climate and policies (migration, settlement, integration, adult education, adult migrant education, and multiculturalism). A case study approach enabled me as a researcher to capture various nuances because the type of information gathered in a case study is characterised by “extremely rich, detailed and in-depth information” (Berg, 2001, p. 251), and helped to discover the causal links between the NT setting, migration, settlement and adult education opportunities for capacity building of the participants, and their successful integration.

3.2.3 Case study approach: Limitations and how to rectify them

The use of a case study approach in qualitative research polarises many authors as there are some concerns and criticisms that need to be considered to improve the quality of a case study. The common thread in all these criticisms and concerns relates to human subjectivities and foibles (Macpherson, Brooker & Ainsworth, 2000).

First, most authors have reservations about the impact of the role of the researcher as the chief data collector and analyser, and the researcher becoming too close to the phenomena of the study (Alderman, Jenkins & Kemmis, 1976; MacDonald & Walker, 1974). Second, some critics cite limited interpersonal and communication skills and lack of specialised interviewing techniques by researchers that might intrude into the lives of
the participants (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000; Merriam, 1998). Qualitative case study is not a neutral and value-free process because within research designs in a qualitative case study, the researcher as the primary data collector holds power that may be used to selectively ask questions or choose data to support preconceived conclusions (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002). This could pose substantial ethical risks as researchers may have biases, preferences and worldviews that may impact on their decisions (Hakim, 1987).

As an African migrant woman and researcher, I am actively involved with the African-Australian community that includes some of the participants in this study, and I do not pretend that I commenced this study “with a blank slate but … acknowledge the embedded prejudgments and [allow] them to be critically scrutinized” (Gitlin, Siegel & Boru, 1989, p. 249). Undoubtedly, my own experiences affected the questions I asked as well as the way I interpreted the data. This is why when a researcher is carrying out a qualitative interpretive case study their own insights and reflections are important assets to the research. Creswell advises researchers to “reflect on their own values and assumptions and actively write them into the research” (2005, p. 50). He further adds, “this may involve discussing personal experiences and identifying how [they] collaborated with participants during phases of the project” (p. 50).

Third, the case study method has been questioned on the basis that the study of a small number of participants cannot offer enough grounds for establishing generality of findings. This makes it difficult to draw generalisable principles from one case study to other cases (Flyvberg, 2006; Stark & Torrance, 2005). Arguably, the above conception about the basis upon which generalisations can or should be made is contestable (Stake,
Mitchell states, “we infer that the features present in the case study will be related in a wider population not because the case is representative, but because our analysis is unassailable” (1983, p. 200). Macpherson et al. also argue that “case study research is capable of creating thick descriptions and rich understandings of social contexts that have relevance and resonance across social sites” (2000, p. 49).

A fourth concern about case study research is purported to lack rigour, reliability and validity, and its tendency to demonstrate bias and selectivity, as well as an inability to move beyond surface description (Bromley, 1986). For instance, the phenomenon might alter or evolve over the study period or a variance might occur between the actual beliefs or behaviours of the participants and the reported beliefs or behaviours (Stark & Torrance, 2005). Finally, researchers cite the possibility of producing an unwieldy document that oversimplifies, distorts and exaggerates a situation that also relates to reader bias and preconceptions (Cohen, et al., 2005). Case studies can also be expensive to carry out in terms of time, resources and quantity of information collected (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Despite the above concerns with the case study research method, there is a strong argument for a case study approach to explore and examine the questions that underpin this study as the advantages outweigh the concerns. Qualitative case study research methods tend to be emic and holistic, and get close to the original experience of interest so as to be able to record it accurately in rich detail. Case studies:

Allow us the rich insights, to ‘see’ anew, and to illuminate the complexity of social environments. These insights also serve the formation of partnerships between the researchers and researched that are able to direct actions to change the norms of social practices (Macpherson et al., 2000, p. 58).
As an African-Australian woman, an adult educator and mature-age student, who has lived and worked with Indigenous people, international students, migrant and refugee women in Australia and Canada, my decision to conduct formal research and write meaningfully about how African-Australian women utilise adult education opportunities to build their individual and community capacity was a form of situated research.

The issues and challenges that I have encountered have a strong personal and professional resonance for me. According to Foucault:

> If one is interested in doing historical work that has some political meaning, utility and effectiveness, then it is possible if one has some kind of involvement with the struggles taking place in the area in question (1980, p. 64).

Feminist researchers have proposed related arguments with debates about the role and positionality of the researcher and the significance of their autobiographical investments featuring in much methodological discussion (Collins 2000; Harding 1987; Lather 1991; Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002; Reinharz, 1992). Caldwell equally asserts that, “research by Black feminist scholars and activists have provided some insights on studies that concern a group of people of colour” (2001, p. 7).

In this research project, the area of study that I sought deeper understanding of was both personal and professional. My understanding of adult migrant education for effective integration of migrants and refugees, adult migrant education practices, the struggles and the “lines of force, tensions and points of collision” (Foucault, 1980, p. 65) result from my experiences as an African woman migrant, adult educator, mature-age student and a social justice advocate facilitating community settlement and integration programs for African migrants and refugees in the NT. My awareness became one of the catalysts for this case study. Yet migration policies and educational issues are complex and dynamic.
Hence, this case study straddles a common methodological tension of attempting to capture and record a specific moment and process in time, while acknowledging that in the passage of research time, starting from data collection, transcription, reflection, analysis and writing, these events are subject to change, even as I attempt to understand them and paradoxically “preserve” them as a case study (Macpherson, et al., 2000; McLeod & Thompson, 2009).

3.3 The research design

There are three principal data collection methods utilised in qualitative social inquiry namely: conversations, observations and examination of written documents (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Patton, 1990). Case study as a methodological approach incorporates a number of data-gathering measures ranging from document analysis to general field studies and interviews (Berg, 2004; Merriam, 2001; Yin, 1994). This research design incorporates data sources, participant selection, interview methods, data management, analysis and interpretation.

3.3.1 Data sources and collection methods

Multiple data sources and data collection methods were used to explore how African-Australian women utilise adult education opportunities to build their community capacity in the NT. These data sets included in-depth interviews, original document sources, questionnaire, and the researcher’s observational field notes. The two main data gathering instruments – the in-depth interviews and analysis of original documents – were selected because they were considered practicable and complementary to each other. The multiple data sources and methods “contribute[s] to the trustworthiness of the
Data … and increase[s] confidence in [the] research findings” (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 24). Data for the study were collected in three stages. The first stage comprised a literature review of international migration, gender and women publications, ABS Census data, DIAC and Multicultural Affairs publications, Adult education and learning particularly, Adult Migrant Education Programs (AMEP) publications, independent research publications, newsletters and press releases. Both Australian and international research on migrant and refugee women’s education for community capacity building were also explored, as they were critical in augmenting the understanding of the research issues under review.

The second stage involved a short questionnaire (Appendix 1) that enabled me to develop a demographic profile of the 24 research participants. In the third stage, all 24 participants, including 19 from Darwin and five from Alice Springs, took part in the individual qualitative semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions. The experiences and perceptions of the participants recorded in the semi-structured interviews were the primary source of data in this study.

The aim of the study was to understand the subjectively experienced realities of settlement, education and learning in a cross-cultural environment by illuminating the participants’ settlement challenges, education and learning opportunities, and broader transformations and empowerment in their host community. Therefore, the semi-structured interview open-ended questions explored themes including family and social networks, education and training, settlement challenges, and issues to elicit participants’ stories about their experiences and perspectives (Appendix 2). These themes were derived from information gleaned from the literature, the questionnaire, and my
background as an African-Australian woman, adult educator, mature age student and community organiser with prior knowledge of some of the settlement and educational issues amongst African migrant and refugee women.

### 3.3.2 Selection of research participants

In order to explore in detail pre- and post-migration adult education experiences of African-Australian women in the NT, a purposeful sampling technique was used in the selection of information-rich cases that intensely illustrate the phenomenon of interest, and were strong on explanatory power in respect to the phenomenon (Creswell, 1998; Wertz, 2005). Such a sampling approach was also conducive to inductive analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

As this study was interested in casting a broader net to explore how African-Australian women of different social strata construct, process and make meaning of the role of adult education in building their community capacity, 24 African women participants were selected. These participants living in Alice Springs and Darwin originally came from 13 of the 24 African countries represented in the NT (Appendix 3). Alice Springs and Darwin were chosen because they present the largest populations and vibrant mix of ethnic African groups, and therefore provided a unique opportunity to find key informants who were knowledgeable about the phenomenon because they have gone through the experience, and were willing to participate in the study and share their experiences with me as a researcher. Potential participants were contacted informally through my established networks in the NT African community. Since the selection was based on a particular group of participants, a set of pre-requisite attributes for potential
participants was established. The selected women participants satisfied all of the following criteria:

- Born in any of the Sub-Saharan African countries represented in the NT
- Aged between 18 and 60 years old
- Entered Australia under any of the major immigration streams namely: Humanitarian (Refugee), Family and Skilled migrants
- Lived in the NT for more than 12 months
- Studied or were studying as adults in any course of study regardless of the delivery method
- Involved in their ethnic/wider community activities in some capacity: as a community leader, a paid or a volunteer worker, a public servant, or as a self-employed person.

The participants came from diverse educational and socioeconomic backgrounds, and were either completing or had completed their education at an adult learning institution. The majority were skilled and had worked in their countries of origin and other overseas countries in occupations including teaching, law, nursing, secretarial and administrative work, dressmaking and hairdressing. In a qualitative case study the sample size is determined by the nature of the research questions being investigated and the “potential yield of findings” (Wertz, 2005, p. 171). The eventual sample size of 24 women was determined according to the logic of non-random purposeful sampling. This sampling requires an adequate number of cases to achieve redundancy and sufficiency in the data so that valid conclusions can be drawn (Eisner, 1991; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1990). Additionally, many women from the African community who were willing to
participate in this study influenced the sample size. I have noted from my experience working with migrant and refugee women that they are always willing to share their stories. Feminist researchers often (Reinharz, 1992; Roberts, 1981; Smith, 1996) comment on women’s eagerness to participate in research that aims at “‘giving voice’ to previously silenced groups of women” (Riessman, 1993, p. 8). Smith reports on the exceptional warmth and willingness among the mature-age women participants in her study, and attributes their attitude to the “perceived relevance of the study to the women’s lives and desire to help [other] women in the future” (1996, p. 64). Rea, Ball and David also believe that many women have lived their lives as “uncared for carers” (2002, p. 17), hence find the opportunity to have their voices heard by telling their stories a powerfully rewarding experience.

### 3.3.3 Relevance of participants’ characteristics to study

The choice of African-Australian women as participants in this study was inspired by Blackledge’s proposition to conduct research “on”, “with” and “for” a minority group (2006, p. 23), with the researcher being an African woman migrant providing an emic perspective on the research themes. The selection criteria for the participants were relevant to the aims of the research. This research sought to understand the meaning and causal links if any, between adult education and community capacity building from the lived experiences and perspectives of African-Australian women. It was therefore important to select a sample from which most can be learned, and this sample in the NT was African-Australian women who had lived in the NT for at least 12 months and had been involved in adult education. Patton argues that it is important to “select information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which
one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research” (1990, p. 196).

All the participants originate from Africa and even though they have diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, they share a common cultural bond and have been acculturated and socialised into similar values and norms. The minimum age was set at 18 years, because in most African cultures, women are expected to be mature enough to undertake familial and social responsibilities at the age of 18 (Amadiume, 1997; Dolphyne, 1991). Accordingly, I expected participants between 18 and 60 years to have a firm grounding in their own culture, formed meaningful perspectives, and developed firmer frames of reference in their own culture and the world around them as their ways of understanding, reasoning and problem solving skills have been tested and refined over the years. As such, these women would normally be expected to have substantial life wisdom and the ability to articulate a wider array of experiences and perspectives of interest to this study with greater introspection. The minimum length of stay in the NT was deliberately set at 12 months or more to ensure that a reasonable time had elapsed since their arrival in the NT for the education, new learning and adjustment (lived experience) to take place. There was an attempt to include women from diverse socioeconomic and educational backgrounds. All the participants had attempted or completed secondary level education, and many had achieved tertiary education qualifications at certificate, diploma, undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. Additionally, they had experienced extensive learning in non-formal and informal contexts.
### 3.3.4 Data collection

Collecting data for this study began when the background reading for the research and planning commenced. Even though I knew most of the research participants through my African community networks, before I formally started collecting information from these participants, I visited each of them in their homes to familiarise myself and confirm that they understood the subject of my study. I also needed to establish trust and rapport with them, as well as ensure that I would be empathetic towards them. Patton and Westby believe that “the capacity for empathy … is one of the major assets available for human inquiry into human affairs” (1992, p. 11). Hays concurs, stating that “a growing level of empathy between the researcher and those being studied … will provide the researcher with growing access to information … and will provide more open, honest dialogue” (2004, p. 231).

### 3.3.5 In-depth interviews

As a methodology, qualitative inquiry begins with the assumption that people are valuable sources of information about their own experiences, and that “much can be learned from direct, extended conversations with individuals whose thoughts and opinions are critical for understanding a topic” (Vaughn, Shay-Schumm & Sinagub, 1996, p. 17). In-depth semi-structured interviews were utilised to gain complex and multi-dimensional insights into the educational experiences of the participants, as “interviews are the richest sources of data in case study and usually the most important type of data” (Hays, 2004, p. 251). Yin points out that:

> Interviews are essential source[s] of case study evidence because most case studies are about human affairs. These human affairs should be reported and interpreted through the eyes of specific interviewees, and well-informed respondents can provide important insights into a situation. They can provide shortcuts to the prior
history of the situation, helping [the researcher] to identify other sources of evidence (1994, p. 85).

Interviewing was therefore not only used as a tool to produce a true account of the participants’ experiences, but rather it also provided a context to explore how the participants ascribe meaning and order to their lived experiences (Reinharz, 1992). The individual face-to-face interviews were conversations with purpose (Merriam, 1998), and enabled me to find out what was in and out of the participants’ minds. As Patton explains:

> We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe … We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions. We cannot observe behaviours that took place at some previous point in time. We cannot observe situations that preclude the presence of an observer. We cannot observe how people have organized the world and meanings they attach to what go on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things. The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person’s perspective (1990, p. 196).

Reinharz (1992) reinforces the use of interviewing as giving researchers “access to people’s ideas, thoughts and memories in their own words rather than in the words of the researcher” (p. 19). Interviewing is particularly “important for the study of women because in this way learning from women is an antidote to centuries of ignoring women’s ideas” (p. 19).

The interview was invaluable as a data collection tool because it enabled me as a researcher and the participants to present and discuss interpretations of the phenomenon, because as a method, the interview “is not simply about collecting data about life: it is part of life itself, its human embeddedness is inescapable” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000, p. 267).
Individual interview was preferred to focus group interview because it was deemed more important for each of the participants to have privacy and time of their own without interruptions and inhibitions from other participants to reflect on their experience. Oakley notes, “interviewing is rather like marriage: everybody knows what it is, an awful lot of people do it, and yet behind each closed door there is a world of secrets” (1981, p. 30). I felt that conducting individual interviews allowed me to probe and clarify ambiguities and observe body language to contextualise the data in the analysis. By shaping the interviews in an informal and ‘dialogical’ way, I offered the participants a less researcher-controlled setting, which many feminists assert contributes to greater authenticity and deeper, richer data as they allow the respondents to develop and articulate their own emphasis in relation to the issues (Aiken, Cervero & Johnson-Bailey, 2001; Reinharz, 1992; Roberts, 1981).

Utilising a conversational method to gather rich data was appropriate because people engage in conversations that define them by telling their stories, which helped in theorising the experience of individuals who are marginalised from dominant social groups. It also unearthed and presented experience and subjectivity that would otherwise remain unheard and invisible. Reissman contends that the opportunity that participants have in narrating their stories through individual interviews, “gives prominence to human agency and imagination, [hence] it is well suited to studies of subjectivity and identity” (1993, p. 5). It gives researchers similar opportunity to listen, hear and interpret the voice of people who may otherwise not find an audience for the stories of their lived experience.
Choosing a conversational style of interview was also in keeping with the feminist aversion to ‘mining’ participants, in favour of a more egalitarian commitment to knowledge exchange and mutual vulnerability in an interview setting (Oakley, 1981; Reinharz, 1992). Feminist scholars draw attention to the power imbalance in the traditional interviewer/interviewee relationship, and suggest that for knowledge to be non-oppressive it must emerge through dialogue rather than one-sided questioning, as dialogue allows the research process to be interactive, collaborative, cooperative and more respectful (Dyck, 1997; Hesse-Biber, 2007; Mies, 1983; Roberts, 1981).

Conversational interview methods help to redistribute power by “allowing respondents to provide narrative accounts of their lives and experiences, and can help to redress some of the power differentials inherent in the research enterprise” (Elliott, 2005, p. 17). It is equally argued that when researchers willingly engage in dialogic exchanges and share their own stories in interviews, they are able to break down the power differentials between themselves and their participants, encouraging participants to also share important lived experiences (Aiken et al., 2001). In taking such risks as researchers, Tierney suggests that “our vulnerability is not a position of weakness but one from which to attempt change and social fellowship” (2003, p. 315).

As I needed to delve deeper to capture the participants’ adult education experiences and their ways of knowing and constructing meaning about their circumstances, I used semi-structured open-ended questions during the interviews, because of their openness and flexibility (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Patton, 1990). Reinharz explains that semi-structured, open-ended question interviews allow “free interaction between the researcher and the interviewee” (1992, p. 18), and as such maximise discovery and
description. In using open-ended questions in research with women, Belenky et al. also suggest that it helps “in opening our ears to voices and perspectives of women so that we might begin to hear the unheard and unimagined” (1997, p. 11). Semi-structured, open-ended question interviews are also “suitable for gathering information and opinions and exploring people’s thinking” (Drever, 1997, p. 9). As a semi-structured interview, I prepared questions to serve as a guide to help focus on the research objective, but in the course of the interviews, questions were adapted as required. I re-formulated the questions based on participants’ responses. While most of the participants were eager to share their experiences, a few required encouragement. I had to listen diligently, follow the conversation innuendos, cultural cues, deliver appropriate prompts and use a reflexive position on an ongoing basis. The interviews took place between May 2009 and February 2010. They were conducted in English and recorded under pseudonyms chosen by the participants. In accord with Eisner’s statement that “interviews should be conducted anywhere people are willing to talk about what they think and feel” (1991, p. 184), the participants selected the venues for their interviews. Apart from three participants, the rest of the interviews were carried out in the participants’ homes (n = 21). Two were interviewed in their workplace and one at a beachside café. Conducting the interviews in participants’ homes shifted the power from the researcher to the participants. As the participants were on familiar ground and I was in their territory, they felt less intimidated than if they had been interviewed in my office or home. There was also the opportunity for me to see practical examples and evidence of their education and learning activities. For instance, asking one participant about a framed certificate on the wall led to a discussion of the different educational programs she had participated in. Another participant also talked about her sports’ team photographs in her lounge and
explained how she had used her team mates and other networks from volunteering opportunities as informal learning networks and mentors.

The interviews were guided by the participants, and as such there were large variations in the duration, ranging from 50 minutes to two hours. During the interviews, the participants were “invited to speak in their own voices, allowed to control the introduction and flow of topics, and encouraged to extend their responses” (Mishler, 1986, p. 69). The participants’ responses determined the order of the themes and the time spent on each theme. Participants were encouraged to digress into details of their personal histories and recount anecdotes about each of the themes discussing the progress, catalysts and decisions about the themes in their complexities. Thus the nature of the interview process was participant-driven and not researcher-driven. Even though the researcher and the aims of the research drive research interviews, my experience is similar to Hiller and DiLuzio’s observation that a qualitative interview is “a collaborative meaning-making experience involving both the interviewer and the interviewee … [and] it is a meaning-making occasion that centres on the interviewee” (2004, pp. 2-4).

The participants expressed their satisfaction and gratefulness for the opportunity to participate in the study to share their experiences from their ‘point of view’. The majority of them indicated that the interviews yielded stimulating and inspiring insights into their own life journeys. The interviews gave them the opportunity to remember and recount their lived experiences and increased their sense of social and political consciousness and voice. As Jomey remarks excitedly, “Oh my God Susan, I can’t believe how much I get from all the things I do for this place [Darwin] … I came here …
uhmm no English, nothing … I can’t stop [laughs] … for now I know I have good brain for book, for helping my kids [and] for my work” (Interview with Jomey, 29/06/09).

3.4 Data management and analysis

3.4.1 Data preparation and storage

On completion of the first two interviews, I decided to transcribe the data. This took me days to complete but it was worth the time, as this exercise helped me to sensitise myself to the importance of the acoustic recordings and pay attention to clarity of the speech during the interviews. It also helped me to reflect on my questions, questioning techniques and adapt my style. I produced full transcripts of all the interviews. Having a professional transcriber might have expedited the transcription process, but most authors (Kvale, 1996; Meares, 2007) believe that transcribing interviews personally is highly valuable for qualitative researchers as it helps to develop intimacy of the interview data.

In the case of this study, apart from gaining intimate familiarity with the data, I also come from a similar sociocultural and linguistic background as the participants – even though the interviews were all done in English – I felt I could understand the different accents and phrasings of the participants better than a professional transcriber from a different cultural and linguistic background.

The transcription was a protracted process and took me more than double the time I had allocated for the exercise because of the frequent pauses I made to note “theoretical memos” (Glaser, 1978, p. 83). By carefully reading and re-reading the data, listening and re-listening to the interviews for accuracy, I developed intimacy with the data and became familiar with the participants’ spoken words, the manner and context in which
they were spoken because “the interviewee’s meanings may be immediately accessible in the situation, communicated not only by words, but by the tone of voice, expressions and gestures in the natural flow of conversations” (Kvale, 1996, p. 125). After transcribing all the interviews, I gave them to each of the participants for authorisation. This also improved the quality of the data as “the process of member checking not only increases validity but also adds to the overall comprehensiveness of the case study” (Hays, 2004, p. 234).

Transcription is also not purely a mechanical process, but instead “involves complex decisions as mediation occurs between speakers and the eventual readers of transcribed words” (Wengraf, 2001, p. 221). For the transcripts in this study, such mediation included the creation of sentences and paragraphs using the usual conventions of capital letters and punctuation to denote pauses and sentence breaks. A number of transcription symbols were used to represent pauses and several other features of verbal speech and moments of laughter. To maximise the accessibility of the participants’ narratives to readers, I worked closely with the participants to decide on how they wanted the features of their speech to be represented. Minor changes to fix grammatical errors such as incorrect use of tenses and missing prepositions were made to the transcripts, which were then given to participants for clarification and confirmation. All nuances, figurative speech and facilitative sounds such as, “Hmm,” “Uhmm,” “Ahhmm” that demonstrate the flow of the conversation text have been presented in the data. I ensured that the editing process did not significantly alter the meaning of the participants’ narratives because as a feminist qualitative case study, my primary concern was to honour the voice of the participants. In situations where I felt that the editing was likely to alter the
meaning of the sentence significantly, instead of linguistically marginalising the participants, I have quoted them directly without erasing their expressions and thoughtful insights, adding ellipses in their quotes to maintain the flow of meaning.

Final copies of transcripts were printed and stored in separate spiral bound folders. Also stored in these folders are copies of my interview notes, comments and queries. All of these are locked in filing cabinets according to the university’s ethics and data storage policy. Three electronic copies were made of each interview transcript and these are stored in separate electronic files, which are password-protected.

### 3.4.2 Data analysis and interpretation

Sandelowski acknowledges that data analysis and interpretation in qualitative research are difficult processes to separate as distinct processes, as they are “temporally and conceptually overlapping” (1995, p. 371). The interview data contained stories from the participants’ lived experiences that were socially situated. In analysing such stories, the participants are not regarded as mere “components of social words … [rather as] active interpreters who construct their [own] realities through talk and interaction” (Gubrium & Holstein, cited in Hayes, 2010, p. 521). Hence, in the data analysis stage, my objective was a deeper understanding of each of the 24 participants’ settlement, integration and adult education experience and reporting of their perceptions and opinions, and I adopted a descriptive and interpretive approach.

After gathering all the data, the resulting mass of information was overwhelming and the euphoria generated by the field experience quickly gave way to the reality of how to make sense of the huge amount of data. Merriam notes making sense of narrative data
involves consolidating, reducing and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read … it is the process of making meaning” (2009, p. 176). As I read the transcripts, I jotted down notes, comments, observations and queries related to the questions, the literature and other insights. I started coding manually by identifying and highlighting common words, concepts, ideas, sentences and paragraphs from the transcripts. I identified recurring themes and emerging patterns of the participants’ experiences. After initial coding, I decided to combine the manual process of analysis with NVIVO QSR, which is a computer software program designed for qualitative analysis (Bazeley, 2007; Saldanâ, 2009). I imported all the raw data into NVIVO and read each transcript again. I performed line-by-line coding by highlighting text words, statements or whole paragraphs and giving them interpretive names with words and short phrases. The different participants’ experiences, ideas, topics, issues, concerns and events were coded as exemplars, as it was important that “the ideas emerging from the data [were] described in terms that stay close to the language and terms used in the data set” (Ritchie, Spencer & O’Connor, 2003, p. 222). Since I commenced the analysis manually, throughout the NVIVO coding, I frequently printed out hard copies of code lists and coded data, and used highlighters to explore the data in fresh ways to identify emerging ideas including similar phrases, common sequences and relationships between variables, concepts and building up themes from the hard copies of the transcripts. The data were questioned rigorously to ensure that the analysis focused on the meanings and perspectives the participants ascribed to their experiences (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Thorne, 2000). The inductive procedures utilised ensured that categories forming the basis of the theoretical interpretations were grounded in the data. The analysis process was reiterative and there was frequent interplay between the data
and extant literature and theories as I constantly moved between the data and the interpretations within the same transcript, across all the participants’ transcripts and the literature review to make links and comparisons. Related emerging ideas and concepts were organised into categories and themes that addressed the research questions. As I sought to identify the participants’ reasoning, associations, connections, understandings and perceptions of their lived experience, I recorded numerous notes, thoughts and interpretations. I evaluated and discussed these with the participants, my academic supervisors and peers. All were useful in helping me to think deeply about my ideas and interpretations of the participants’ lived experiences, and provided direction for further analysis, interpretation and groupings under higher order categories and main themes.

Leonard states:

The interpretive process is necessarily circular, moving back and forth between parts and whole and between the initial forestructure and what is being revealed in the data of the inquiry … Through systematic analysis of the whole, we gain new perspective and depth of understanding. We use this understanding to examine the parts of the whole and then re-examine the whole in light of the insight we have gained from the parts. The interpretive [analysis] process follows this part-whole strategy until the researcher is satisfied with the depth of his or her understanding. Thus the interpretive process has no clear termination (1994, p. 57).

The analysis of the data occurred in visible and invisible ways (Hanson, 2007). The visible was the hard analysis—transcribing the data, sorting the data and reading and re-reading the data for themes. The invisible was the discussion with others, the dreams, and the spontaneous ideas that emerged in all sorts of unlikely places for me. While a lot of emphasis is given to the hard analysis in research, I was also cognisant that the other ways of understanding meaning were equally valid if I were to be open to other epistemological thoughts and values. After so much coding, re-coding, questioning, interpretation and re-interpretation of data to ensure accuracy of presentation of
participants’ voices, as well as to enhance rigour and accountability of the findings, the core themes that emerged from the study’s data were:

- Migration, a choice of life journeys: Opportunities, barriers and challenges
- Strategies for overcoming barriers and challenges: Adult education and learning, and coping factors and mechanisms
- Outcomes and achievements from adult education and learning.

These themes form the titles of Chapters 4, 5 and 6 respectively. It was challenging representing the participants’ spoken words in written text for readers to fully ‘hear’ and ‘feel’ their voices. In doing so, long verbatim quotes have been used as “the quotation [brings] to life and gives it the feel of spoken rather than written text” (Elliot, 2005, p. 52). As feminist research, I believe this will help readers to hear and feel the participants’ words instead of just reading them.

#### 3.5 Research issues

**3.5.1 My role as researcher: Intimacy, bias, reflection and reflexivity**

Feminist research is expected to foreground women’s experiences making the whole research process empowering (Merriam et al., 2001). However, McDowell observes that “women studying women are quite likely to find themselves in circumstances where they are more knowledgeable, more powerful, more affluent or with greater access to a range of resources than the women they are studying” (1999, p. 239). The perceived unequal relationship between participants and researchers has raised a concern amongst feminist scholars, and needs to be addressed in research through the exploration of the researcher’s role, intimacy, bias, reflection and reflexivity.
In this study my main role as a researcher meant that I carried out the entire study from the stages of planning, data collection, data analysis and interpretation, and writing of the thesis. As the researcher, I personally recruited the research participants and collected all relevant documents for analysis and interpretation. I negotiated and went to the participants’ preferred locations to seek the necessary consent to conduct interviews, and in some cases used telephone and email for follow-up contacts. I personally conducted and audio-taped interviews as well as transcribed all the interview data. In effect, I was the main instrument of data collection as characterised by a qualitative interpretive case study of this nature (Creswell 1998; Merriam, 1998). In accomplishing these tasks as a qualitative researcher, I had to be skilful with a great deal of practice in interviews to obtain relevant data for the study because the quality of data generated from studies are directly linked to the skills of the interviewers. The types of skills most often identified by researchers as important within semi-structured interviewing include a knowledge of language and culture of the participants, and good interpersonal skills including the ability to establish rapport with individuals, to listen actively, and judge when and how to ask questions appropriately and empathically (Fontana & Frey, 2003; Partington, 2001; Polkinghorne, 2005). Partington emphasises “the importance of empathy and rapport, listening and questioning, restatement, clarification and persistence” (2001, p. 1) in conducting interviews.

My professional background as an educator and my voluntary work in community advocacy roles require interviewing and counselling skills, which assisted me in conducting interviews that generated substantial data for analysis. I have also had opportunities to practise and refine my interviewing skills in my undergraduate and
postgraduate studies. As well as these generic communication skills, I felt the other most important resource within the interview setting was background knowledge of the topic under study and the lived experiences of the research participants. And in this area, my own experiences represented significant resources in the evolution of this study. But in as much as this research evolved out of my own migration and adult education experiences, I did not enter the field as “the all-knowing, all seeing” (Rose, 1997, p. 305) researcher. This is because my main focus was to allow the African women participants to tell their stories their own way, and for their voices to be heard. However, in the midst of the research process I became aware that I had not fully realised the power inherent in the production of knowledge about other people, and the intersection of power and academic knowledge as a researcher. My realisation was confirmed by Rose’s statement; “researchers are in a position of power by virtue of their ability to name the categories, control information about the research agenda” (1997, p. 307). I noticed that even though I identified with the participants and provided an opportunity for their input, I singlehandedly carried out the researcher role detailed earlier and I also had more say with the interpretation and presentation of the research, which put me in a privileged, powerful position.

Furthermore, because of existing social relationships with many of the participants, I had not fully problematised the fact that the research process placed me in a different social location as I did not just speak from a specific historical, cultural, racial and economic position but also from an academic position. The power imbalances were apparent as I noted how much authority I had over the research process. It was therefore important to address the ‘researcher’ and ‘researched’ relationship—I was not on the same page as...
the participants because I was the audience for their stories and could influence the construction and formation of those stories. The nature of my research—using qualitative methods in feminist research—also meant that I was obliged to be reflexive, and declare my positioning and power differentials within the study explicitly because “discussions of reflexivity are especially prominent amongst those who situate themselves within feminist methodology” (Elliott, 2005, p. 155). As it happened in this study, all the participants subtly negotiated power by determining where and when the interviews were held and what they wanted to say. On several occasions, I had to wait for the participants to complete their daily chores before interviews. During the interviews, the participants also controlled the information they wanted to share. As the researcher I had some perceived power to ask questions central to my research, but some of the participants chose to talk about what they felt was important to them and eventually their conversations guided the interviews.

As an African-Australian woman researching the experiences of other African-Australian women I had assumed that there would be a “mutually perceived homogeneity” (Merriam et al., 2001, p. 406) that would facilitate a non-hierarchical interview process and enhance trust and openness throughout the interview process. Whilst being an African woman provided me with easy access to the participants, and afforded me an ‘insider’ position, I was also perceived as an ‘outsider’. As an insider I am part of the participants’ African-Australian women’s community and share the same racial and ethnic categorisation within the dominant community. According to Harding:

>The best feminist analysis … insists that the inquirer her/himself be placed in the same critical plane as the overt subject matter, thereby recovering the entire research process for scrutiny in the results of the research. That is, the class, race, culture, and gender assumptions, beliefs and behaviours of the researcher
her/himself must be placed within the frame of the picture as she/he attempts to paint (1987, p. 9).

But as an outsider, I am an academic and a researcher inhabiting a different world from that of the participants. For instance, in this study I had a research agenda, so I would be seen as someone privileged to the social and political machinations within the academic and research community, and this perception compromised my insider position in some way.

Feminist scholars have traditionally seen intimacy and trust as important resources in fostering conditions under which participants feel safe to share intimate aspects of their lives with a researcher (Fontana & Frey, 2003; Oakley, 1981; Reinharz, 1992). They argue that intimacy is politically important as it promotes a degree of empathy that prevents the urge to objectify participants as the ‘other’. Narayan asserts that building enduring relationships with our participants removes the “safe footing” (2003, p. 293) Western researchers rely on to provide a distancing and objectifying “contemplative stance” (p. 293) within research. However, Goodson and Sikes (2001) claim that there are potential risks associated with doing research with people you know, as intimacy can sometimes act as a disincentive for participants to talk freely and share experiences because this can give the researcher considerable power to disrupt the lives of participants, should they behave unethically with the data. Another issue with intimacy is researcher bias, and although MacDonald and Walker (1974) are concerned with the bias intimacy might create, others see it as an integral part of qualitative research and an aspect that needs to be acknowledged rather than denied (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Hesse-Biber, 2006; Kasper, 1994). I argue that intimacy is not necessarily the enemy of objectivity as long as researchers are reflexive about the role their relationships play in
shaping the way they carry out research. I therefore engaged in a “reflective process with a political purpose asking what could be, not just what is … seeking to empower the subjects” (Thomas, 1993, p. 4), and employed what Harraway (1991) refers to as “shared conversation”. Through interview methods that use conversation and dialogue, I embraced a feminist research practice that used the standpoint and experience of the research participants and connected them to the sociocultural and political processes and possibilities of transformation.

All researchers, whether consciously or unconsciously, bring their own values, attitudes and background experience into the research process. In acknowledging the concern that the researchers’ position and perspectives affect the research process, Malterud suggests that researchers turn this methodological concern “into a commitment to reflexivity” (2001, p. 484). This involves “taking a critical look inward and reflecting on one’s own lived reality and experiences … and understand how [one’s] own social background and assumptions can intervene in the research process” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007, p. 129). Similar to African-Australian women participants in this study, I am a product of my society’s social structures, norms, and institutions; and my beliefs, values, attitudes and background experience are part of the process of my knowledge construction. Specifically, my evolving feminist consciousness, coupled with my migration, adult education and research experience in planning and doing research at different levels, allowed the personal experiences, subjectivities and attitudes of both the participants and me as a migrant and adult educator to be part of the focus for this study. This is an acknowledgement that my choice of the research topic, participants and the research methodology relate to the fact that “all knowledge is affected by the social conditions
under which it is produced and that it is grounded in both the social location and the social biography of the observer and the observed” (Mann & Kelley, 1997, p. 392). This research is situated in my personal experiences as an African migrant woman and adult student and, like all the research participants, we are knowers and known; observers and the observed (DeVault, 2004; Harding, 1993; Mann & Kelley, 1997).

I was mindful that I am someone who is already acquainted with the migration and adult education policies, culture and practices for migrants and refugees in most of the education contexts in the NT; therefore, the notion of intimacy required exemplary professional research conduct. My ethical assurances to the participants were guided both by my university’s ethical requirements and my deeply held personal values and principles of integrity, honesty and trust between people. I was confronted with the dilemma of what I should include or exclude in the final version of the data analysis. While I agree with Nnaemeka (2003) that being reflective about how we form categories, how we intervene and how we use information provides some consolation, I am aware that what we eliminate presents a conundrum for feminist researchers, because exclusion remains a constant fear. Therefore, there is a need to be “humble listeners” (Nnaemeka, 2003, p. 374) and embrace openings for “epistemological humility” (Esteva & Prakash, 1998, p. 202).

This study was committed to the inclusion of the voices of the excluded as a tool for expounding African women’s migration and educational experiences. Therefore my status as an African migrant woman researcher was an asset in the research process, but it did not stop me from struggling with being reflexive about some of the issues that result from my loyalty to the participants. However, the methodological commitments
have been crucial in enabling me to resist the urge to “elevate the experiential to the level of the authentic” (Silverman, cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 17); and rather to identify and productively manage the conflicts associated with carrying out research within my African community, and people that I know and share so much with.

3.5.2 Issues of quality: Validity, reliability and generalisability

In research projects, the establishment of reliability and validity are important processes in legitimising the research findings. Reliability is concerned with the degree to which the study’s findings are consistent with the data collected and whether the study can be replicated with similar results (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998). There are two approaches in determining validity in research; internal and external validity. Internal validity determines whether the research findings correspond with reality. Merriam and Simpson contend that since qualitative researchers are the primary data collection tools, they “are closer to reality than if an instrument had been interjected between the researcher and the researched” (2000, p. 102), which makes internal validity central to qualitative research. External validity on the other hand relates to how research findings can be generalised in other situations and contexts. Several qualitative researchers believe that unlike quantitative researchers, qualitative researchers should not be responsible for making decisions about how their study’s findings can be applied to other situations, and that their role is to provide information to make such assessments possible by the readers (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Creswell, 1998; Eisner, 1991; Merriam, 1998).
Hays asserts that generalisability is not the main goal of most case studies, as “case study researchers examine each case expecting to uncover new and unusual interaction, events, explanations, interpretations, and cause and effect connections” (2004, p. 219). Another implication for purposive sampling is that research findings are less likely to be generalised to a wider group. However, while the findings from such a small sample cannot be widely generalised, the stories of the African migrant and refugee women in this study provide a valuable insight into the experiences of a particular social group, and their stories may reflect the experiences of other women in similar circumstances.

Elliott reminds us that in such studies, each individual story:

> Tells us something about the cultural framework in which the individuals make sense of their lives … [and] narratives produced by a relatively small sample of individuals may produce evidence that is considered to provide an understanding of the inter-subjective meanings shared by the whole community (2005, p. 28).

In addition, the findings could be generalised as it was a multi-site study (Alice Springs and Darwin) based on an in-depth study of the same phenomena – the lived migration and adult education experiences of 24 African-Australian women from the different African countries represented in the NT – and I provided a report that has rich, detailed description of the phenomenon that readers can draw on to construct their own naturalistic generalisations elsewhere.

To address the issues of quality in qualitative research, Merriam (1998) recommended that the qualitative researcher use strategies, including a range of data collection methods. These include multiple researchers, multiple data sources, peer review or debriefing; supervisors; member checks; prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field; working with discrepant data; clarifying researcher’s bias; and providing rich, thick description and external audit to enhance a study’s quality.
Creswell also suggests “searching for convergence of information” (1998, p. 213) to verify quality of qualitative findings. During this study, I addressed the issues of quality by using a multi-method approach, multiple sources of data, rich thick description, member checking and peer review and a panel of three academic supervisors to verify the findings. Flick explains that “the combination of methodological practices, empirical materials, perspectives and observers in a single study … as a strategy adds rigor, breadth, complexity, richness and depth to any inquiry” (2002, p. 229). In addition, the case study enabled me as a researcher to develop deep meaning with least disruption to the natural setting, by interacting with participants in the different contexts to gather rich qualitative information, while being aware of personal bias and prior knowledge and experiences that may affect the research investigation. In dealing with research bias, I followed the advice of several authors (Bassey, 1999; Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998; Shaw, 1999), to be up-front and acknowledge personal knowledge and experiences I brought to the research investigations. Hammersley and Atkinson comment:

The aim [in qualitative research] is not to gather ‘pure’ data that are free from potential bias. There is no such thing. Rather, the goal must be to discover the correct manner of interpreting whatever data we have … The point is that minimizing the influence of the researcher is not the only, or always even a prime consideration. Assuming we understand how the presence of the researcher shaped data, we can interpret the latter accordingly and it may provide important insights, allowing us to develop or test elements of our theory (cited in Shaw, 1999, p. 56).

Again, a major strength of this study was the opportunity to draw data from many different sources, methods and theories and as such, I secured confirmations of findings by corroborating assertions and interpretations that emerged from different categories of participants. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, I discussed transcripts with participants to clarify and confirm their data; and findings were shared with participants for their feedback and to ensure clarity of participants’ experiences, perceptions and beliefs. As
part of the data analysis and a preliminary dissemination of the research findings to test
the credibility of the data gathered, I presented a peer-reviewed conference paper (Saffu,
2009), and published an article in a peer-reviewed journal (Saffu, 2010). I engaged in a
number of community meetings, conducted workshops for students and community
groups on African-Australians’ settlement and integration issues. I also participated in
panel discussions with educational institutions, and government and non-government
social service agencies. The findings of this thesis were also subjected to peer-review by
professionals in the field of study for comments and feedback. A panel of three
academic supervisors also reviewed the findings, and their comments and feedback were
considered for this thesis. All these activities have provided me with opportunities to
cross-check, cross-reference and validate my interpretations of the participants’
responses, and greatly assisted in shaping the thesis. Overall, I adopted strong ethical
research guidelines, a systematic recording process, and different measures as elaborated
to enhance the standard of quality in this study.

3.5.3 Ethical considerations
Ethical considerations and decision making saturated all the stages of the research
process including the concept, methodology, design, data collection, data management,
and analysis and writing of the findings. First, to conduct the study I applied for ethical
clearance, which was granted by Charles Darwin University’s Human Research Ethics
Committee (HREC), and renewed annually throughout the period of the study. The
study was about an emerging African community in the NT that is part of MCNT and
AAFA, therefore I approached the executive committees of both organisations to
ascertain their interest and support for my research project. They gave me written support letters for my formal application to HREC.

After gaining ethical clearance, I contacted members of the cohort and discussed my research proposal with them and also made announcements at AAFA’s social functions in Darwin and Alice Springs. The response was overwhelmingly positive and resulted in the study ending up with 24 participants instead of the earlier proposed plan of identifying between 12 and 15 participants. Issues of confidentiality and informed consent were integral to the conditions of the university’s ethics approval for this study, and the participants’ consent was explicitly sought. I had one-on-one meetings with the potential participants and they were provided with Consent Form and Plain Language Statement information (Appendix 4) and fully informed them about the study’s objectives, methods and significance. All the participants gave me their written consent forms before I conducted the interviews, and they were reassured during the interviews that they could still choose to withdraw at any stage from the study without consequence. None of the 24 participants who commenced the study withdrew and any identifying information has been obscured, and participants have been identified with pseudonyms, which they chose themselves.

The crucial importance of the researcher-participant relationship in feminist research was adhered to during the research process. This included scheduling of meetings at mutually acceptable places, at times sharing meals and drinks to increase comfort levels, and in some cases diverging into personal issues in the interview conversations because these were pressing issues for the participants at those particular times. To ensure that the study was conducted and its results disseminated in an ethical manner, I also
consulted regularly with my principal supervisor and other members of my supervisory team. In addition, I sought the opinions of colleagues and friends who have experience in conducting similar academic research.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the feminist-inspired qualitative case study and the research design employed to explore how African-Australian women in the NT use adult education opportunities to build their community capacity. The chapter described the feminist theoretical influences and the choice of qualitative research paradigms and how the research process developed, presenting in detail the different research phases. This included a discussion on how the research participants were selected, the data gathering process, the data analysis and interpretation, the positionality and subjectivity of the researcher and a range of quality and ethical issues in feminist research.

In studying the African-Australian women participants from their perspectives and recognising the researcher’s own positionality and subjectivity within the research process, this research is more than just research about women, for women, by another woman. It is also about the connection of theory with the study of women, gender, and race, using participants’ experiences as the starting point and acknowledging them as experts and authorities on their own experience.

The research findings and the participants’ voices are presented in the next three chapters within the context of the presented theoretical frameworks that assist in understanding the adult education experiences of the research participants.
Chapter 4: Migration, a choice of life journeys: Opportunities, barriers and challenges

Migration for my family definitely, it is a choice and journey … between making opportunities for yourself and facing lots of problems in [the] new country because everything is new for you … but it makes you strong and wise … like they say in my country, travel and see … (laughs) (Interview with Sally, 6/06/09).

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 are devoted to the study’s findings. Each chapter addresses the research questions – primarily designed to understand experiences of settlement, migration and education of African migrant and refugee women. The analysis, interpretation and discussion of the findings in these chapters drew heavily on the interview responses from participants.

Migration as a multidimensional phenomenon generally has many positive effects, including the expansion of opportunities and human development leading to wider perspectives on many sociocultural and economic issues among migrants and the host society. Migration can also result in barriers and challenges, as it involves change. Erikson (1960) describes the process of migration as “the transplantation of old roots and a search to find new roots in change itself” (cited in Burnett, 1998, p. 1). As Sally observes above, once migrants arrive in the host society, they encounter ‘problems’ as well as ‘opportunities’.

This chapter describes the opportunities, barriers and challenges the participants encountered in the NT. It focuses on the initial learning curve experienced by the participants as they engaged in their new lives as immigrants in the NT. The data
presented in this chapter foregrounds the participants’ adult education and learning experiences with respect to the following significant research questions:

What pre-migration qualifications, skills and experience do African-Australian women possess?

What opportunities does migration provide African-Australian women in the NT?

What barriers and challenges do African-Australian women encounter in their migration, settlement and education process in the NT?

Migration has a complex and multilayered relationship with education, capacity building and human development (Allender, 1999; Bron, 2003; Guo, 2010a; Quraishy, 2008; Sivamalai & Nsubuga-Kyobe, 2009). While the environmental conditions for human development in migrants’ original countries determine both the need and nature of migration, the process of migration generates different effects on migrants. The participants in this study are migrant and refugee women from developing African countries. Thus, their education and learning experiences must be understood within their sociocultural and historical backgrounds, the form of migration they undertook, and the motivation and other factors that impacted on their migration, settlement and integration into their host community. These events are significant. They provide a framework to understand the focus of this study, which includes the participants’ pre-migration, migration and post-migration, education and learning experiences, and how they modify each other in complex interrelationships, to elucidate the intersections between gender, race, class, status and ethnicity.

The chapter commences with a brief profile of the research participants and a preamble that provides the participants’ responses to selected aspects of their pre-migration
lifestyle that impacts on the research questions. The 24 participants originally came from 13 African countries through a variety of immigration streams—refugee migrants (n = 14), family migrants (n = 6) and skilled migrants (n = 4). At the time of the interview, all participants, aged between 18 and 60, had lived in the NT between two and 28 years, and were Australian citizens. With reference to the participants’ demographic details, their varied socioeconomic and educational backgrounds are consistent with current literature, which depict migrants and refugees as people with a variety of interests, and with high knowledge and skill levels (Iredale, 2005; Kim, 2010; Liversage, 2009). Iredale, Mitchell, Pe-Pua and Pittaway’s study of 172 humanitarian refugees and 46 migrants in Australia notes that “people from Africa generally had university qualifications” (1996, p. 56). Similarly in this study, the participants’ pre-migration educational qualifications ranged from higher education degrees, TAFE equivalent certificates, secondary and primary school certificates (Appendix 5).

The Australian Government sponsored the refugee participants after rigorous medical and security assessments to migrate to Australia. On arrival, they were provided with a wide range of services including subsidised accommodation, free access to 510 hours of English language tuition through AMEP, social security and medical entitlements, and free access to translating and interpreting service (DIMIA, 2003; Hannah, 1999). The 10 migrant participants comprised six family migrants and four skilled migrants. Three of the family migrants arrived as dependents of their parents, and the other three as dependent spouses. The four skilled migrants included Barbara, Cheetah, Kalumburu, and Therese. Whilst Kalumburu and Therese applied for skilled migration status and were assessed from overseas countries before arriving in Australia, Barbara initially
came to Australia as an international student and on completion of her studies, applied for the skilled migration status. Cheetah on the other hand, came to Australia as a visitor, and was granted a permanent resident visa as a skilled migrant based on her professional qualifications and experience. Despite the diversity of countries of origin, languages and culture, all the participants identified themselves as part of an ‘African community’ in the NT. Similarities in their migrant and refugee experiences and shared ambiguities about the possibility of belonging in the host society have fostered this African identity amongst all the participants.

4.1 Pre-migration experiences

When the participants were asked about their pre-migration lived experience, the refugee participants (n = 14) talked extensively about the context in which they became refugees more than their educational and professional experiences. Most of them recounted the adverse effect of wars on themselves and their families, traumatic experiences of fleeing from their respective countries to refugee camps, coupled with the difficult and dangerous years spent in refugee camps before resettling in Australia. On the contrary, the migrant participants underscored their educational, professional and other migration experiences in their responses to the same question. The refugee participants lived in UNHCR designated refugee camps in Egypt, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya and Tanzania before resettlement in Australia. The majority lived for long periods in refugee camps and recalled anxious waiting periods. Florence, for example, recalls her experience in a camp in Kenya, “I waited and my family was applying for all the countries for 10 years, before Australia accepted my family for resettlement … Camp life was really difficult and dangerous for us with kids” (Interview with Florence, 18/06/09).
Mariama originally from Liberia, initially escaped the civil war in her country by entering the neighbouring country, Sierra Leone. But as Mariama explains, “We had to run again to camp in Guinea because the war followed us to Sierra Leone … it was very difficult [and] sad for me because many of my family died for this second time to Guinea” (Interview with Mariama, 14/05/09). Three Sudanese refugee participants—Lacha, Kiden and Vilma revealed similar experiences of movements and displacements. Kiden initially moved to Uganda, and returned to Sudan after separating from her husband. On her return, the war escalated and she made the difficult decision of leaving her young son with her parents to make the dangerous journey through the jungle to Ethiopia, eventually ending up in a refugee camp in Kenya. Kiden describes the difficult and painful decision she had to make as a young single mother at the time:

No choice for me … you stay back you know you gonna get raped, [and] get killed from rebels … you leave you can die on the way or … if you’re lucky you get to [refugee] camp … very difficult decision for me … but for my son, he was safe with grandparents … for me, not safe, I had to leave (Interview with Kiden 13/05/09).

Kiden’s statement summarises the way most of the refugee participants described their flight from civil war in their original countries, the deaths of family members, and the painful separation from their living family members, which indicate the involuntary nature of their escape to refugee camps. None resettled in Australia because they had considered opportunities of advancing themselves and their families, rather they were ‘pushed’ by circumstances beyond their control to leave their country. Many of the participants talked about the human rights violations they experienced, including arbitrary arrest, torture, executions and abduction of young children into forced military service. For instance, Lacha expresses her painful tragedy thus:
[The] worst thing for me and my kids (pauses) [is] my husband [was] killed for war … I have to run everywhere with my children because that time they [rebels] were taking children by force to fight for war … very painful (Interview with Lacha, 22/06/09)

In the case of the migrant participants (n = 10), Romana left her original country to live and work in different countries and arrived in Australia through family migration. When asked about some of her experiences before migrating to Australia, she describes the “detours” she made before she arrived in Australia:

I didn’t come to Australia straight from Africa, there were some ‘detours’ or ‘transit lounges’ (laughs) … before I got to this final destination, Australia. I have been here longer than any other country I have lived and worked in … [and] I think I can confidently call Australia, my final destination (Interview with Romana, 6/01/10).

Therese, a skilled migrant refers to herself as a “veteran migrant”:

I had travelled before (pauses) … yeah I’d say … Hmm ‘a veteran migrant’ … some of the countries I have even forgotten because I travelled so much with my study and work … I studied in Switzerland and England … I travelled all over Europe … I also travelled a lot with work on study tours … to different states in the US … and then to Russia … [and] different African countries … When I got married … we lived in the Middle East … and eventually ended up in PNG before here (Interview with Therese 12/05/09).

It is clear from Therese’s response that apart from the study tours in different countries, like Romana, her migration trajectory included numerous stops and detours in both developing and developed countries. Romana and Therese’s experiences reflect those of the other five migrants who had lived, studied and worked in other countries before migrating to the NT. These excerpts illustrate the range of migration experiences and myriad of cultural and social histories of having lived, studied and worked in different countries around the world.
4.2 Reasons for migration

Much of the literature on migration from developing African countries to developed countries such as Australia is preoccupied with the micro and macro-economic causes of migration. However, the reasons for migration can be complex and varied due to a migrant’s unique pre-migration circumstances, as well as the socioeconomic, cultural and political situation of the departing country (Kim, 2010; Udo-Ekpo, 1999).

As mentioned earlier, the participants in this study fall into three main migration categories – refugee, family and skilled – with varied reasons for migration, including their socioeconomic and educational levels, ethnicity, cultural, legal and political systems of their departing countries. For instance, when participants were asked about why they chose to migrate to Australia and settle in the NT, their responses revealed patterns and commonalities between refugees and migrants, echoing Hugo’s observation that, “an empowering experience for women is influenced by the context in which migration occurs, the type of movement, and the characteristics of the women involved” (2000, p. 288).

4.2.1 Refugee participants

None of the 14 refugee participants migrated voluntarily. As refugees, they migrated to Australia as part of the UNHCR’s refugee resettlement program, with no control over where they would end up. Accepted by the Australian government for resettlement, they came directly from their countries of refuge to Australia. Kiden and Lacha’s quotes illustrate these reasons: Kiden states:

I came to Australia because I am a refugee … [and] refugee camp life has many troubles and problems and not safe. Like today I’m running a good business, tomorrow there could be a protest and I will be raped [or] killed … at the camp, you
apply and UNHCR people, they just tell you the country that accepts you, and for me, I was accepted by Australia (Interview with Kiden, 13/05/09).

Lacha on the other hand, arrived with her children and states:

I stayed [in the] camp with my kids, single woman [and] that was not safe … when they told me I was coming to this place … I didn’t ask questions, because for me all I wanted was good place. I was happy to come for settlement with my kids because we suffer too much tragedy, and camp life … no future (Interview with Lacha, 22/06/09).

Kiden and Lacha’s experiences, similar to all the other refugee participants, are consistent with previous studies (Pittaway & Bartomelei, 2005; Schafer, 2002; UNHCR, 2006) highlighting the constant danger women face in refugee camps where gender-based violence such as rape is endemic.

Although the refugee participants migrated involuntarily and were not fully aware of their final resettlement destinations in Australia, they were positive and optimistic, and above all expressed their appreciation of the Australian government’s generosity in giving them a new life of peace and security, to re-build their lives with their families. Jomey summarises it thus, “Australian Government and people for Darwin, they welcome you, then they give you help … really we’re very happy, we thank them for giving us this chance to come here” (Interview with Jomey, 29/06/09). This is consistent with Colic-Peisker and Tilbury’s (2008) study, which found that the dominant public discourse of refugee participants was one of gratitude. Because they had usually lost their loved ones in tragic circumstances, they were easily touched by acts of generosity from people they considered as strangers in their host society.
4.2.2 Migrant participants

Unlike the refugee participants, all the migrant participants reported that they migrated voluntarily to Australia. They presented multiple reasons for choosing to migrate to Australia and settle in the NT. Their migration to Australia was mainly as a result of unsustainable livelihoods in their home countries and a better lifestyle for their families. They were hopeful for professional development opportunities, education, employment and a good quality of life for their children. The NT was deemed attractive because of its topography and weather, which are similar to the participants’ countries of origin. The NT’s multicultural and friendly population was also mentioned as part of the attraction for settlement, as the experience of living in a diverse and multicultural society was seen as an advantage in developing significant social capital (Saffu, 2010). Therese reiterates the common response from the migrant participants’ reasons for migrating to the NT as she explains:

We were living in PNG … at the time [it] was getting unsafe for families … we noticed that Australia was peaceful, free and people were friendly … [and] there were plenty of job opportunities for us … and so we ended up here. Overall it’s been good because the energy and creativity in this town are just fantastic! (Interview with Therese, 12/05/09).

Mangi arrived with her Australian husband and children. She states her reasons as follows:

We migrated … because my husband is Australian … our children belong to two cultures and it was important to know their father’s culture and extended family … Darwin offered a better environment for the children to grow up in a truly multicultural society. The education too – because it can be very competitive, really difficult back home … [and] there are better chances here for our children (Interview with Mangi, 8/06/09).
Nyainbo who migrated as a dependent child, talked about her parents’ motivations that echo those of the other family migrant participants. Nyainbo describes her parents’ concerns at the time of her family’s migration:

> My siblings and myself … came with our parents because they were skilled migrants … I guess dad wanted a future for his kids in the sense that security wise things weren’t looking good at home and as a concerned, caring dad … I think he decided to come here, just for a future for us [children] … my parents were doing very well back home … [and] they did it mainly for us (Interview with Nyainbo, 22/06/09).

There were similarities in the circumstances of Therese and Mangi, and that of Nyainbo’s parents. They were all professionals with well-established careers, but the desire for better economic and educational opportunities for themselves and their children motivated them to migrate. In contrast to the other participants’ reasons for migration, Cheetah, who arrived in Australia from Europe, states that she migrated to Australia “out of a desire and curiosity to travel”. She maintains that:

> The migration to Australia actually was ehmm okay, I always wanted to leave [original country] because of its racist regime and … I wanted to travel and really wanted experiences beyond a racist country … I went to Europe … and came to Australia simply because I wanted some adventure … I had an Australian boyfriend at the time (laughs). And really I didn’t have any intentions of staying but whilst I was here, I responded to a call for amnesty for illegal immigrants and visitors to change their status. And I got in, yeah just got in! … in my own right instead of through my boyfriend, you know, because it made it easier so as not to put pressure on our relationship … and that’s how I got my permanent residence and citizenship (Interview with Cheetah, 17/06/09).

Cheetah’s narrative is an illustration of the assertiveness of contemporary skilled migrant women, as she changed her migration status on her own merit instead of being an ‘appendage’ of her Australian boyfriend, contrary to that depicted in migration literature – that women migrate behind men. This was made possible due to the change in migration policies that allowed young skilled women to migrate on their own merit rather than accompanying male relatives (Arthur, 2009; Buijs, 1993; Inglis, 2003).
In spite of the participants’ diverse backgrounds, the major reasons for their migration pertain to quality of life improvement for themselves and their families, particularly their children. This finding is similar to the Caribbean women who migrated to North America in search of “better opportunities that were not readily available in their home country” (Alfred, 2004, p. 147).

The findings also show that the strong bonds between most of the skilled migrant participants and their children compelled them to sacrifice high-salaried positions and comfortable lifestyles to migrate to Australia in order for their children to live in safe and secure environments and have better educational opportunities. The family bonds and high aspirations for their family members provide good examples of what Coleman (1988) refers to as the use of social capital to create human capital. He further suggests that social capital within the family can be an important resource for the education and well-being of children because the strong bond between parents and their children can compel parents to make sacrifices for the future of their children. This form of social capital was a key factor that motivated many participants in their decision to migrate. Hence, apart from the ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors for migration, there are other complex reasons for women’s migration. This finding concurs with the results of prior studies – migrant and refugee women have diverse migration trajectories as the numerous factors illustrated in the participants’ stories above mediate their experiences (Boyd, 2006; Buijs, 1993; Piper, 2008b). Other studies report similar findings about participants’ motivation for migration from developing to developed countries as “dreams of advancement” (Udo-Ekpo, 1999, p. 3; see also Alfred, 2004; Arthur, 2009; Berger, 2004a; Donkor, 2000; Manuh, 2000). In effect, all the participants migrated to create
better lives for themselves and their families, illuminating the importance of women’s role in international migration.

Although the participants are linguistically, ethnically and socioeconomically diverse, the processes of migration (for migrant participants) and resettlement (for refugee participants) in the NT have created a transnational African identity among the two groups. Despite the differences in socioeconomic and educational backgrounds, the participants are drawn together by similar opportunities, barriers and challenges, as reported in the next section of this chapter.

4.3 Opportunities, barriers and challenges
Migration experiences can provide new opportunities as well as challenges for migrants and refugees from developing countries, as shown in this study. The participants widened their realm of opportunities. However, to take advantage of these opportunities and rebuild their lives in their new environment, the participants revealed enormous constraints and challenges in adjusting to a new cultural, social and economic environment, including linguistic difficulties, unemployment and underemployment, and racism, discrimination and stereotyping. Even though the participants described experiencing intense feelings of gratitude on arrival, this feeling was gradually replaced by an awareness of the magnitude of the sociocultural adjustments they had to make in a country where “almost everything is new [and] different” (Interview with Nyainbo, 22/06/09).
4.3.1 Opportunities

Martin asserts that migration affects a woman’s role in her household and community as it “enhances the autonomy and power of women … When women from traditional societies migrate to advanced industrial societies, they become familiar with the new norms regarding women’s rights and opportunities” (2004, p. 28). As African women, all the participants had come from patriarchal societies, and had personally suffered some form of oppression or witnessed the injustice meted out to women in their societies. They therefore found the opportunities in Australia attractive, assisting them to pursue their aspirations and fulfil their expectations. All the refugee participants variously reported that they had found a new life that provided them with freedom, human rights, stability, security – the key opportunities they lacked in their original warring countries. The common opportunities that all the participants cited included: gender equality leading to personal and family development; freedom, safety and independence; education and training; economic independence and self-confidence.

4.3.1.1 Gender equality and equal opportunities for women

Gender equality policies and practices assist in the redistribution of resources, power and care responsibilities between men and women to ensure that women have greater control over their lives. The key issues in gender equality are the rights and opportunities women have to legal, economic and social independence and the same representation in leadership and decision making roles as men (HREOC, 2008).

For migrant and refugee women from patriarchal societies, policies that address inequities between men and women are critical to accessing opportunities in the NT because of the pervasiveness of gender inequality in their original societies. In such
societies, women have few formal rights in sociocultural, political and economic life as “their productivity is limited by poor access to [power] and resources in the form of tools, new technology, credit, education and training and markets” (Solheim, 2007, p. 18). Despite contemporary socioeconomic, cultural and political transformations in most African societies, gender parity lags behind external social conditions and there are gender gaps in education, employment and other social sectors (UN, 2000; UNESCO, 2006). According to Omelaniuk migration “can help reconfigure gendered relations, particularly by offering more women the opportunity to enter the global labour market … [and] raising the productivity, education and health … all key to reducing inequality” (2005, p. 1).

Since the participants migrated from African countries where there is gender inequality and women do not have the same opportunities as men in most aspects of their lives, they commented effusively on the equality between men and women, and Australia’s democracy, freedom of speech, and ‘fair go’ mentality, as well as the egalitarian spirit of its population. They reported differences between women’s roles in their original country and those in Australia (Gilding, 1997), and how gender equity values including affirmative action programs created opportunities that encouraged them to extend themselves beyond societal expectations. As Vilma states:

> Here in Australia, anybody, man or woman, government encourage you for education, [and] job. We are all [the] same, man and woman … they give you chance ... But for my place [original country], different … women are treated like children (Interview with Vilma, 8/07/09).

Kiden agrees:

> I was [a] hairdresser … because I don’t get chance to go for good school … but here in Australia, same thing – man can do, woman can do … that’s why now I use
that chance to get good education and good job for myself … because here we [men and women] can all have same choice (Interview with Kiden, 13/05/09).

Therese, who lived and worked in both developing and developed countries before migrating to Australia, compares gender equity as practised in Australia with other countries as she details her experience:

I have lived in many places and one thing that really struck me was the egalitarian society, the free spirit, ‘fair-go’, ‘fair-dinkum’ attitude … Everybody has rights [and] same opportunities in this country. And for women … I mean the opportunities are endless, seamless, up for grabs … education, jobs, affirmative action … governments and NGOs all helping women … In other countries especially Africa, they talk about it [gender equality] and make policies that are not implemented … here they [have] got … policies [and] strategies in place to ensure women are on the same plane as men (Interview with Therese, 12/05/09).

The views about gender equality mechanisms and equal opportunity strategies that promote respect for women’s rights in Australia confirm studies by Hugo (2000) and Piper (2008b), that migration can produce positive experiences for women from developing countries moving to developed countries. As women assert themselves during migration, the process and associated experiences become both a cause and a consequence of women’s empowerment. May corroborated Therese’s perception of equity and affirmative action policies as practices that created opportunities for women and refugee advancement programs such as the migrant English programs and states, “AMEP give me lots of opportunities for learning here … otherwise for me I will not be where I am today” (Interview with May, 10/06/09).

4.3.1.2 Freedom and independence

The participants talked profusely about the rights, responsibilities and the freedom, independence and autonomy that women enjoyed in the NT that permitted them to realise their potential. The permissiveness and associated freedom culturally shocked
most of the participants, as they had lived under patriarchal societies where women were subservient to men and they did not expect the amount of freedom they had in Australia. Coming from patriarchal and collective societies, migration to Australia offered all the participants the opportunity to view themselves away from the sociocultural structures in which they had grown. Hence, the sense of freedom that the participants discussed was not just a result of greater physical mobility but more importantly, a breaking down of gender-related cultural and social roles that kept them strictly controlled. This meant that they had better opportunities to try new ways of doing things:

When I got here, [the] thing that really struck me was the freedom, you can say what you think [and] what you like … People may not like what you say but … you won’t go for prison. For my country, no way! … that’s reason we are fighting all these years … If you’re a woman it’s worse, you have to listen to men … But here it’s opposite, I’m really happy … at least my daughter will grow up strong, have same education [and] same work as my sons (Interview with Lacha, 22/06/09).

While 22 participants spoke mainly about the freedom from their African male-dominated culture and gender-related values, Bridget Jones and Cheetah, who migrated from apartheid regimes, reported a different kind of freedom. These two participants were relieved to experience freedom from the racist apartheid regime that stifled the progress of black people, particularly women. They lamented the racist apartheid system that rendered their race subservient to the white race as illustrated in their comments on their newfound freedom in Australia. Bridget Jones states:

For the first time in our lives, we had the freedom to make our own decisions … about things like where to live, which school to go to, even what to eat, who to marry (laughs) … and yeah everyday basic things that people take for granted … and not controlled by white racist government rules. The freedom thing was great and I guess that really made me explore my creative self and follow my passion … [and] ended up marrying a white Aussie (Interview with Bridget Jones, 9/07/09).

Cheetah explains:
I was just awestruck [and] amazed about the acceptance, the freedom that … especially a black woman like myself had in terms of employment … I could be wherever I wanted to be and speak my mind … And I had an interesting experience on the bus one day where a young Caucasian boy of perhaps 13 years stood up and offered me his seat and I was close to tears because in my country that I had left, no white boy or person would have done this. One, we wouldn’t have been on the bus together and two, no white boy would have shown me that courtesy and respect … because of the racist regime where they were conditioned that they were superior to us (Interview with Cheetah, 17/06/09).

4.3.1.3 Economic independence, power and self-confidence

Apart from seven migrant participants who were engaged in formal, paid work, or were independently employed prior to migration, the majority (n = 14) were refugees who had migrated to Australia from refugee camps, where they were not involved in the governance and decisions about their day to day lives, because the refugee camps were run and controlled by UNHCR. They have had disrupted careers and mostly had not had paid jobs because there were not many employment opportunities. They were provided with rations of food and basic accommodation, and they were not responsible for their lives. Hence, arriving in Australia and getting financial support through employment, the social security system and subsidised accommodation was a big relief and a privilege. They gained the self-confidence to make decisions and control some aspects of their lives. For instance, Fatuma migrated under the woman-at risk program with her children. On arrival, she realised the change in her role as the head of the household. Before she got paid employment, she was dependent on government welfare subsidies for her family, but she had substantial autonomy about how she used the money. Later, when she got a paid employment, her wage-earning capacity gave her greater ability to direct household priorities. Fatuma describes her situation:

I was nurse before I married my husband [and] he said no work for me … [and] he gave me everything for the house [and] the children. But sad for me, they killed him during the war … It was good the time I came here, Centrelink [Australian Social Services Department] helped me before I got my job, got money, look after my
children, my family [and] I become strong person inside myself again (Interview with Fatuma, 19/06/09).

Similar to Fatuma, many participants mentioned the changes in the power dynamics in their homes. They revealed that these changes were the result of socioeconomic opportunities provided by education and employment during settlement, which helped to boost their economic independence, power, self-confidence and self-esteem.

4.3.1.4 Education and training opportunities

Almost all the participants came from countries where education is highly valued and serves as one of the most important means of gaining knowledge and skills, and attaining economic success and social mobility. Mortimer and Bryce-LaPorte (1981) attribute the high value placed on education by migrants and refugees from former colonies to a history of colonialism that underscored education and learning to expedite their social mobility. But in most African countries, the cultural trend of favouring males over females is pronounced in sociocultural programs, particularly education (Adu-Poku, 2001; Gyekye, 1997). The demand for formal education in these countries exceeds what the governments can offer, because of the overwhelming number of people wanting education. Access to quality education is highly competitive and families invest in males; females are not often given the same educational opportunities. It is not uncommon for financially struggling families to ask female children to give up their education and work to support male siblings’ education. The majority of the refugee participants had disrupted education due to civil wars. After migrating to Australia, they were struck by the abundant education and training opportunities, including that available to adult women, and the various modes they could access formal education –
internal, external, fulltime and part-time. Kiden expresses her excitement at the educational opportunities for women:

I got here, I see all the education and I just wanted to study! I said this is second chance for me … this is chance I get for [the] education I didn’t get in Sudan … Here [Australia] it’s different, people don’t care if you are woman or man … they give you chance for education (Interview with Kiden, 13/05/09).

Kiden further explains the cultural reasons for not reaching her full potential through formal education:

My parents were poor … but I think even if they get money, they will send my brothers because that is the culture … but here in Australia, different – boys, girls, woman, man, we can all have same education … last time my friend was saying that there are many girls for Centralian [College] than boys (laughs) (Interview with Kiden, 13/05/09).

In most cases women in these patriarchal societies are provided with sub-class education that perpetuates their subordination (UNESCO, 2005). Longwe remarks that in most African countries, “women’s education into their subordination is an implicit and unquestioned facet of all aspects of everyday life” (2008, p. 5). In contrast, Australian women’s situation is different because the welfare system and free education have resulted in fewer structural and economic constraints to women’s education and socioeconomic advantage. Furthermore, Australian society’s values for gender equity and the various opportunities for women to be as successful as men, contribute to raise migrant and refugee women’s educational expectations of themselves. There are also many opportunities for women’s adult education. Omelaniuk points out that “migration increasingly offers women education and career opportunities that may not be available or be denied them at home” (2005, p. 3).
4.3.1.5 Summary

This section has illustrated the political and economic stability in Australia that provided the participants with the opportunity to experience greater well-being and material comforts than in their countries of origin. In talking about the opportunities, all participants repeatedly compared their privileges and new-found opportunities to that of their departing countries. Many authors (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2003; Guarnizo, 1997; Pacheco, 2011; Wong, 2000) have documented the constant tendency of migrants to compare and contrast their circumstances in their host society with those in their country of origin termed as “immigrant’s dual frame of reference” (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995, p. 163). The stories presented in this section indicate that all participants had a dual frame of reference as they constantly compared their experiences in their host society with that of their original societies in Africa.

4.3.2 Barriers and challenges

Despite the opportunities that the participants found to rebuild their lives and reconstruct their identities, they realised that they were part of a minority and culturally diverse group in their new society; hence they faced multi-faceted structural barriers and challenges, particularly in adjusting to, and coping with the differences between the dominant Anglo-Australian cultural perspectives and their traditional worldview. The barriers reported in this study relate to the diverse challenges associated with adjustment to the new culture. These challenges include dealing with differences and ambiguities between their sociocultural values, beliefs and standards, and those of the host society; multiple social and family responsibilities; gender roles and parenting; loss of family and lack of social networks; issues with English and linguistic barriers; racism,
discrimination and stereotyping; and employment and work issues related to unemployment, underemployment, non-recognition of foreign credentials and lack of Australian work experience.

4.3.2.1 Adjustment to the new culture

The word ‘culture’ has multiple meanings, with people from different contexts defining it differently (Smith, 2001). Trice and Beyer state that “human cultures emerge from people’s struggles to manage uncertainties and to create some degree of order in social life” (1993, p. 1). Gollnick and Chinn define culture as “a way of perceiving, believing, evaluating and behaving … [and it] provides a blueprint that determines the way we think, feel and behave in society” (2000, p. 25). The culture of a group of people may therefore refer to the knowledge, values, beliefs and norms acquired through their socialisation, therefore making culture the “social heritage of people – those learned patterns for thinking, feeling and acting that are transmitted from one generation to the next” (Vander Zanden, cited in Zhang, 2005, p. 99). It is inherent in these definitions that ‘culture’, as shared values of social groups, sets the rules and patterns of behaviour and practices for group membership, and guides members’ daily activities. Migrants whose culture is incongruent with the host society’s culture can experience ‘culture shock’ as they face unfamiliar situations and “a feeling of uneasiness, anxiety and stress which arises when suddenly all familiar cues, language, interpersonal relations … and actions are out of place” (Kaplan & Eckermann, 1996, p. 16). The stress of adapting to the new culture engenders “a sense of loss, confusion in role expectations and self-identity … and feelings of impotence” (Taft, cited in Pantelidou & Craig, 2006, p. 777).
During migration, people shift their physical contexts, but the cultural models that they acquire through their pre-migration enculturation affect their meaning-making processes in their new society. In circumstances where the migrant’s cultural models do not have the same significance in the host society, the socialisation process for them:

Induces a complex and important process of cultural adaptation ... as a result of grappling with the new experiences associated with establishing a new life ... [This] involves processes of cultural re-composition ... and familiarity with the dominant [group’s] values and customs (Fincher et al., 1994, p. 107).

The participants talked about experiencing culture shock on arrival because they came from sociocultural, political and linguistic backgrounds that are fundamentally different to the Australian way of life. The differences range from their patriarchal society, family size, relations between family members and communication styles. Hence an adjustment to Australian culture and lifestyle requires an adaptation to the culture of the Anglo/Western paradigm, which focuses on equal human rights, individualism, nuclear family, individual achievements and material acquisition as opposed to African cultures that value communalism, extended family, community achievement and reciprocity. The participants were therefore confronted by Australian society that is multicultural but mainly mono-cultural in its major social institutions and structures of power. The participants commented on the conflicting African and Anglo/Western cultures as they compared the profound differences between the African worldview of collectivity and the Western worldview of individuality. They revealed that the African worldview is deeply rooted in the family and community as, “We move according to the rhythm of our community’s music” (Interview with Mangi, 13/06/11). Mangi’s comments highlight the commitment and obliging loyalty to communalism. Mangi expresses the
African migrants and refugees’ dilemma of not only having to adapt to Australia’s culture, but also struggling to maintain their antecedent culture when she says:

As African women … we are going through hard time because here, everybody looks after themselves. But for us, we have to look after everybody. We have many hats, many different things to deal with … we have to learn new social mores … workplace culture [and] on top of everything, we have to keep our African culture [and] that one is very important … because in a multicultural place like Darwin, if we don’t hang on to our own values, we will be nothing (Interview with Mangi, 8/06/09).

Numerous studies and media publications (Andrews, 2007; Dhanji, 2009; DIAC, 2007b; Nsubuga-Kyobe, 2005; NT News, 2009; The Courier Mail, 2008), have documented the issues faced by African migrants and refugees in adjusting to the new culture in areas such as gender roles, rights and responsibilities of family members, and social and legal implications in Australia. For many of the participants, the unwritten cultural codes and social rules have been the most daunting and challenging experiences, as Therese explains:

The way we do things in Africa is different from here and it’s good to adapt … but most of the things about culture are nebulous because you don’t know until something happens (laughs). Yeah not that we [Africans] are not capable … but it’s just difficult … I was taught to respect, yeah defer to elders … boss, teachers … but here practising those cultural behaviours will be like I’m crawling to people for favours (laughs) … The other day one of my clients got suspended for dishing herself a plate in the restaurant where she works … for heaven’s sake how can she know she can’t do that when nobody told her? Fundamentally, there are cultural differences but the ones that are not so clear needs to be explained (Interview with Therese, 12/05/09).

These sentiments echo McMichael and Manderson’s findings that Somali women felt isolated and disconnected from Australia’s cultural values as “the culture of Anglo-Australians is less communal than in Somalia, and their own family … beliefs … set them apart” (2004, p. 95). Shakespeare-Finch and Wickham (2010) also found in their study of Sudanese refugees that many of them had overwhelming issues learning the
customs and norms for social interaction, as they were challenged by the significant differences in their traditional cultures and the existing sociocultural practices in Australia.

4.3.2.2 Loss of family and social support networks

Migration as a movement from one place to another involves a movement between social relations and community contexts. Therefore, the challenges in migration, settlement and integration in the new society is also rooted in the loss of family and social support networks because of the separation, isolation and disconnection from the individual’s family and community. Family and social support networks are an African’s most valuable asset, and as such their loss impacts on the family’s foundation during migration. Udo-Ekpo writes: “for Africans … the hardest thing to come to terms with is distance, loneliness and separation from others” (1999, p. 139). All the participants revealed that in their original collectivist societies, adult males are the breadwinners and women are responsible for the family’s private domestic activities, including raising children, caring for the well-being and welfare of the family, and nurturing and maintaining the family’s traditional cultural practices (Dove, 1998). Therefore if women decide to pursue other public conflicting roles, such as careers outside the home, extended family members assist them with household responsibilities. These values make the extended family an important part of their social support network. One of the most difficult challenges during migration to an individualist society such as Australia, for the participants, is the loss and separation from extended families. Apart from extended families, community members’ role in raising their children was very important to the participants because in traditional African culture, children belong to
everyone, with childrearing shared amongst relatives and community members: “Every adult in the neighbourhood is responsible for the well-being of children in the neighbourhood” (Obeng, 2007, p. 262). It was not surprising that in their reflections of settlement challenges, all the participants mentioned the loss of family and social support networks repeatedly. For instance Lacha states:

> Back home in Africa … children run around … everybody helps look after them … But here, no [it’s] against the law! Children are with you all the time and you can’t lock them up in the house. That one is real problem for us … [and] you want somebody to look after your child is big money... really, we miss that one support from family, like grandmothers, aunties [and] sisters (Interview with Lacha, 22/06/09).

Several participants who have had children during settlement talked about how they missed extended family members, as they would have preferred having a family member as a caregiver. Mercy describes her dilemma of having to send her six-week old baby to childcare so she could continue with her studies:

> I got pregnant in the middle of my degree, [and] I had to go back six weeks after I had my baby … All the time I drop my son at childcare, I will be crying … anytime, I get break, I will run to the centre to see if he is okay … [because] I have never … left my child with complete strangers … It was really difficult time for me but I didn’t have a choice (Interview with Mercy, 5/06/09).

As women who are socially expected to manage their domestic activities, including caring functions for their children and other family members, the participants were suddenly faced with multiple barriers and challenges. Although all the participants continued to juggle their domestic, professional and educational commitments, it was a difficult transition to do housework, as most had either employed domestic help, referred to as ‘housegirls’ or ‘houseboys’, or extended family members to do household chores and assist in raising their families prior to migration. The quote below from Romana reveals the frustrations and challenges they faced without family and social support:
I missed my family because back home extended family members come and live with you … [and] help with housework and the kids … even in PNG we had “housemerries” [domestic help] … I got here and really missed that aspect of my life … It was difficult working fulltime and doing the housework … [but] I just couldn’t afford that kind of help that I took for granted back home … they are very expensive here (Interview with Romana, 6/01/10).

May talks about loneliness due to loss of family and friends:

The people here want to be friends and nice but not all the time [and] is difficult because you don’t know when they want to talk to you … back home not many women get depressed especially after they get babies, but here all the time they say they get depression [and] get crazy … People only talk to you when they want … [and] not when you [are] having problems [and] you want to talk to them. This one makes me miss my family and friends … because they are there for you all the time (Interview with May, 10/06/09).

May and other participants’ stories support Fincher et al.’s comments based on a longitudinal study that the settlement experience “‘weighs heavily’ on migrants and refugees who do not have family and social support networks” (1994, p. 124), and manifests in increased loneliness, isolation and depression, increased household responsibilities for women, lack of childcare support, and affects the choice of employment and educational aspirations. Wolf also reports a Danish social worker’s observations on Somalian migrants and refugees that, “Somalis in Africa know the suffering of war and the destitution in refugee camps, but not the suffering of isolation and loneliness of living in diaspora without the same degree of community” (2010, pp. 31-32). Vilma, a divorcee, explains how the loss of family and social support networks leads to marital breakdown:

For my place [original country] we have many family and friends [and] when there’s problem for husband [and] wife, they help solve problems … But here when there’s problem, you talk to strangers … they [are] just doing their job and whether you stay together or not … they still get their money [salary] so that one is really difficult for me and our African people … This [is the] reason we get many divorce in our community because we miss that family advice [and] support to solve problems (Interview with Vilma, 8/07/09).
The participants’ comments about the loss of their families and support networks are similar to numerous studies that emphasise women’s commitment and affiliations with family, community and social relations as the core of their lives (Arthur, 2009; Dove, 1998; Higginbotham & Weber, 1996; Obiakor & Afolayan, 2007). Both migrant and refugee participants acknowledged the deep sense of loss and isolation living away from extended family and friends; however, for the refugee participants, their loss encompasses the loss of family members in traumatic wars, loss of land through displacement from homeland and loss of culture as well. For all the participants, Udo-Ekpo’s (1999) suggestion that social isolation is the hardest challenge for Africans to cope with during settlement in Australia, did not discount other settlement challenges.

4.3.2.3 Conflicts in gender roles, parenting and caring responsibilities

Migration can put a lot of strain on family units, and cause conflicts and disintegration due to changes in family roles (Martin, 2004; Nsubuga-Kyobe, 2007). The participants found the significant differences to traditional gender roles and parenting practices in Australia challenged their core values. As explained earlier, generally men are the head of African households, catering for all financial commitments. In circumstances where women engage in paid employment, they expend their earnings on themselves and their extended family without contributing financially to the upkeep of their nuclear families’ domestic expenditure. During settlement, most participants realised that even where their husbands had paid employment, they could not support their families on a single income, and they had to take on the additional responsibility of getting a paid job to contribute to the family’s finances. In some instances, it was easier for the women to find jobs as they were prepared to take up any employment, whilst the men waited for
jobs in their chosen professions. As some of the participants revealed, they felt powerful and independent when they instantly became breadwinners while their husbands struggled to find employment. They gained status through their new and demanding responsibilities as breadwinners, which also gave them stronger decision-making roles. But the changes in family roles put a lot of stress on the family unit, especially on the women. For instance, when Mercy and her husband resettled in the NT, she found the employment opportunities after tertiary education very attractive, and wanted both herself and her husband to commence tertiary studies straightaway. Her husband wanted to wait, but Mercy enrolled in a degree program. She sadly narrates her shocking experience that by the time she finished her studies and got a job, her marriage was gone because her husband felt he had lost control:

When we got here, I wanted us to start uni [university] straightaway ... [because] I saw the quality life with great opportunities through education ... I finished my course [discipline] and got a job... maybe my husband was thinking I shamed him because I was working, paying for many things for the house ... I didn’t mind but I guess it all piled up ... he just left (Interview with Mercy, 5/06/09)

The participants also found the new way of parenting challenging, because the social permissiveness that exists in Australian culture undermined their authority and control over their children. In contending and adjusting to the new culture, most of the participants were concerned about the incompatibility between their own cultural identity and the values their children were acquiring in the new society. Many of the participants reported that the rate and ease with which younger family members settled into the new cultural context exacerbated family issues as the rapid acculturation into Australian mainstream values undermined the status quo and traditional African parenting values and beliefs. Another area of concern to the participants was that the children picked up English and related nuances faster than their parents. Whilst the
parents struggled to learn the language, the children assumed new roles as interpreters and teachers, and this new role reversal caused parent-child conflicts in many families.

The participants spoke of the difficulties they encountered including the lack of cultural understanding and sensitivity from government agencies in negotiating cultural differences in relation to the laws protecting the rights of children, child safety, child abuse and the disciplining of children. The participants talked at length about how these have affected family relationships in the African community. They cited many instances of parents losing control over their children and experiencing a sense of loss and helplessness in dealing with their children’s disrespect for traditional values because of the way child protection agencies, welfare officers and teachers propagate and implement children’s rights. They made various comments showing their dissatisfaction with the way government agencies interfered and undermined parental authority by siding with children against parents. Mangi pragmatically points out that:

In Africa we say, ‘Children are to be seen, not heard’ … they [children] have to listen to adults … I don’t agree with that … But the one I have problem here [Australia] is, when the children say ‘we know our rights’ … that is causing many troubles … we are faced with children who want to do what they like, with no understanding of the consequences … and when parents try to advise … they get into trouble because child protection people and teachers take sides with the children because they don’t trust African parents … [and] they don’t want to know parent’s side of the story… the parenting thing is destroying many African families (Interview with Mangi, 8/06/09).

Mangi’s explanation represents most participants’ concerns regarding parenting misunderstandings, and the mistrust between parents and relevant authorities when they cause family conflicts. Marienne, who has experienced this conflict, recalls the most traumatic experience she has had since her settlement as the period when her children were fostered out because of a misunderstanding between her family and the school. Her
children have since been returned after the discrepancies were sorted out. Marienne talks about her emotional experience:

I don’t have problem for my children go for sleep-over but I have problem when the parents for their friends tell my children, we are bad parents because we tell them to come home early … [so] we can go to church … I got into big trouble … teachers [and] other parents telling my kids bad things to tell government people about us … [and] they took the kids gave them to foster [family] … It was difficult, really sad time for my family … now they give my children back [but] this one still happens to many African families (Interview with Marienne, 3/07/09).

Marienne’s experience is a poignant example of the disappointment many of the participants shared about how African families’ sociocultural values were discounted and devalued in parenting issues as bureaucrats and outsiders dictated how their children should be raised. Some of the participants mentioned the polarisation between parents and their teenage children as ongoing challenges. The participants attributed the intergenerational conflicts and rift mainly to Youth Allowance financial payments. They indicated that their children viewed these subsidies as ‘easy money’ and spent them on trivial and material things, which they detested. Indio states:

The well quoted bible verse says, ‘the root of all evil is money’, and this is causing lots of damage among our families … once these kids start getting Centrelink money, that’s it! No respect for parents … it’s all about shoes, clothes, latest mobile phone [and] it’s just because they don’t understand why they get that money … and yeah the parents get the end of the stick … sad eh? (Interview with Indio 11/06/09).

The changing gender roles were also quite challenging for the participants as their responsibilities both inside and outside the home increased because they took on additional roles as mediators with the host society, carriers of their culture of origin and had to be “buffers and containers for their family members’ frustrations” (Berger, 2004b, p. 3). In some cases the women were compelled to renegotiate their traditional domestic roles, and this caused anxieties that resulted in family relationship breakups. The majority of the participants reported that their husbands were unable to reconcile
their expectations with the sociocultural and employment situations, and whilst they were determined to seek ways of encountering their issues for the sake of their children, their husbands’ stress affected their relationships. For example, Vilma is still wondering why her husband left her and their kids. After almost seven years’ separation, she is still in shock and denial. She does infer though, that most of her countrymen leave their wives when they get here because they feel threatened that they are not in control of their family members, including their wives and children. Vilma laments:

We got here [and] I went to school to improve my English … he just wanted to drive taxi … because he wanted quick money to bring his family here … But like many [original country] men, they get jealous because the women get education, get jobs, get their own money … they feel like they have lost control for wife, family … next thing is divorce (Interview with Vilma, 8/07/09).

The participants also reflected on how they had to work extremely hard to provide leadership roles and financial responsibilities formerly provided by male family members. These changes in traditional gender roles grossly undermined their male relatives’ authority within their families, as the men felt disempowered by the women’s economic independence. They contributed to strained and abusive relationships that led to domestic violence and divorce for some of the participants including Jomey, who shares her experience:

I didn’t know English the time I got here … [and] my husband was cheating me for everything … because I didn’t understand many things … I finished my English then I got my job. When I say show me house money, he got very angry, saying I don’t trust him, I don’t respect him … he was kicking me all the time [and] I called for police many time[s] … then I called for [family counsellor], she helped me tell my case to housing people [and] I got new house [and] I took the kids and left him (Interview with Jomey, 29/06/09).

These findings are substantiated by Cuban and Stromquist, who report that “women immigrants are more at risk for abuse by family members when they engage in paid work or in education in a new country because their public identities threaten patriarchal
conventions and their domestic roles within their families” (2009, p. 160). The effects on male spouses and challenges of gender role changes in this study also mirror what Martin found in her study:

> Men often feel neglected and disappointed, which sometimes brings out patriarchal habits and efforts to re-establish traditional roles – even by force if necessary … Their own feelings of inferiority can lead to their doubting the love or untrustworthiness of their wives. While men mistrust their wives, they may restrict them and try to control them in an effort to boost their egos (2004, p. 29).

In terms of domestic violence, the participants’ excerpts show that as the men cling to their traditional notions of acceptable social behaviour, the women resort to Australia’s laws regarding domestic violence to take a stance in dealing with spousal abuse and domestic violence issues. The participants in this study echo the sentiments of the participants in other studies. Manuh (1998) and Pacheco (2011), in their studies of African migrant and refugee women in Canada and the US respectively, report of how the changing gender roles have caused marital conflicts and divorce between husbands and wives. Whilst the Sudanese refugee women in Pacheco’s study explain that such conflicts were due to women’s educational attainments – because with education, women became conscious of their rights and started “pushing the boundaries of gender roles too far” (2011, p. 63). Manuh’s study of Ghanaian immigrant women reports that “the safety net, where the Canadian state provides housing and childcare support to single and divorced women, has undermined the authority and power of husbands to maintain particular kinds of relations with their wives” (cited in Wong, 2000, p. 62). The binary tensions between the participants’ roles as caregivers, wives, mothers and career development plans without the extended family support created family tensions. For both married and single participants in this study, the economic demands in Australia involved a greater demand on them to pursue education as a means of entry.
into the labour market. However, their socioculturally defined roles as wives, mothers and daughters made them primarily responsible for household chores and obligations. Similar to the Dominican Republic women migrants in Guarnizo’s study, the participants had to restructure the power relations within their households between themselves, their spouses and their children. This meant either:

Conform[ing] to the social and cultural norms of [their society of origin] … in which the husband is the primary breadwinner [and therefore head of the household] or to socioeconomic conditions in [Australia where] households supported their domestic economy through resource pooling (Guarnizo, 1997, p. 300).

The participants’ experiences demonstrate that the changes in gender roles and parenting were challenging as they impacted negatively on some previously stable families, but highlights a shift from some African patriarchal practices and acceptance of some Australian values and norms to assist in the participants’ transition in the new context.

4.3.2.4 English language, communication skills and African-English accent

English is the language of globalisation (UNESCO, 2005). Although Australia prides itself as a multicultural society, the recognition of English as the official language leaves little room for languages from other migrant cultures, or for migrants to speak in different voices and accents (Gilligan, 1993). Babiniotis (2001) states “people who are not able to speak and therefore communicate in the language of the country where they live are doomed to social exclusion and therefore segregation” (cited in Mattheoudakis, 2005, p. 323). This makes English language proficiency and literacy a crucial factor in settlement in Australia as attested to by Kalumburu:

I’d say that the ones [Africans] without English need to learn the language. They need the language to communicate effectively, to understand the system, different structures and how they work, and impact on their lives so that they will be able to control decisions affecting their lives … Australia is a multicultural society but all
the powerful institutions, service agencies … government, even NGOs, they all reflect main Anglo-Saxon cultural values and practices which are different from our home countries … [and] without English [there is] no chance of making it here (Interview with Kalumburu, 5/07/09).

As the official and dominant language, English is the “primary language of economic, social, cultural, educational and administrative sectors of public and private life … of the media, of the delivery of public services and the dissemination of information” (Lo-Bianco, cited in Burnett, 1998, p. 38). English is therefore central to the social, economic and educational advancement of migrants and refugees, and it is difficult for them to participate effectively in Australian society without proficiency as “the rules of success are written in English” (Tait, 1990, p. 1).

All the participants underscored the significance of English language competency because they believed that proficiency in English had a direct impact on their ability to integrate quickly, giving them the capacity to effectively engage and negotiate many facets of the host environment. They indicated that English is one of the most potent challenges for them, lack of language skills can compromise economic opportunity, and restrict access to social resources and the opportunities to participate in the power structures in Australia. The participants highlighted the various ways in which proficiency in English facilitates their successful settlement by “providing a path to building social networks and employment; accessing information and services and participating in the lives of their communities” (Saffu, 2010, p. 23).

Two participants migrated as adults and could not speak English prior to their arrival, and three arrived as children and learned English through the Australian school system, so speak English like Anglo-Australians. English was the first language for two
participants, and the other 17 participants had varied levels of English language proficiency as they had learned and used English language as their second language, as another language, or as a subject in school. As indicated earlier, Fatuma and Jomey were the two participants who could not speak English as adults, and on arrival in Australia, learning English was their utmost priority. Jomey explains her shopping experience during that period:

> It was difficult for me I felt like little child because I couldn’t speak English ... I like going for shops … but tough for me because when I went to the shops I looked at things [and] because I couldn’t read … I was using pictures [and] I got confused if there’s no picture ... What I was doing, when we finish eating the food and it’s good, I take [the] empty tin to shop then I buy same thing again [laughs] … I really struggled trying to understand things … For fruits and veggies I always picked the ones I know from Africa … it was embarrassing … but there was nothing I could do … I remember one time for Woolworths, I went for line with nobody then people were looking … Another time I went to same shop with my friend, she spoke English good, I went for that line and she told me that line for people with small things like one [or] 10 items … I told her my story and we laughed because that day I had more than 30 (Interview with Jomey, 29/06/09).

Fatuma talks about her first experience in her English class:

> When I come here, I can only speak Arabic, no English! My first day [at] AMEP I greeted everybody ’Salaam malekum’ (laughs), like greeting for Arabic and everybody looked at me … And my teacher … she says to me, ‘No … say good morning’ … for two days I never say anything for class … yeah like dumb woman! I hear everything but I can’t say nothing … and any time I want something I call for one woman interpreter … It was very hard so I sit down and learn English myself with my children … Now I don’t need help to do things like before. It’s a good feeling for me (Interview with Fatuma, 19/06/09).

These excerpts from Jomey and Fatuma represent the debilitating and humiliating experiences they had to endure because of their incompetency in English. Both repeatedly mentioned their inability to secure employment or access services, their sense of isolation, frustration and feelings of being ‘dumb’, limited social networks, and dependency on other people to interpret for them, which meant they had no ‘privacy’. But they were determined to use different coping strategies in a very difficult situation.
For example, Jomey went to the shop during quiet times and used pictures from old containers to identify grocery items. The language barrier for Jomey, Fatuma and other participants was a major factor associated with other difficulties and anxieties. Participants portrayed difficulties using their English as limiting their ability to communicate assertively, resulting in feelings of powerlessness and vulnerability.

Similar to Arthur, Este and Hrycak’s study (2007) of refugee women in Canada, the participants cited that the issue of language affected them psychologically because they felt devalued as their issues were trivialised and they were treated as stupid and dumb because of their inability to speak English. They note that, “the feeling of being degraded, not being heard and lack of recognition or valuing of the self by others … as a result of language barriers … has serious consequences … that affected emotional wellbeing in all areas of life” (Arthur et al., 2007, pp. 14-15). Most of the participants indicated that the lack of English language skills on arrival literally incapacitated and silenced them. As illustrated in the above quotes, the participants achieved their sense of identity after they gained functional literacy in English and could understand the cultural nuances of the language.

The participants who reported having fluent English indicated that their settlement process was a bit easier. They commented on the advantage they had in accessing services, finding employment, pursuing further education and training, and making friends. For example, Therese states:

I have been speaking English since I was in kindergarten … I got here and walked into volunteering at my kids’ school and made lots of friends and got my real job through my networks (Interview with Therese, 12/05/09).

Kalumburu, a skilled migrant with functional English on arrival also remarks:
I came here as a skilled migrant and I’m lucky I had very good English … I have noticed how difficult it is for some of my African brothers and sisters who have little or no English. They have to depend on other people for almost everything, from grocery shopping to seeing a doctor, they have no privacy! … when they are employed they are given the messiest things to do and underpaid, all because they don’t have the language to complain … you need English language to understand the people, the culture, negotiate institutional arrangements, battle bureaucracy and justify your inclusion (laughs sarcastically), hmm basically everything here! (Interview with Kalumburu 5/07/09).

There is a marked difference between acceptable Australian employment conditions and that of the developing African countries that the participants have migrated from. Kalumburu’s excerpt confirms earlier studies (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2007; ECCV, 2008) that limited English language can inhibit African migrant and refugees’ ability to get employment, and the confidence to speak up and complain about poor and exploitative working conditions. As illustrated by Therese and Kalumburu, many of the participants recalled that English fluency had been a considerable asset in their settlement, and hardly anticipated that language would be a problem in their new environment. However, in knowledge societies including Australia, language can be a major obstacle for African migrant and refugee women who were fluent in English, as well as those who learned English after their migration, due to their subordinate position in the host community. In such contexts “language constitutes … a space of exclusion and an ongoing site of struggle … [and] accent discrimination as a feature of daily life” (Creese, 2011, p. 33). For instance in this study the participants opined that the numerous Australian acronyms, jargon, terms and slang were prohibitive and exclusionary. Some felt removed from Anglo-Australian speakers due to their inability to follow verbal communication as a result of the considerable variations within Australian-English accents. They were also challenged and frustrated learning how to cope with the sociocultural aspects of the language from the cognitive, attitudinal and
behavioural perspective as they were often accused of being either passive or aggressive communicators. Sally relates the challenges as follows:

My biggest challenge was actually the way Australians speak English … quite different ... it was difficult to follow conversations. People made [me] feel I didn’t know English because I speak differently and didn’t understand their terms … it is annoying because I am confident about my English … I have learnt some of the local terms now … because I really want to socialise [and] not look confused (Interview with Sally, 5/06/09).

Consistent with Sally’s experience, Koehne (2005) indicates the cross-cultural experience of international students in Australia, which involves the awakening and transformation of identity, and overlapping cultural meanings of language in different learning contexts. Participants also confirmed that language is used and interpreted within a localised context, and migrants who speak English require initial translation of colloquial phrases, nuances, jargons and pronunciations. However, “the local vernacular is not only different [for migrants], the difference implies incompetence in the speaker” (Creese & Kambere, 2003, p. 568).

While most of the participants had taken time to adjust to colloquial differences between African English and that of Australia, they were genuinely surprised about their accent discrimination, which created significant barriers and feelings of exclusion. Lippi-Green confirms that accent discrimination is widespread in the Western world as it “is so commonly accepted, so widely perceived as appropriate, that it must be seen as the last back door to discrimination. And the door stands wide open [for migrants and refugees]” (1997, p. 73). The participants revealed their ongoing struggles to have their linguistic competency recognised and their African accents accepted in their daily interactions with Anglo-Australians. They reported that they were made to feel that their linguistic competency was second class because of their accents, and that this practice undermined
their linguistic capital because they were treated as incompetent and incapable. The majority of the participants shared negative experiences about how educational institutions, employers and landlords screened their applications by their accents before offering interviews and admissions. For example, when Mariama, a primary school English teacher from an Anglophone country wanted to upgrade her teaching qualifications, she was encouraged to do Tertiary Entrance Program (TEP) to upgrade her English. Mariama noted that there were no deficiencies in her command of English, rather she was expected to improve her phonetics and acquire the local Australian accent. Mariama explains her concerns:

I was teaching English in [original country] … It was really challenging and frustrating when I got here because … I wanted to upgrade my teaching qualification and they asked me to do TEP to improve my chances, but I found out that it was my pronunciation … they wanted me to speak like them … I finished TEP … [and] decided to do nursing not teaching because I don’t want people referring to my … accent if I am a teacher (Interview with Mariama, 14/05/09).

Similarly, Lacha and Vilma who had pre-migration educational qualifications and experience in teaching decided to pursue careers in community services and health because of the pressure to learn to speak with the local Australian accent. They were discouraged by demeaning experiences and did not feel confident to gain employment as teachers with African accents. The practice of directing English-speaking Africans to participate in English classes to re-mould their accents and reshape their English language speaking skills was a very common experience for all participants. As shown by Bourdieu’s work, “one’s accent either facilitates or hinders the ability to be believed, obeyed, respected [and] distinguished” (1977, p. 648). The finding, where all the participants recalled circumstances where they were reminded in a variety of ways in social situations that they were not believed, obeyed, respected or distinguished by other
Australians, supports Bourdieu (1977), Creese (2011), and Creese and Kambere’s (2003) studies. Mangi complains about such practices in different contexts, including accessing formal education and workplace meetings:

I was taught by Irish and English nuns … [and] I thought I spoke perfect English until I got here … I wanted to study and telephoned [institution] and was very disappointed … they just heard my accent and made up their minds because I got this woman who asked me ‘Do you really know about the program?’ … At my work in meetings … I say something and it is rubbished, then somebody picks my ideas … and they are given credit [for] them … yeah it’s really difficult convincing them I have brains … because all they hear is my accent! … I don’t think my accent is difficult to understand … they just look at me as a person … more than my knowledge … The funny thing is there is a lady that nobody understands because of her thick Scottish accent, but they don’t say nothing when she speaks … but when it’s an African like me there’s a problem … I think they do that to put us [Africans] down … it’s a way of telling us … our [Anglo-Australian] accent is better than yours … all about control, just to discriminate, sheer racist! … yeah [it’s] like if you want to be accepted you have to do it our way (Interview with Mangi, 8/06/09).

Mangi’s experience illustrates that her colleagues’ reactions to her accent undermined her professional expertise at meetings and affected her sense of belonging. Even though she still believes in her professional capability, it is clear that she is irritated by the fact that people refer to her accented English when she learned English from “Irish and English nuns”. She feels marginalised as she compares her own African accent to that of her Scottish colleague’s stronger accent. Her colleagues’ attitude is a reminder that “accents are an index of authority … [and] the efficacy of discourse, its power to convince, depends on the authority of the person who utters it” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 653). Most of the participants’ narratives suggest that the accent barrier that they encounter is a systemic tool used to put them down, marginalise and exclude them. As Mangi explains above, many educated Africans have mastery over English and the problem is more to do with being African women in Australia. For some, the constant reference to their accents was embarrassing and discouraged them from engaging in public discourse,
such as speaking in class. Their silence was often misunderstood as lack of intelligence.

Marienne talks about such an experience:

Some of my mates think because I didn’t speak English like them, I was not understanding for class … I started talking with my French accent … Sometimes, I just put in my answer, [and] then they give me chance to talk … some of our people [Africans], they’re not strong so they miss out for discussion … Here [Australia] if you don’t talk for class, they think you don’t know … [and] it affects your grade … [and] you can’t make friends for group work (Interview with Marienne, (3/07/09).

Marienne’s explanation is an illustration of how other migrant women who are not as strong as herself become marginalised, invisible and discriminated against because they choose silence over embarrassment for their accent. The mockery of different accents prevents some of her African classmates from accessing opportunities to actively engage in learning experiences, and tap into the resources and networks that come through such interactions. Fennelly and Palasz (2003) found in their study of immigrants in the US that many are highly educated, but their inability to speak English, or speaking it with an accent, is construed as lack of intelligence leading to exclusion.

The participants also talked about the routine and pervasive policing of their accents as another dimension of accent discrimination. They reported frequent interruptions of “excuse me”, “what did you say”, “what do you mean”, “pardon”, “can you repeat”.

Esperance describes her experience:

They keep asking me to repeat what I say with ‘pardon’, ‘excuse me’ … [and] when I say ‘aubergine’ they say ‘eggplant’, which is their term … Sometimes they go ahmm you mean this, with their own accent … I hope people will know that Africans talking with accent, we are not dumb … really we are very clever because many of us speak many languages (Interview with Esperance, (8/06/09).

As expressed by Esperance, the majority of the participants (n = 22) spoke more than one language, and indicated that monolingual Australians should give them credit for speaking more than one language, instead of humiliating and marginalising them.
because their first language affects the way they speak English. Since many of the participants reported being fluent in English, they expected their linguistic capital to facilitate integration into the local labour market and civil society on arrival. However, it is apparent from their experiences that both fluent speakers and those who had limited English or learned English after migration identified accent discrimination as a central feature of their lives as they continuously struggled to assert their English language competency in the NT. These participants assert that their challenging experiences of English in their daily lives is not because they have difficulty with comprehension and expression, but, similar to the participants in Creese and Kambere’s study, their “African English accents mark them as immigrant, African, Black, women perceived to have low English-language competency” (2003, p. 571). Tastsoglou and Miedema explain that “as far as accents go, racism is the real problem because sound itself does not present a functional problem; the treatment of a different sound as inferior is the issue” (2005, p. 18).

4.3.2.5 Racism, discrimination and stereotyping

Racism, discrimination and stereotyping have been documented extensively as “widespread and serious problems” (Burnett, 1998, p. 34) for black migrant and refugee women. Kabeer succinctly points out that during migration and settlement, “all women suffer from discrimination” (1996, p. 20). Similarly, in several studies (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2007; Creese, 2011; Elabor-Idemudia, 2001; Osirim, 2008; Udo-Ekpo, 1999), race and racism play a key role in the socioeconomic and everyday experiences of African migrant women in developed countries such as Australia. In spite of Australia’s anti-discrimination legislation and well-established multicultural policy that allows for
the existence and practice of diverse cultures, Berger (2004a) notes the vulnerability of migrant and refugee women to human rights violations, and argues that these women are usually caught up in a web of triple discrimination, as a result of racism, sexism and class inequality.

The participants’ responses reveal that all endured implicit and explicit racism, stereotypical expectations and illusory generalisations, regardless of the migration type, socioeconomic status and length of stay in Australia. All had encountered racism, discrimination and stereotyping at both institutional and individual levels. They recounted numerous experiences of racism, discrimination, stereotyping, sexism, and social exclusion, which in most instances made access and participation more difficult and restricted. Apart from Bridget Jones and Cheetah who grew up under racist apartheid regimes before migrating to Australia, the other participants (n = 22) migrated from sovereign African nations where their black race was in the majority, and they were not considered a minority race. In their original countries, these participants did not suffer any disadvantages, exclusion and discrimination due to their race. Some of the women may have experienced tribalism and sexism, but not racism, and they had never considered that their race would present barriers and challenges in their settlement. They were therefore shocked by the overt and covert racism they experienced on the basis of their skin colour. The experience also marked a change in their status from majority to minority, as they were faced with a different kind of marginality based on their race. The participants (n = 12) who admitted overwhelmingly to the most profound sense of culture shock about racism and stereotyping were the ones who originally came from Anglophone countries and the others (n = 3) who have white/Anglo-Saxon spouses,
because they least anticipated such a challenge. They felt that they would be easily accepted because of their spouses’ race, linguistic capital and social status. Mangi remarks:

No matter who you are ... here you are nobody, nobody, just a poor black African woman and you have to work hard to re-invent yourself and be in control, otherwise you will just fit into their stereotype, the box they put all of us in” (Interview with Mangi, 8/06/09).

As the participants recounted incidences of verbal taunts, physical assaults, emotional abuse and denial of access to services due to racism, discrimination and stereotyping, there were feelings of marginalisation and exclusion; and a sense that their rights as equal citizens with other Australians were undermined. Paradoxically, Bridget Jones and Cheetah were able to handle the racism and discrimination they experienced in Australia better than the rest of the participants (n = 22), as they felt it was more covert compared to what they had left in the apartheid system in their original countries. For instance Bridget Jones comments:

It was fascinating to see how people were interested in our dark skin and fuzzy hair … nothing compared to the racism and segregation we suffered in [original country] … There is no way I could have married my husband … if I was still in Africa … the racism here, at least it’s not in your face kind of thing like [original country] where it was … government law [and] religiously policed (Interview with Bridget Jones, 9/07/09).

VicHealth reports that “amongst refugees and people from non-English backgrounds, almost two in every five persons have been verbally discriminated against on the basis of ethnicity … [and] the highest instances … occurred in educational and workplace settings” (2007, p. 11). Similar findings emerged in this study as the racism, discrimination, and stereotyping the participants suffered were mostly in educational and work contexts. Mercy talks about her feelings of racism, stereotyping and alienation as a student:
Getting admission into [discipline] was okay … but in class, the lecturers were always giving positive examples with Australia … any example with Africa was negative, all about war, malnourished kids, poverty … Sometimes I helped my white friends to do assignments but they got better marks than me … [and] it’s just because they [lecturers] don’t believe I am capable … In my final year, I did this assignment and submitted … [and] then he [lecturer] claimed I didn’t submit … After many complaint letters to the department, he gave me my grade. Then what happened? [Laughs sarcastically] the department never wrote to me to apologise, rather they wrote to the white woman, [the] complaint officer [name] who helped with my case. That one I found to be very racist and disrespectful! … because if this happened to a white student, I know it will be in NT News and the university will ask the lecturer to apologise to the student … but because I am African woman nobody bothered (Interview with Mercy, 5/06/09).

Mercy’s experience of racism and stereotyping illustrate the institutional racism that she faced as an African refugee woman accessing education. Mercy, like many of the participants, is incensed by the insensitivity and ethnocentrism of her lecturers’ negative portrayal of Africa during lectures as most of the examples given by them showed their stereotypes and prejudices about Africans. Mercy attributed her experience from the lecturer and the ambivalence of the university authorities to racism and negative stereotyping of Africans in general, and African women in particular. This finding concurs with a significant body of evidence that reveals educational institutions in Australia and other Western nations perpetuate systemic inequality based on race, gender, class, ethnicity and religion (Alfred, 2006; Bannerji, 1991; Dei, 1996; Matthews, 2008; Ng, 1994; Onsando, 2014). Elabor-Idemudia states that, “most Canadian educational administrators and decision makers are not even aware of the systemic bias inherent within their institutions, and even when they become aware, they frequently deny or downplay the pervasiveness of such a bias” (2001, p. 192).

Lacha, who arrived as a refugee migrant echoes the lived experiences of her 13 refugee counterparts in this study. She praises “the opportunities and the fresh start” that Australia offers refugees for resettlement. However, she finds it difficult to understand
the disdain and discrimination she encounters due to her African ancestry and refugee status:

Some people think African refugees are taking all the dole [welfare] money, houses and everything for Aboriginal people and try to make trouble for us … they don’t want to know that … we work hard for everything. Anytime the [illegal] boat comes with refugees, they think it’s our fault then they say painful things to us … it’s not fair because we Africans get all our papers before we step on the plane to come here … I’ve lived here now for more than 10 years, I become Australian citizen … still people see me as refugee … I work for my money, still anytime I go to shop for medicine, first thing they ask [are] you on pension? Just because they think I don’t work (laughs) … being refugee is stigma for us, because people all the time remind you of your background (Interview with Lacha, 22/06/09).

Lacha’s statement highlights the continued relegation, devaluing and stigmatisation of the lives of African refugees to a subordinated, minority status, on the assumption that they are a burden and drain on social service and welfare expenditures. All the refugee participants are economically self-supporting, and do not depend on the magnanimity of the welfare state. All of them attest that their initial labelling and stigmatisation as refugee migrants has become their social marking, invoking feelings of ambivalence as it undermines their rights as equal citizens, and challenges their sense of belonging and “being from here” (Mapedzahama & Kwansah-Aidoo, 2008. p. 1). Mangi eloquently makes the point:

I have lived here almost 20 years … but almost everyday people ask me ‘where do you come from? … Do you like it here?’ For heavens’ sake when are they going to accept that I am Aussie? … What do you say when you are constantly asked where you come from, if you like vegemite, beef or salad? … People are forever reminding me about how lucky I am to be here … [and] not caught up in the bloody civil war … but there’s been no war in my country … and the only reason is because I am black African (Interview with Mangi, 8/06/09).

The above statements illustrate the exclusionary nature of questions that the participants are confronted with regularly. They recognise that their ‘blackness’ attracts such questions and actions, hence, they are marked as the ‘other’ because of their black skin
and their initial migrant and refugee status. All the participants have gone through formal citizenship processes, but indicated that regardless of their legal citizenship, they will never be perceived as ‘Australians’, and will always be targeted, identified and treated as “perpetual foreigners … new to Australia” (Wu, 2002, p. 17) because their blackness prevents them crossing from being a ‘migrant’ or ‘refugee’ to being ‘African-Australian’. The different experiences recounted by the participants are not random acts, rather, they are regular encounters, and indicate the systemic processes of marginalising, excluding and ‘othering’ the participants. In such instances as illustrated in the participants’ stories, African women’s experiences of racism, discrimination and stereotyping makes them ‘outsider within’ excluding them from being Australian citizens. As migrants and refugees of ‘colour’ the participants will continue to negotiate their identity and status in Australia and inhabit what Anzaldua (2000) argues are “spaces in between and always in the process of negotiating the border crossing” from ‘Other’ to ‘Australian’ (cited in Creese & Kambere, 2003, p. 566).

Reflecting on racism, Carol who had completed her degree and was working in a management position, recalls a stereotypical and ethnocentric incident when she met a former co-worker from her student days when she worked as an administrative assistant. She says:

I also find that people just can’t go beyond the ‘black thing’ they just can’t help stereotyping – because we are all blacks and came here as refugees, they put us in a box where they believe we should be (laughs) … I worked as a receptionist when I was attending uni … Recently I met one of my former colleagues … and she asked me, ‘What are you doing after uni?’ And I said ‘I’m working with the government’. She quickly replied, ‘Oh as a receptionist?’ So I asked her, ‘Tell me, how many Australian white women you know, finish a [discipline] degree end up working for the government as receptionists?’ She turned red-faced trying to be all friendly and said, ‘oh, oh I’m sorry’ … and she was quick to wish me well (laughs). But it’s like that all the time … [they] think being a black African refugee means you have to be at the lower end of things and that you can never elevate yourself beyond what they
Carol and Mangi’s excerpts show that the stigma attached to African migrant and refugee women intersect with the construction of the position of migrant and refugee women as ‘unskilled and unhealthy others’ and subjects of multiple discriminations (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2008; Udo-Ekpo, 1999; VicHealth, 2007). They also highlight the participants’ recognition of, and resistance to, the stereotypical ideas and stigma attached to Black African migrant and refugee women.

The local property market was another area where the participants encountered racism and discrimination, as their circumstances were compounded by the NT’s perennial and chronic shortage of both public and private rental accommodation. Out of the 24 participants, 11 own their house, and 13 reside in rental properties, but almost all had stories about discrimination in the rental market. Some of the participants who currently own their properties indicated that they worked hard and saved money to buy their properties because of the entrenched racism and discrimination they experienced in the
rental market. They talked about numerous instances where they had been denied rental to houses, supposedly taken, and afterwards seeing them empty or advertised. On some occasions, rental prices were increased in the middle of leases and at other times they were asked to leave before the end of their lease. Other instances of discrimination included being denied rental accommodation due to large family size, and real estate agents and landlords failing to maintain houses. Some participants who rented directly from property owners talked about being cheated on their bond money because they were never given receipts for rental payments. Sally describes how her family was asked to vacate their private rental property because she had requested a rental receipt:

We were renting directly from the landlord … we asked for receipt … and he promised to put it in the [mail] box but didn’t … The other tenants had rental books [so] I confronted him and he said to me, ‘what [do] you need receipt for? You get receipt for rent in Africa?’ And I told him, ‘but this is not Africa, this is Australia!’ … He gave us all the receipts but told my husband he won’t renew our lease because I was rude … This is sheer racism and discrimination, because he thinks … we don’t know our rights (Interview with Sally, 5/06/09).

Other studies have found that migrant and refugees’ negative experiences in the housing market are due to their lack of rental history and knowledge regarding tenancy issues, discrimination from landlords and real estate agents, large families and the inflated real estate market (Atem & Wilson, 2008; Beer & Foley, 2003; Forrest, Hermes, Johnston & Poulsen, 2012).

Confirming previous studies on migrants and refugees, all the participants in this study, as visibly different, experienced widespread racism, discrimination and stereotyping in relation to education, employment, housing and access to social services as a result of the intersection of race, gender, ethnicity, class, migration status, language and linguistic ability (Abu-Duhou, 2006; Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2007; Creese, 2011; Das-Gupta,
As illustrated in their stories, these dynamics played out in different contexts of their daily lives.

4.3.2.6 Unemployment, underemployment, non-recognition of foreign credentials

The economic integration of migrants and refugees into their host societies through employment is central to successful settlement, as employment is significant for all types of inclusion (DIMIA, 2003; Kyle, Macdonald, Doughney & Pyke, 2004). In comparison to most OECD and other developed countries, Australia has continuously enjoyed economic prosperity with low unemployment rates and shortages of both skilled and unskilled labour (OECD, 2005). However, migrants and refugees continue to experience unemployment, underemployment and lower earnings levels (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2007; Liebig, 2007; Richardson & Lester, 2004).

The participants revealed a range of barriers obstructing labour market integration processes and contributing to their unemployment and underemployment. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, all wanted to be part of the workforce as they felt it was an opportunity to earn their living and make a contribution to their host community. They had also come from countries where there were no government social security welfare systems and were not familiar with the ‘welfare state’ ideology in Australia, and could not mentally adjust to receiving money they did not work for. Acceptance of government financial assistance compounded the initial shock and frustration of being associated with unemployment. Even though the majority of the participants indicated that they welcomed the initial financial reprieve the social security income gave them on arrival, they equally expressed a sense of shame and indignity over receiving ‘unemployment money’. They did not see it as a government assistance scheme, but
rather as a ‘handout’ that could eventually incapacitate and make them dependent on the
system, hence a drain on the public purse. Furthermore, all the participants had come
from patriarchal societies, and having their own jobs was more than making money – it
was also a way of increasing their bargaining power and control in the family. To
illustrate these issues, May explains:

I am happy for the money Centrelink gave me and my family, when we got here …
but I didn’t want to stay getting that money because nothing like that in [original
country] … [and] I wanted to work for my own money … I didn’t want them
controlling my life … because I am getting their money … no respect for that!
(Interview with May, 10/06/09).

Apart from the indignity that all the participants associated with ‘unemployment
money’, many of the refugee participants wanted to earn their own money so that they
could financially support their family and community members who remained in refugee
camps. Jomey explains:

I was [the] only woman for my whole family get chance to come for settlement ...
All my people in camp … they struggle for life. I needed work … [because] really I
needed money to help my family (Interview with Jomey, 29/06/09).

The process through which foreign credentials are discriminated against in favour of
local qualifications is aptly captured in Kalumburu’s comments on issues of retraining.
Kalumburu, a highly skilled professional who had enjoyed high-level positions in both
developing and developed countries, was recruited as a skilled migrant lecturer in
TAFE. On arrival she was required to study for Certificate IV in Workplace Training
whilst working full-time in her position. She also had to repeat some units in her
foreign-earned degree to give her credibility to deliver and assess them as part of the
TAFE program. Kalumburu had to pay the fees for her studies and complete them within
a year. Kalumburu later found out that she was not treated on equal terms as her
Australian colleagues. She eloquently explains the complexity of her situation:
I was employed as a skilled migrant based on my qualifications … I couldn’t believe my ears when I got here and they [employer] asked me to do Cert. IV and two of the modules that I was actually going to deliver within a year whilst working full-time! I felt like asking them but you employed and brought me here because I satisfied your criteria … I didn’t mind doing the Cert. IV because … I am not a trained teacher … but the course modules, I felt cheated! … I mean to re-train in something that I can teach with my eyes closed, and pay from my pocket … I must say I had thoroughly enjoyed my work [pre-migration profession] which included training and mentoring new … employees … so when I got here and I was asked to retrain … I had to redefine myself as none of my Australian colleagues had half of my qualifications … I am a determined person, [and] I love challenges … yeah but sometimes there was a feeling of confusion and vulnerability about this whole process of retraining [Interview with Kalumburu, 5/07/09).

As a trained lawyer, Therese decided that it would be better to accept a position in human services instead of studying to meet the requirements of the local professional bodies to practice law.

I didn’t expect to walk into my profession here … [but] with all the things they [legal fraternity] were asking me to do … I just felt at my age, forget it! … Luckily, I got this job whilst working as a volunteer … [and] I am using my passion for human rights, social justice [and] advocating for refugees and migrants … I regularly update my knowledge … [but] not sure if I will go back to practice [law] (Interview with Therese, 12/05/09).

Therese’s view indicates a pragmatic acceptance that this is the best she can do in the labour market. As she had earlier expressed that her migration was motivated by her children’s well-being, her hopes for higher status and well-paid jobs could be placed on her children. Kalumburu and Therese’s responses in the above quotes confirm what several authors (Creese & Wiebe, 2009; Guo, 2011; Iredale & Nivison-Smith, 1995; Krahn, Derwing, Mulder & Wilkinsion, 2000; Liversage, 2009; Mojab, 1999) refer to as human capital for economic development. These authors argue that skilled migrants are recruited for their technical and professional knowledge, but when they arrive in the host countries, their credentialed knowledge does not carry the same value as it did prior to migration. They are compelled to engage in additional education for acceptance into their respective trades and professions. As illustrated in the excerpts, the recognition of
knowledge in the global knowledge economy is significant, but developed countries use their standards to discount knowledge and skills gained in developing countries. Credentialism is a way of monitoring entrance to key positions in the labour market, and can be debilitating for educated and highly skilled migrants from developing countries as their knowledge and skills acquired in their original countries are systematically devalued and socially constructed as inadequate (Iredale, 2005; Sorensen, 1995).

The legacy of colonialism is also evident in recognition of qualifications from institutions in Britain and its white settler colonies – Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the US – whilst discounting the credentials from former Third World colonised countries. Australia has a national system of recognition of overseas academic and occupational qualifications, but this has been criticised for “its Anglo-centric bias … to the detriment of those not trained in a system developed from the British model” (Hannah, 1999, p. 158). Hannah adds that, “consequently, large numbers of migrants and refugees arriving in Australia cannot practise their skill or profession, or have their qualifications recognised without further study” (p. 158). Discounting foreign credentials is a major problem for migrants and refugees in Australia and the discriminatory nature of recognising overseas gained qualifications was evidenced in this study with only one of the four skilled migrant participants (Cheetah) employed directly in her pre-migration profession without re-training. Cheetah credits her ability to ‘walk into’ her teaching profession to her training in her original country being linked to Oxford University in England, and her postgraduate work in Europe. She explains:

I completed my degree in [original country] … At the time of my education, my uni had a relationship with Oxford, and I guess because my country [original country] and Australia were Commonwealth countries, the education system was not much different … so I didn’t have to re-train … I was employed straightaway and I guess
all because they had British kind of training here (Interview with Cheetah, 17/06/09).

Barbara on the other hand, had qualified as a registered nurse in her country and had almost 20 years work experience. She initially arrived here as an international student and was eligible to work 20 hours a week whilst studying. Barbara did not get paid work as a nurse while studying because:

People were telling me all the time, you have to have Australian papers and experience … I didn’t get paid work as nurse … but funny they allowed me for voluntary work … lucky for me when I finished my studies … I got a job as nurse (Interview with Barbara, 8/06/09).

As Salaff and Greve (2006) demonstrated in their study of Chinese immigrant women in Canada, foreign degrees are not considered adequate without having been subjected to established evaluation standards. Inadvertently, the process of getting overseas qualifications recognised in Australia is complex, lengthy and costly (Iredale, 2005). Therefore many migrants and refugees give up on the process of skills recognition and either re-educate themselves or work in areas outside of their trade and profession as illustrated by Mangi. She had trained and worked as a middle manager before migration, but decided to change and pursue a different career in health promotion because:

I realised that all my qualifications and experience didn’t mean much … I went for many interviews and if they don’t tell me … you need this, you need that, it will be other excuses … I thought I don’t want to waste my time going for another training … when there is no guarantee I would get a good job in management … so when I got the opportunity to work in the health area, ehmm that was it, I stayed … [and] I did some more studies (Interview with Mangi, 8/06/09).

The majority of participants had similar stories, where they were challenged with the significant issues of the lack of local work experience and the related inability to provide Australian references. They viewed these issues as an excuse to exclude them from the workforce and relegate them to lower positions. For the participants who were highly
skilled and proficient in English, the most critical barrier faced in their search for jobs was reference to their foreign credentials and demands for Australian work experience. They were either classified as ‘under-qualified’, ‘over-qualified’ or ‘lacked Australian experience’. Many ended up in ‘bottom end jobs’ such as cleaning, and situations referred to as “well educated, low-priced labour” (Momsen, 1999, p. 10) for substantial periods, mainly because their educational qualifications and work experience were viewed as substandard to Australian qualifications.

The structural inequalities in the labour market impacted on the majority of the participants, and many of them re-trained and changed professions into marketable careers in the community services and health industry. For example, Kiden was told that she had to go to TAFE and do an apprenticeship before she could be employed as a hairdresser. It took her almost a year to get an employer to take her on as an apprentice, and during that waiting period she worked as a farm hand on a banana plantation. She explains her circumstance:

I wanted to go back for my hairdressing but they said I have to do apprentice through TAFE ... It was difficult to get salon for apprentice [so] I worked for banana farm till I got this woman to sign me for apprentice … I finished apprentice but I realised it is not good for me to do well … [because] I will always be like ‘floor girl’ and small money, that’s reason I started new training for aged care and work for nursing home (Interview with Kiden, 13/05/09).

Esperance completed a law degree and had about three years’ practice before migrating to Darwin. On arrival, her law degree was assessed and she was required to complete some undergraduate law units to practise as a lawyer in Australia within a two-year timeframe. She is very keen to complete the studies, but she is caught up between her family commitments as a wife, mother of two young children and full time worker. She indicates:
It’s difficult for me doing study, looking after family, working full-time … I wanted to be lawyer to help my people but if I can’t make it for the two years … I will consider different career for social work … not strong like lawyer but what can I do (Interview with Esperance, 8/06/09).

Esperance’s dilemma represents the majority of the participants who were prepared to retrain when their credentials and experiences are devalued. However, since these women bear much of their family responsibilities, the demands on them as caregivers, workers and students can translate into a ‘triple day syndrome’. They carry out all these responsibilities simultaneously to invest further in their human, cultural and social capital (Mapehadzama, 2007). The underemployment of migrant and refugee women is not unique to this study, as other studies have shown that migrant and refugee women from developing countries particularly, Africa often have higher levels of education and yet are over-represented in lower status jobs (Creese & Wiebe, 2009; Ho & Alcorso, 2004; Tastsoglou & Miedema, 2000; Webb, Beale & Faine, 2013).

Fatuma initially had very limited language skills, but was determined to join the labour force. It was difficult initially but once she gained some functional English she decided to look for a job and talks about her negative experience in this way:

I wanted to do any work … but they won’t give me because [of] no English … after I learned small English I started cleaning and looking for more work … We were five African girls [women], we wanted work experience … We got job for that employment place [name], but they cheated me, really cheated me! … They send us to hospital for cleaning. We work many long hours because we didn’t know for this place, you get time for ‘smoko’, time for lunch … they didn’t give us nothing [and] they didn’t tell us that one! … Then they didn’t pay us for all the money after six weeks because they tell us the work for first two weeks … is work experience. That time I was really angry but I didn’t know anything and [had] little English … my friend was telling me they do bad things to us because we are African women … if that one happened to me now, I will take them to Tribunal because I’ve learned work rules for Australia … I joined the union too (laughs) (Interview with Fatuma, 19/06/09).
Fatuma’s experience illustrates that the issues of unemployment, underemployment and employer exploitation are related to racism, discrimination, limited English skills and unfamiliarity with Australian workplace culture and ethics. At the time of the above incident, all these factors inhibited Fatuma’s ability and confidence to challenge the employment agency over exploitive employment conditions. Victorian Immigrant and Refugee Women’s Coalition identified employment agencies as treating migrant and refugee women “as a flexible and inexpensive source of labour” because “experiences of financial stress led many women from migrant and refugee backgrounds to assume employment in extremely poor conditions” (2007, pp. 2-3). Syed and Ali’s study of working women in Australia also reveals, “English language deficiency serves as a major barrier to minority ethnic women’s participation and equal opportunity in employment” (2005, p. 48). They add that, “due to … ‘inadequate’ accent and lack of traditional support networks, they end up underemployed … or in ‘the 3Ds of employment’, that is dirty, dangerous and difficult jobs” (p. 50). These findings reinforce Fatuma and the other five African women’s negative experience with the employment agency. Even though Alcorso (1995) raised the issue of extreme exploitation of migrant women working in ‘occupational ghettos’ in the clothing industry because of English language difficulties in the mid-nineties, their circumstances clearly have not improved much over the years, as the participants in this study talked about similar repressive experiences. As highlighted in the case of Fatuma and other African women, “they are often forced to work until they are chronically injured” (Syed & Ali, 2005, p. 51).
Apart from the number of structural barriers to employment, the participants also identified overt and covert discrimination that were attributed to racism and individual prejudices in the labour force. The following examples illustrate the participants’ perception and experience. Erica arrived in Australia at the age of five and speaks English like an Anglo-Australian. She won a position for a customer service job but ended up stacking coffee in the machines, cleaning and washing dishes in the kitchen. She explains her situation:

I remember my first job in the coffee shop with my two [white] friends … They showed us what to do at the front counter serving customers, but I ended up just cleaning and stacking coffee … later I realised maybe I will push their customers away because I am Sudanese, even though I grew up here and speak like them … so I quit … I know it’s discrimination, it’s racist but for me, I just moved on … that’s why I’m bent on my education, yeah to have more options [and] not get stuck with these sorts of racist people [employers] (Interview with Erica, 14/05/09).

Jomey talks about her experience, which illustrates the way being a Black African refugee woman is often a triple disadvantage in the labour market:

The time I was studying English … all my mates are Asian women … and we looked for jobs together, but all the time they get the job, not me … [the] only time I got job, my friend talked to the woman for me … that time I know because I’m black African refugee, maybe they think I can’t do cleaning (Interview with Jomey, 29/06/09).

As Erica argued above, there was no justification for limiting her job options by putting her permanently in the kitchen when her two white friends were rostered for different tasks, including customer service at the front desk. She is convinced that she was not given the same opportunity because she is a black woman, and that her presence at the front desk might affect the business. Erica’s argument concurs with Das-Gupta (1996) and Vallas’ (2003) observations in Canada and the US respectively, where differential tasks among co-workers employed to do the same job was a common form of discrimination for black migrants. Both studies observed the ‘colour line’ existing in
most companies employing black workers for jobs in the back, and white workers for jobs at the front counter as a common practice. It is also consistent with emerging studies in Australia (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2007; Ho & Alcorso, 2004; Udo-Ekpo, 1999) where ‘visibly different’ migrants are offered lower level jobs and treated with disdain and rudeness.

In the case of Jomey being stereotyped as an African refugee woman who could not carry out cleaning tasks, Colic-Peisker notes that employers tend to use cultural backgrounds to stereotype ethnic groups and that “refugees are perceived as the lowest class of immigrants … unfavourably stereotyped [as] is currently the case … with Africans” (2005, p. 6). This finding is also substantiated by Taylor’s conclusion that “refugees [and migrants] have higher unemployment, lower earnings and occupational attainment … Lack of English, lack of required skills and non-transferability of qualifications and racism all create barriers to employment” (2004, p. 7).

It is clear from the findings that the non-recognition of the participants’ pre-migration educational qualifications, professional credentials and work experience, resulted in underemployment and deskillling of the participants, and subjected them to “the multiple processes that reproduce immigrant workers in the lower echelons of a gendered and racialized labour market” (Creese, 2005, p. 3). The findings also demonstrate that the Australian workforce is highly segmented and racialised, with strong links between people’s birthplace, gender and the types of jobs they get. In their analysis of migrants and labour force segmentation, Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2006) infer that segmentation implies job opportunities are based not just on one’s work ability, qualifications and productivity, but also on non-economic ascriptive criteria that pertain to ideologies of
gender, race and ethnicity. They further argue that labour markets are structured in such a way that women, migrants and racial minorities are at a disadvantage.

Despite the opportunities that migration provides for women, these are not evenly distributed, especially with regard to employment for black African women. In their study of black migrant women in Canada, Boyd and Pikkov conclude, “a very real potential for these immigrant women is to be ‘triply disadvantaged’ in the labour market by virtue of being female, foreign-born and phenotypically non-white” (2005, p. 6). The participants’ experiences demonstrate that multiple and mutually reinforcing barriers present systemic impediments to their labour market participation. These include non-recognition of foreign credentials as a major structural barrier, as well as discrimination based on soft skills such as appearance, cultural and ethnic differences, and accents. It is worth noting that the results in this study contradict Adhikari’s findings that there are “no separate labour market segments for NESB immigrants” (1999, p. 203), and rather support prior studies which argue that NESB migrants and refugees’ high foreign educational attainments do not yield high occupational achievements, and that discrimination pushes them to the bottom rungs of a segmented labour market (Boyd & Pikkov, 2005; Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2006, 2007; Creese & Wiebe, 2009; Ho & Alcorso, 2004; Iredale & Nivison-Smith, 1995; Udo-Ekpo, 1999).

The barriers and challenges that the participants shared are complex and fractured. They indicate the social constructions of black, racialised and gender identities based on structural and systemic issues, with racism intertwined with gender, ethnicity and immigration status. These issues permeate various institutions in Australian society including immigration, settlement and integration policies, educational systems, labour
and property markets, and everyday life, creating barriers and challenges for migrants and refugees identified as the ‘other’. As the findings have shown, a combination of sociocultural issues, loss of social networks, English language, racial discrimination, underemployment, unemployment and non-recognition of foreign qualifications are the greatest challenges for the participants in this study.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the findings about the participants’ motivations for migration, as well as the opportunities, barriers and challenges encountered during settlement. The varied reasons for migration suggest that the substantial differences in the socioeconomic opportunities between Australia and their departing countries provided a strong ‘pull’ factor, while civil wars, political instability and natural disasters were ‘push’ factors. Similar to other migration from developing countries to developed countries, the participants’ migration was motivated by the “gap between life aspirations and expectations, and the means to fulfil them in the country of origin” (Portes & Rumbaut, 1996, p. 12).

Migration increased both opportunities and challenges for the participants as migrating from developing African countries to a developed country, such as Australia, provided them with numerous options for advancement in their personal and professional lives. Conversely, migration generated enormous challenges in adjusting to the distinctive differences between their sociocultural values and that of Australia. Migration therefore placed the participants in a transition from “a familiar predictable past toward an alien, unknown future, where all certainties are questioned, including their [migrants] own
roles and status, identities and relationships” (Krufeld & Camino, 1994, p. ix); as the existing sociocultural contexts conditioned the opportunities for their resources to succeed or fail. These placed limits on their individual ability and agency to access and advance their opportunities. The participants’ transformative capacities were challenged and it was imperative for them to “have knowledge of societal institutions and the consequences of their actions” (Giddens, cited in Lamba, 2003, p. 60). The majority of the participants accepted their conditions as the natural sacrifice of women for their family’s progress, and believed that life in Australia would bring about improvement for themselves and their families. They were prepared to acquire different kinds of knowledge and skills to facilitate their understanding and integration into their host community. Consistent with Ogbu’s (1990) categorisation, these migrants are ‘voluntary minorities’ who find ways to face their challenges and actively engage in the new community.

The next chapter will present the strategies, mechanisms and factors that made it possible for the participants to build their individual and community capacity, and participate productively in their host society.
Chapter 5: Strategies for overcoming barriers and challenges: Adult education and learning, and coping factors and mechanisms

I got to [city in Australia] … I see that many things [are] different … for me to feel good, feel confident for myself [and] become good woman, I said to [ex-husband] I need more English, [and] I need more education. I am refugee for my own country because of war [and] I can’t change what happened to me but now for me I have to learn to be better woman for this place, [and] survive here because we can’t go back to Sudan … that’s reason I want to learn all the time (Interview with Kiden, 13/05/09).

Chapter 4 explored the opportunities, barriers and challenges that the participants encountered during settlement. The participants’ excerpts showed that although the majority were highly skilled and experienced in their home countries before migration, they found great difficulties in their host society due to sociocultural differences between their original and new country. Compounded by their race, gender, ethnicity and migration status, they realised that they could no longer depend on cultural cues and linguistic skills that had served them well prior to migration to survive in their new environment. Therefore, they had to unlearn some of their assumptions and engage in lots of re-learning to gain new knowledge and skills; and build the capacity to interpret and understand new ideas and events so that they could participate effectively in their host society. Holt asserts that, “immigrant women’s cultural experiences and worldview are different from their counterparts in their new community therefore … the rate at which they are able to learn the specific rules of the game … ultimately determines their success” (2008, p. 233). Holt’s assertion is affirmed by Kiden’s opening quote in this
chapter, which represents the majority of the participants’ determination to develop learning strategies amidst the opportunities and overwhelming challenges discussed in the previous chapter to navigate the complex challenges and survive in the new environment.

This chapter examines the strategies, factors and mechanisms that the participants utilised to gain the knowledge, skills, power and resources required to confront and overcome the challenges that they faced, and access opportunities. These are discussed in three main parts. The first section discusses the participants’ motivations in developing strategies and techniques. The second section addresses the strategies that the participants employed. The third concentrates on the factors and mechanisms that facilitated learning techniques that were used to promote opportunities. Hence, Chapter 5 addresses the following research question:

*Why and how do African-Australian women utilise adult education opportunities to build their capacity?*

First, the chapter explores what motivated the participants to engage in the different educational experiences in formal, non-formal and informal learning settings. Examining the participants’ motivations is useful, because most studies on migrant and refugee women do not analyse the issues leading these women to take part in adult education activities. However, this is a worthwhile gap to examine, because motivation provides the rationale for their level of engagement, educational attainment and success in the application of knowledge and skills gained in their everyday lives in the NT. Furthermore, considering the feminist perspectives of this study, an examination of the participants’ motivations will highlight their perceptions of adult education and learning.
and how they led to participation in education and learning activities in circumstances that differed from their originating country.

5.1 Motives for engagement in education and learning activities

Motivations are the factors that influence people’s drive, persistence, tenacity, optimism and determination towards certain behaviours (Coker, 2003; Maslow, 1970). Migrants and refugees often perceive education as the key to successful settlement and inclusion in the host community (Gebre, 2008; Hannah, 2008). The participants in this study reported that they needed local education and learning experiences “to survive” in their new society. The findings from this study amply demonstrate the participants’ determination and drive for self-development as a means of social and economic upward mobility which could contribute to their family and new community’s development. Despite their varied personal motives for engagement in education and learning activities, the participants’ motivations are interconnected because they are triggered by the urgency to gain the required knowledge and skills to enable them to participate effectively in their host society. The motivations mentioned by the respondents included employment, social and economic mobility; cultural understanding; high societal and family values in education; family development and role modelling; community development; and opportunity – easy access, conducive environment and convenience. None of these motivations were mentioned independently by the participants, as they were all addressed repeatedly in combination with other reasons.
5.1.1 Moving to a new place: Education for cross-cultural understanding

For all the participants, learning about the dominant Australian culture was important as they realised that moving from collective cultures into an individualistic culture required learning to understand the dominant Eurocentric culture. They needed the necessary skills and knowledge to navigate the everyday norms, rules and practices in the new environment. Even though 10 of the participants came from former British colonies, and some of the other 14 participants had lived and worked in Anglophone countries, they strongly expressed the importance of going through some form of education for their smooth cultural transition. As Jomey bluntly puts it:

How can I understand for this place, if I don’t go for their school? All my life, I lived in Sudan till the war took my family to Kenya, then from Kenya to Australia and everything here is different [so] I have to learn again … to understand the things here and make life good (Interview with Jomey, 29/06/09).

Romana aptly explains that the dissimilarities between African and Australian “family orientation, cultural, economic, educational, political structures, language” (Interview with Romana, 6/01/10) contributed to difficulties, frustrations and confusion, and believed that African migrants and refugees required local education for cultural understanding leading to a productive and coherent lifestyle in their host community.

Whilst Kiden agrees with all the other participants that she needed education to interact in the new environment, she had other reasons for using education – to enhance her skills for involvement in the multicultural discourse and promote African culture as part of the Australian cultural mosaic. She explains:

They say Australia is multicultural [and] everybody comes here with [their] culture … For us Africans we haven’t been here long, and it’s good we get exposed to [mainstream] Aussie culture. But how can we talk about our own culture, share our message if we don’t have education, [and] if we don’t know how to say things
about our culture? Many Australians, don’t know about our culture, we have to show them … I learn all the time [so] I can understand the people here … then I can put my African culture for them [so] they can understand and respect us too (laughs) (Interview with Kiden, 13/05/09).

In this study, many of the participants expressed similar sentiments of their sense of belonging in their African culture and the determination to participate in local educational activities to understand, appreciate and promote their cultural heritage in their host community. Kiden also reflects what Collins (2000) noted that many Black American women engaged in education to sharpen their skills to uplift their minority and subjugated race and culture within the American population.

5.1.2 Employment, social and economic mobility

As revealed in Chapter 4, all participants migrated with the aim of improving their family’s well-being. Many were highly skilled prior to their migration, but as a result of the non-recognition of their foreign credentials, they experienced underemployment and were involved in casual work. Similar to the participants in Alfred’s study, the respondents in this study were motivated to undertake “more education to enhance their opportunity for more sustainable employment” (2006, p. 109), because their participation in the labour market also “increases both economic and social integration and … offers the opportunity to gain self-esteem, to facilitate new social contacts and to learn or improve English language skills” (Bloch, cited in Mestan, 2008, p. 4). The participants stressed that they enrolled in formal education programs, and engaged in non-formal and informal learning activities because they perceived education as a valuable tool in helping them gain the skills and knowledge required for the Australian workforce. They also recognised the usefulness of Australian education as the main
pathway to employment, upward social and economic mobility and effective integration into their host community. Fatuma explains her motives below:

For me to get good job as nurse, I needed English - proper strong English to do nurse work and get good money [because] I want to get good life for [my] kids as they suffer too much for war … That’s reason I am serious for my study all the time (Interview with Fatuma, 19/06/09).

Carol inferred in her response that she was motivated in her educational pursuit by the need to get out of the negative societal perception of black African women and the stigma attached to being a refugee. Her excerpt below also addresses social and economic mobility from sociocultural and familial perspectives:

I noticed the racism and discrimination with being a black woman [and] the stigma for refugees. I said to myself the only way is education. If you want to be successful in this system, get a good job, good salary and move beyond that image, then I have to study … do it for myself, my family [and] have good lifestyle choices … yeah raise the image of African women [and] prove that we are capable (Interview with Carol, 6/06/09).

The above excerpts are representative of most of the respondents’ positions; they were motivated to engage in education because they believed that education could help them to escape their socioeconomic disadvantage as newcomers in an established system that excluded them in many aspects of their lives. This finding is consistent with prior studies (Bariso, 2008; Hannah, 2008; Pacheco, 2011; Webb et al., 2013; Withnall, 2006) where participants viewed education as the primary means through which they could gain employment and improve their lives in the host country. This echoes the recent study by DIAC (2011a) that a strong predictor of migrants and refugees’ advancement in the labour market in Australia is their educational qualifications.
5.1.3 High societal and family values in education

The participants belong to societies and families that value education, and these societal perceptions and values in education greatly influenced their decisions to engage in further education and learning. They talked at length about how education is valued in their extended families and their original societies. Each of the participants’ narratives revealed a strong current of deep belief in education as an important facilitator to achieve their life goals. Lacha aptly summed up the importance of education when she explains the source of her motivation, passion, belief and values:

> For my place in South Sudan, we say, ‘education is my mother and my father’, this one tells everybody that we value education [and] we take education seriously, because you’re nothing for my place without education. Education is very important to make you wise and strong for life. That’s reason we push for education (Interview with Lacha, 22/06/09).

Kalumburu echoes Lacha with her own society and family’s values:

> In my country, education is the uppermost thing on everybody’s mind … And for me and my siblings, my parents expected each of us to go to uni … (laughs) and I felt obliged to do that! ... My father always used to say ‘education is the best investment you can give to your kids, because nobody can take it away’ … my value for education definitely made life a bit easier for me in my educational pursuits here - the time I was working full time with my two kids and had to complete that [qualification] in a year, it was tough but I didn’t give up because of my upbringing (Interview with Kalumburu, 5/07/09).

Similarly, Erica who migrated as a child, points out that her values and strong motivation to pursue education is a belief which was transmitted to her by the African women who supported her family during the early years of their settlement. She describes the prestige and the feelings of achievement and success these African women associate with education. To emphasise her point about how strongly she feels about education, Erica mentions educated African-Australians who have made tremendous contributions in the community as a result of their education:
When my family arrived in [first resettlement city], all the African women helping us were telling me about education [and] they showed me what education can do for us Africans because they were saying this aunty she has this education, now she has good job, she has a house [and] people respect her ... Even here [Alice Springs] I have seen with our people [African professionals], because they have good education, they’ve got good jobs, beautiful houses, good life [and] they are well respected by our people [and] white people [too] (Interview with Erica, 14/05/09).

The foregoing assertions support studies that family values and obligations can become an important source of motivation and psychological well-being for migrants and their children (Fuligni, 2001; Zhou & Kim, 2006). Strawn (2005) found that people living in communities where education is valued and viewed as a means of advancement have the propensity to value education and equally participate in both formal and non-formal learning programs. This finding is also consistent with Gebre’s study of African adult immigrant students in the US, where he notes that:

African immigrants [may] come with many disadvantages such as low English proficiency [but] they often bring with them their value system and their customs, which place very high value on education and encourage family members to participate and persist in higher education … They do not take educational opportunities for granted (2008, pp.19-20).

DIAC’s (2011a) study substantiates that migrants from NESB value opportunities in education for themselves and their children, evidenced by most NESB migrant and refugee students excelling in the Year 12 examinations in all the states and territories throughout Australia (cited in Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) 7:00 pm Darwin, NT News, 28/04/11).

5.1.4 Family development and role modelling

As African women, the participants’ traditional family role responsibilities as keepers of their culture and primary caregivers meant that their development manifests on a personal level, but also impacts family members, particularly children (Dove, 1998). The
married participants (n = 15) indicated that even though they were not sole breadwinners, their education would lead to financial stability that will enable them to contribute and support their husband’s income and their extended families’ upkeep. On the other hand, the participants (n = 9) who were heads of their households and sole breadwinners in both their nuclear and extended families engaged in education and learning activities from familial and cultural perspectives, with the hope that their accomplishments would benefit their family members intellectually and financially. As revealed in most of the participants’ narratives, Vilma noted that some African women were alienated from their husbands and children because they could not keep up with their children’s acculturation in a permissive society. The majority of participants wanted skills to maintain a cordial and mature relationship with their children and prevent being alienated from them. Being primary caregivers, the participants felt they required education for social interaction in a wide variety of situations, such as dealing with their children’s education and healthcare issues. Apart from the sociocultural responsibilities the respondents wanted to keep up with their children’s academic advancement, particularly in the area of information and computer technology. Vilma wanted computer literacy to be able to guide and monitor her children’s activities on the internet, as illustrated by her quote below:

Apart from studying to get good job [and] … put food for my children I want them to look up to me [and] know education is important … Uhmm I don’t want them to grow up [and] think I am stupid [because] that is happening for many African women. Their children don’t respect them because they don’t understand what the children are doing … I didn’t know anything about computer but I had to study for myself and my children. I wanted to know computer so I can check what they do [and] advise them [and] not be stranger for my kids (Interview with Vilma, 8/07/09).
Other participants including Carol, whose mothers are semi-literate, felt obliged as the oldest children in their families to aim higher in education and set good examples for their younger siblings. Carol describes her motivation:

I am the oldest and … I feel obliged and responsible for my siblings, and mum in different ways and need to be educated. I have to get things right myself to be able to guide them because mum is not very educated (Interview with Carol, 6/06/09).

Conversely, some of the participants, including May, were encouraged in their educational pursuit by other educated and successful women role models:

Education is good for everybody but education is 100 percent good for women especially the situation we [African women] find ourselves here … The first African woman president for Liberia is doing well. She can talk for big [important] people and get money for Liberia after the men [Heads of State] caused all the war … See Obama’s wife, Michelle, she stood strong behind her husband to win elections! Even here in Darwin, the Indigenous woman for Parliament, yeah Marian [Marion Scrymgour], she is strong for education [and] that is reason she is not scared to speak her mind …. [A] woman with education is strong [and] I really like Condoleezza [Rice], Oprah [Winfrey] and [Australia] Governor General [Quentin Bryce] - powerful women [and] they all get good education. They’ve got good sense, they help people [and] do many good things for [their] community … they really encourage me for education (Interview with May, 10/06/09).

A number of studies highlight that the lack of women role models is a major barrier to women’s participation in education (Fox, 1999; Pessate-Schubert, 2003). Educated women are therefore important role models in their communities, because they demonstrate that it is possible to make civic contributions through education, and provide “visibility for female competence in society at large” (UNESCO, 1999, p. 12).

There is a profound belief amongst migrant and refugee families, particularly Africans, that each generation should do better educationally and economically than the previous generation (Berger, 2004a; DIAC, 2011a). Several studies argue that African diasporan women are often the primary breadwinners and role models in their families and are socialised to the nurturing and welfare of their families and communities (Alfred, 2003;
Arthur, 2009; Donkor, 2000; Osirim, 2008). For women such as the participants in this study the decision to participate in education “remains a principal goal for achieving wellbeing … [and] identity” (Nanton, 2005, p. 221) for themselves, and their families.

5.1.5 Community development

The participants had a strong sense of ethnic identity, purpose and direction, which gave them enhanced meaning to their personal educational journeys, to further their community’s development. Many had undergone early socialisation processes that underscored kinship and community. They believed in the African proverb, “I am who I am today, because of you, and you are who you are today, because of me” (Interview with Mangi, 8/06/09). Hence, they viewed themselves in relation to the people from their ethnic communities as well as mainstream Australian society. They were aware of the racism, sexism, discrimination and negative press given to African migrants and refugees; hence their motivation was toward achievement in education to promote a positive image for Africans and social cohesion between Africans and wider Australians.

Sheba shares her motivation for education that would enable her support young women in her ethnic Sudanese community to overcome racism, sexism and exploitation:

Many Sudanese girls want to be [professional] models but they have no idea how to go about things … their managers, don’t help because they give them false hopes and exploit them. It’s sad listening to these girls, they are confused [and] frustrated, that’s why I can’t stop … I have to know more about all these business stuff - legal and compliance issues …[and] advocate for them [because] they look up to me like ‘big sister’. But I can’t help if I don’t understand the issues [and] don’t have the knowledge, [and] the right connections (Interview with Sheba, 15/08/09).

Florence acknowledges:

Women are [the] backbone of everything that happen in our family, community [and] if we understand the system … then we can help our people … We will form a very good bridge between our families, our communities and other people here in Darwin (Interview with Florence, 18/06/09).
The participants’ quotes highlight their view of education as cultural and social capital which will enable them to contribute productively within their ethnic community, and the wider community’s development. As mentioned earlier, all the refugee participants cited the urge to reciprocate the Australian Government’s generosity for resettlement as part of their reasons for education and learning that will equip them with the appropriate skills to effectively contribute to NT’s development. This finding confirms the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL, 2009) report that adults are influential models in their family and community therefore fostering adult learning can contribute to social capital and cohesion.

5.1.6 Easy access, conducive environment and convenience
The participants originally come from countries where civil wars, political instability, limited access to education and training facilities, and other structural factors prevented them from pursuing their educational aspirations. Therefore, seizing the educational opportunities in the NT became a significant consideration in their rationale to engage in education and learning activities. For example, Mercy had completed high school however her tertiary education aspirations were disrupted by protracted civil war in her original country. She also faced limited educational opportunities for women in her country of refuge. Mercy states, “Migration to Darwin gave me very good opportunities and options which really pushed me to do my university education” (Interview with Mercy, 5/06/09). Similar to Mercy, many of the participants found easy access to formal education and the flexible study options, including on and off campus, and full-time and part-time studies encouraging. Indio remarks on incentives for mature-aged women:

Here we have many options [and] there are different supports for women, like the Women’s Policy Office scholarship to encourage women to do further
studies….And you can do full time, part-time, online [and] you don’t have to pay fees upfront, you can use HECS and get Austudy – yeah that’s the reason many of us feel strong to do further education (Interview with Indio, 11/06/09).

As illustrated in the above excerpts, the catalyst for action for the majority of the participants was the fulfilment of long-term dreams that due to circumstances beyond their control in the past they had not been able to achieve. McGivney describes the return to study for adult learners as being “often serendipitous” or “because others in their circle are doing it” and “because of the need to deal with an immediate situation in their life” (2006, p. 85). Many of the participants talked about these kinds of serendipitous factors. For instance, Nyainbo had postgraduate qualifications but opted to study for a degree in a different career. She was very grateful to have the opportunity to study and explore new career options:

I feel so blessed that I can change from [former career], work and study to become [profession]. I wouldn’t think of this back in [original country] because as a married woman I’d be stuck with what I did before I got married, nothing like adult education, working full-time [and] studying part-time (laughs) … Honestly, I’m very grateful I have this opportunity (Interview with Nyainbo, 22/06/09).

Several of the participants were equally motivated to make similar shifts in their careers due to their family commitments, uncertainties and insecurities in the labour market, and appreciated the opportunity to make the professional shift. It is noteworthy that 21 of the 24 participants who engaged in formal education were unanimous about the critical role of easy accessibility to enrolment. The majority of the participants are wives, mothers and workers, who study part-time or full-time and tried to fit their education in with their family, employment and social commitments. The travelling time was crucial in order to juggle other competing commitments, hence educational institutions close to their residence and workplace were paramount and attractive for engaging in further studies. Both Darwin and Alice Springs are medium-sized cities, and education and training
facilities are in close proximity to areas where participants lived. Mariam and Sally cite this as the main reason why they relocated from interstate to the NT to undertake tertiary studies. McGivney (1999, 2006) noted that distance from education and training centres is a key indicator in participation in adult education and learning, as most non-participants may not travel beyond a two-mile radius because of their family and other competing commitments.

The participants also talked about how their host environment encouraged adult and mature aged students. Many older women were actively involved in various educational studies; therefore, the participants did not feel abnormal studying as adult women. Unlike in their original countries, colleges and universities traditionally focus on the provision of education for late teenagers and the 20’s cohort, and make older learners, especially women, feel unwelcome. This is illustrated by Vilma:

> I get inspired by other women because it is not common for women my age going to school back home [Africa]… When I did my computer course, one old woman, about 80, used to sit next to me [and] if I make mistake [or] get confused, she will say, ‘Darl, don’t stop, you should learn till they bury you’ [and] I was inspired by her courage and patience to learn (Interview with Vilma, 8/07/09).

### 5.2 Adult education and learning as a strategy

Having moved “from the familiar to the unfamiliar, moving from our own comfortable environment where we know … and have references for everything to a new environment, obviously for us to cope, … we need education” (Interview with Kalumburu, 5/07/09). Kalumburu and all the other participants indicated that they wanted to use adult education and learning as a strategy to empower and transform their sociocultural, economic and political perspectives (Mezirow, 2000; Stromquist, 2002). They also wanted to use education to acquire new knowledge and skills, and enhance
their intellectual and critical thinking skills (Brookfield, 1987; Cranton, 2006; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999) as well as increase their marketability in the labourforce (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982).

The above section analysed the participants’ intrinsic motivations to use education and learning as a strategy to access and create opportunities and choices to integrate in their new society. In recounting their motives for participating in adult education and diverse learning activities, there was a prevailing optimism among the participants that they will develop skills to enable them to overcome their challenges. Similar to the participants in James and Taylor’s study, the participants in this study believed that education would provide them with “knowledge and skills … [and] guarantee them more life opportunities, fuller participation in society, and upward social mobility … particularly for those who are faced with race, class and gender barriers” (2008, pp. 568-569). The findings also corroborate Magro’s (2009) study of Sudanese refugees in Canada who she notes, “have very high expectations of education and they see it as a ‘recovery strategy’ or as a way to take back control over their lives” (2009, p. 15).

5.2.1 Obtaining Australian qualification as a step to survive in the new country

All the participants reported that they participated in different forms of education and learning opportunities in order to obtain Australian qualifications that would prepare them to advance their social, cultural, economic and political aspirations, and transition into their host society. Education played a critical role in the experiences of all the participants, and while 21 have studied formally, all related to stories about their non-formal and informal education and learning activities in multiple contexts, such as
academic institutions, at home, at work and in their social lives. They appreciated all forms of education, and asserted that on most occasions all three forms of learning (formal, non-formal, and informal) occurred simultaneously in the same contexts. The participants’ education and learning contexts are shaped by the multiple roles they play as women within their own families, ethnic communities, and as migrants and refugees in the host society. As shown in the participants’ narratives in the following sections, the boundaries between the different contexts of learning are fluid, as their family and friends, and host community members helped to construct their learning practices between spaces of social contexts and relations.

5.2.2 Formal education and learning in Australia

The formal education opportunities that the participants accessed as adult students were AMEP, TAFE and higher education programs. Apart from three migrant participants, all the others have completed or are completing formal studies for qualifications ranging from high school certificate, vocational education and training certificates and diplomas, undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. Formal learning occurred in schools, adult community-based education centres, vocational education and training (VET), and higher education institutions.

5.2.2.1 Strategies in overcoming language barrier - AMEP

AMEP programs were critical points of entry for many of the participants in this study to progress in their learning trajectories. Ten refugee participants and one migrant participant took advantage of the opportunities that AMEP offered to develop macro skills of reading, writing, speaking (oral communication) and learning strategies that
helped them to launch their career prospects through further studies in vocational and higher education programs. There were programs for three English language levels – basic, intermediate and advanced. Fatuma and Jomey commenced learning basic English language skills. Fatuma reports that she did not only learn to read, write and speak English, but also learned how to apply her linguistic skills in everyday life:

I went to uni to learn my English from AMEP … Many times we went for excursion to library, museum, Parliament [House] [and] sometimes [the] teacher put us for groups then we talked about family life, things in Darwin [and] Australia. She brought people from Centrelink, Anglicare, Police, Clinic [and] Legal Aid to talk for class. That was really good because I got [the] chance to practise my English and know many places … By the time I finished I was happy for my English … I was not scared to use English (Interview with Fatuma, 19/06/09).

Fatuma’s excerpt shows that for people who had limited English language and lacked the confidence to venture into public spaces alone, the experience of visiting these places and having the opportunity to discuss issues with public servants, in the company of her classmates and teacher, was “tremendously empowering and helped to extend [her] social spheres beyond the private and into the public” (Schuller et al., 2002, p. 24).

Jomey also learned English language from scratch, and her relationships with teachers and peers became invaluable resource in providing information on a range of settlement issues. All her classmates were migrants who were facing similar challenges and they shared experiences and useful information such as employment opportunities. The social networks she created through AMEP helped in her job search and sociocultural development:

They took me to AMEP to learn speaking [and] writing English. I started from A, B, C, … [and] I learned English quick with all the women because we became good friends and we have to push to talk in English and the teachers were good helping us … even my mates helped me get my first cleaning job … The English I learned from AMEP, really is [the] one that helped me make good progress in this place (Interview with Jomey, 29/06/09).
It became apparent that attending formal classes and learning English was critical for them to understand and cope with the practicalities of their everyday social and cultural lives in their new society.

Six participants enrolled in intermediate English language programs to enhance their linguistic skills and improve their confidence in using English in a variety of contexts.

Vilma’s story encapsulates some of these participants’ stories:

AMEP helped me get my confidence for studies and work. I was speaking English before I came to Australia but when I got here I started using interpreter because of my accent [and] I lost my confidence for English. I went to AMEP to learn proper way to speak English, get a job, [and] do more education. The teachers were very helpful. All the time encouraging and telling me I am clever [and] that really helped me to study fast [and] finish all my CSWE levels (Interview with Vilma, 8/07/09).

Three other participants enrolled in advanced English programs to develop academic and vocational skills for employment and higher education studies. These participants mentioned that the programs were useful as they paved a clear pathway to the labour market and higher degree studies. Esperance reveals:

I was in English level five and when I finished … I sent my papers to the uni [and] I guess they said ‘Oh she’s got qualifications from our university’ and accepted me because before, they didn’t want to look at what I had from Africa [and] I also got a good job (Interview with Esperance, 8/06/09).

Unlike Fatuma and Jomey, nine participants had English language literacy but were not confident with their linguistic capital. They utilised various AMEP programs to improve their phonetics (accents), and ascertain their readiness for employment and further studies. All 11 participants who completed various levels of English language programs proceeded to TAFE and higher education programs whilst working in part-time employment. The participants’ narratives demonstrate that learning and enhancing their English skills was one of the most important steps in overcoming barriers and making
progress in their new environment, since English is the official language in Australia. This finding is consistent with Freire’s (2004) suggestion that migrant women usually achieve a sense of identity through language because “through claiming or reclaiming language, people can critically engage in an analysis of their experience that enables them to transform and create the world” (cited in Jackson, 2010, p. 245). It is also clear from the participants’ stories that the English Language class in AMEP was more than just a language school, because it not only offered academic and enrichment programs, but also served as the locus for social support, network building and social capital development.

5.2.2.2 Obtaining professional qualifications – TAFE and higher education

Twenty one participants have formally completed or are studying for certificates, diplomas, undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. For six of the participants, the Australian higher education and TAFE qualifications they obtained were their first qualifications. The other 15 participants opted to study for Australian qualifications that are repetitions of pre-migration qualifications or in different disciplines, due to the non-recognition of their pre-migration credentials. Almost all these participants studied in popular labour market professions in the community services and allied health programs in disability, childcare, aged care and nursing. The majority of the participants (n =16) studied through TAFE for certificate and diploma awards, and eight proceeded to further studies in higher degree programs, making the overall number of participants who are completing or have completed higher education undergraduate and postgraduate degrees as 13 (Appendix 5).
After the non-recognition of their pre-migration professional credentials, 10 participants did not attempt to re-qualify in their former careers, but rather re-trained for new careers.

Florence’s reason for a change of career represents many others. She explains:

I had background of education in secretarial work but I started all over again to get a new understanding in English, then build a new career in nursing because I didn’t have a chance in my career for public service … I didn’t mind changing careers because it gave me the opportunity to study at uni with other Australian people and international students … I learned so many things for my work as nurse, and many things about this place, not just book knowledge. Also I made friends with many classmates from different backgrounds and they taught me things, and I hope I taught them different things too (laughs) (Interview with Florence, 18/06/09).

Four of the participants had to acquire additional qualifications to their pre-migration credentials to operate in their professional roles. For example, Barbara had an advanced diploma equivalent in her profession, and studied two more years to gain professional practice certificate. Kalumburu required a Certificate IV in Workplace Assessment to work as a TAFE lecturer. She recalls:

At the time I was employed, all the VET lecturers had to do Cert IV [Workplace Assessment] … By the time I finished the course, I was confident in myself as a lecturer … the delivery was different but great and made learning really exciting because the more I learned the more I want to know as I discovered a whole new realm of my ignorance … I’ll be getting into more studies soon (Interview with Kalumburu, 5/07/09).

Nyainbo’s story is an exceptional case because she had a degree before migrating to Australia, and did postgraduate studies in the same discipline in Australia. After working in highly-skilled positions, she decided to go back to TAFE and do a diploma in a new profession before enrolling in the degree. When asked why she did not apply as a mature age student directly into the degree program with her impressive academic qualifications and experience, she responds:

I could have got into the degree program easily, but I just thought I’d do the diploma first, [because] it’s hands-on … In nursing, I have got people’s lives in my hands and I need to be confident about what I am doing [and] yeah the diploma helps build me up in my confidence as a nurse (Interview with Nyainbo, 22/06/09).
From the previous stories, the education and learning environments did not only provide competence and intellectual capability culminating in human capital development for the participants, but also gave them confidence and access to social support systems which expanded their networking opportunities and contributed to a holistic learning experience. These formal education and learning environments also created informal spaces which allowed the participants to come together with other new migrants and mainstream Australians to share information and support each other. It also helped the participants to broaden their range of social relationships as they received stimulation from sources other than their family members.

**5.2.2.3 Catching up with the modern technology – Information and Computer Technology (ICT)**

Many of the participants did not have ICT skills on arrival in Australia, but they all acknowledged the importance of computer literacy in the current digital world. They realised that ICT skills were the basis for employment, studies at all levels of education, as well as communication and various transactions in their everyday lives. As a result, they decided to undertake studies in various ICT programs. A few of the participants enrolled in formal basic computer to advanced ICT programs as part of their TAFE and higher education studies. Conversely, the majority of participants engaged in short skill-specific programs with private service providers to develop and gain skills required in searching for jobs, preparation of resumes, how to send emails, and also help family members to cope with the digital world. Kiden attended intermediate computer classes at a migrant resource centre. The centre provided an opportunity for her to learn computer technology in a safer and more understanding environment, and she states:
I did the beginner computer at AMEP and the time I started my certificate [TAFE], I was struggling with many things … all the time I was going to [migrant centre] learning with [name] … now I am good because she got time to explain and show me things slowly (Interview with Kiden, 13/05/09).

Barbara had worked for several years in her country of origin but on arrival in Australia, she realised that she would require some level of computer literacy in her profession. She therefore enrolled in an ICT unit as part of her upskilling program. She explains her circumstance:

I had to do the computer training because where I come from [original country] I had somebody dealing with admin and computer stuff, and most of the patients’ records were done manually (laughs). And really I wasn’t used to the kind of high tech computer things … But I had to wake up (laughs) [and] enrolled in computer units… very helpful for my job and even my private things (Interview with Barbara, 8/06/09).

A number of the participants described learning and utilising various internet-specific programs such as Skype and how to send email to a wider audience, thereby communicating regularly with family and friends interstate and overseas. They indicated that they found it easier and cheaper to use various programs and engage in social media. Romana summarises the sentiments of others:

I have done many computer courses … I did this short course with [organisation] to help manage my investments on line. I also try and learn about new programs by myself … for me, emails and Skype are really good [and] cheap ways of keeping up with family and friends everywhere … Anytime I’m travelling I do my bookings on line – easy way to compare prices, great asset (Interview with Romana, 6/01/10).

For many of the participants, learning ICT boosted their confidence enormously and facilitated their integration into the global and host communities, their family members and friends’ worlds, and the labour market. This finding is consistent with Mitra’s research which concludes that “digital technologies provide a ‘safe virtual space’ [and] allow those marginalised to find a new voice with which to produce the new discursive places where the silenced identity narratives can be articulated” (2005, p. 377).
5.2.3 **Taking advantage of professional development and every learning opportunity – non-formal and informal education**

All the participants indicated that the formal learning environments could not provide all the knowledge and skills they required, particularly for the workplace and their everyday social activities. They therefore had to access these skills in non-formal and informal learning contexts. The non-formal education and learning included regular workplace orientation, in-service and professional development offered by employers; short-term non-accredited courses provided by government and non-government organisations in public service management courses, and cross-cultural issues such as domestic violence and citizen rights, parenting skills, consumer rights, housing and tenancy rights.

All the participants have had basic workplace orientation up to complex career advancement training on the job in their learning trajectory. Three participants who had postgraduate degrees before migration, reported that they have not engaged in any formal education and learning but have had professional development to update their knowledge. They have enhanced their skills through various work-related training programs sponsored by their employers. Therese states:

> Since coming here, I have done many professional developments (laughs). Can’t remember them all, but they really help me because they are tailored information for my work ... any new policies [and] legislations that come out, I have to attend seminars to study them … I really like them [seminars] because they give me the chance to have discussions and meetings with people from other states - that’s why I have a wider network of colleagues (Interview with Therese, 12/05/09).

Carol has attended many professional development courses and talks about the program she attended prior to obtaining her current acting management role:

> I have had the opportunity to attend various professional development courses … [and] they extend my knowledge on the job … This training came up, the *Women in management* program … Yeah I finished and started acting in my current position (Interview with Carol, 6/06/09).
Other respondents also mentioned that after they got paid employment, they attended workshops on money management to help them transition effectively from receiving welfare benefits to wages. Some participants attended short courses in domestic violence, parenting, human rights and cultural transition to be able to learn and help themselves and their ethnic community members understand such cross-cultural issues.

Mercy describes her training in domestic violence issues:

I have done the course for Domestic Violence. This course is for me to understand DV issues, then educate our people [Africans] about the law for violence … It is good because many of us Africans think it’s a shame job to tell outsiders about family problems (Interview with Mercy, 5/06/09).

Florence describes the parenting classes she attended with her husband:

It was mostly about the guidelines for raising kids (laughs), what they call here ‘parenting skills’. It was good to learn some of the government rules because we discussed with our children [so] we understand our responsibilities together … The training helped our family for good communication and understanding about family relationships and solving problems (Interview with Florence, 18/06/09).

Another 14 participants who attended parenting classes mentioned that they acquired a clearer sense and understanding of their position as parents in guiding their children. This has resulted in improved relationships and more confidence in working with their children. Ten participants reported that they have attended short interpreting courses to translate for other migrants and refugees with limited English. Some mentioned that they initially translated informally for family and friends and decided to do the training to enhance their competence.

Both the formal and non-formal learning contexts provided informal learning opportunities for the participants. However, they acknowledged that they could not learn most of the skills, knowledge and cultural understanding they required to survive in the new society in structured classroom and workplace situations, and that it was important
to venture out and informally find different sources of information that would assist
them. The participants expressed their feeling that informal learning would give them an
opportunity to experience authentic language and ideas in real contexts that would
enrich their learning experience in ways that cannot be achieved through textbooks and
structured learning contexts. Kalumburu affirms this notion when she says:

You cannot learn everything from books, sometimes you need to just get out there,
mix with people and pick up fresh ideas. I learn from everything that I’m involved
in, [and] looking back on my own life, all the education that I have had from family
and friends – like even the ones in mum’s kitchen – yeah the African cooking, have
helped me to be confident in my African skin [and] identity [and] helped to get over
some issues in my life (Interview with Kalumburu, 5/07/09).

Due to cultural differences, Jomey experienced a most embarrassing moment which she
argues could have been avoided with more diverse education:

We need all education … we don’t have same culture, same education for my
country, [they are] different from Australia … I tell you one day there was … party
[and] before I had seen this shop in town say ‘Adult Shop’ so I told my friend we
can go [and] buy nice dress for party. Oh my God, we got there … I pushed, open
[the] door and the people in the shop looked at us funny, then we saw the things in
the shop – ahhh we just ran and ran away. My heart was beating, we didn’t stop to
look [as] it was shocking and embarrassing for me. I learned lots that day! I went to
class that week [and] told my class [and] everybody agreed that we need to have
talks with Aussie friends [and] neighbours then we can learn slowly about different
things. I also told all my [original country] women, if you don’t know something,
you find out before you get into big trouble (Interview with Jomey, 29/06/09).

The participants’ comments give credence to Skilton-Sylvester’s observation that “there
is significant agreement that language learners develop communicative competence
primarily outside the classroom by using language in authentic communication” (2002,
p. 13).

The informal education and learning that the participants talked about ranged from
intended, unintended, unconscious and incidental learning that they experienced in
diverse contexts and circumstances. Most of the learning occurred as part of their
socialisation, and as a natural function of their daily interactions with family members, friends, neighbours and other people in private and public places including the home, workplace, education and training institutions and community centres. Marsick and Watkins argue that “learning grows out of everyday encounters” (2001, p. 29), and the participants’ everyday activities had powerful implications for informal learning. For example in the process of enrolling their children in schools, many of the participants were exposed to people from different backgrounds, and had to engage with them. Their observations and interactions with such people, friends and others in their neighbourhood became a source of information and orientation into Australian society. The quote below shows how May learned about the ‘wage’ and ‘tax’ payment method in Australia:

> When I started work my boss told me the money [wage] I’m gonna get for one week ... For pay-day, she gave me envelope with just paper, no money (laughs). I was thinking what’s wrong here? ... I called [African friend] and she told me [that] here, they don’t put money [wage] for envelope [and] my money will be in my bank account. I went to the bank and I find the money [was] there but not same amount. I called [African friend] again and she told me to bring my bank paper and pay slip ... [and] she talked to me about tax [and] super [superannuation]. I was lucky she explained all the things for me because this one is different from [original country] (Interview with May, 10/06/09).

Apart from engaging with other people, the participants mentioned other informal learning sources they used were television, radio, newspapers, magazines and videos. It became apparent that the most powerful learning occurred as the participants struggled to “make sense of what is happening to them and to work out ways of doing something about it” (Foley, 1999, p. 12). Hence much of the participants’ learning occurred incidentally within their efforts to overcome their challenges.
5.2.4 Taking advantage of mentoring and work placements

Mentoring and work placements were cited by the participants as very useful learning processes as well as mechanisms in overcoming challenges with employment and social inclusion. They offered opportunities to be exposed to workplace cultural norms, and create useful community networks. As the participants in this study were venturing and charting their way into unknown territories, work-placement opportunities and particularly mentors, helped them to uncover important information, and create and maintain the social networks critical to their survival in their new community (Bristol & Tisdell, 2008; Daloz, 1999). The majority of the participants (n = 19) had taken part in mentoring and work placement schemes as part of their education and training programs, and were mostly positive about their experiences. Although there was no obligation for the employers to offer paid employment after work-placements, Indio was one of the lucky participants (n = 8) who secured paid employment:

I did my placement for my [discipline] at the [centre]. I really liked working with the kids, and the parents were great [and] before I finished, the director asked me if I’d like to work there … I was so happy I took part-time hours [and] changed to full-time when I finished my course (Interview with Indio, 11/06/09).

Mentoring relationships often flourish in work environments, but they can also evolve informally in situations where family members, friends and neighbours act as mentors to enhance an individual’s advancement. Twenty participants mentioned that they had formal and informal mentoring relationships to strengthen their personal and career achievements. The mentors offered practical support in different aspects of the participants’ lives which were invaluable in their development. Barbara and Mercy talked extensively about mentoring relationships in the workplace as they were very helpful in their learning and career advancement. Barbara experienced intense mentoring
during her work-placement and probationary period when she worked with an experienced staff member:

[Mentor] is my guardian angel in Australia [and] I feel so blessed having the opportunity to work under her … That time, she helped me with my practicals and assignments [and] also showed me many things that I can’t get from books … I think she even put word for me to get my permanent job (laughs). I am now working in a different department but I still take her like my big sister, my friend [and] teacher, yeah because she helped me a lot (Interview with Barbara, 8/06/09).

Mercy also talks about her wonderful mentoring experience:

My mentor is Irish [and] she didn’t help me with just my work, she actually shared her experiences with me [and] that was very helpful because it made me realise [that] even some white people feel excluded. She told me initially she felt different like she didn’t belong here, because she speaks differently … I started thinking hmm maybe people don’t look at me funny when I speak because I am [an] African … She was finishing her Masters [and] she advised me to do that one [and] gave me all her books … yeah I owe her lots for the progress I [have] made with my family, my work [and] my studies (Interview with Mercy, 5/06/09).

Barbara and Mercy’s experiences show that they became acquainted with workplace culture and intergroup relations by making contact with many other Australians through their mentors. Mentoring, therefore addressed the participants’ psychosocial, professional and personal needs, because the mentors did not only provide them with advice, exposure and visibility in the workplace but extended themselves to offer collegiality, friendship and emotional support, encouragement and role modelling to boost their confidence and self-esteem. As illustrated above, mentors used their own life experiences to help Barbara and Mercy identify goals and integrate into life in the new environment. Many of the participants acknowledged the benefits of their mentoring experiences reporting that they learned from their relationships, working closely with more experienced staff that went beyond what was usually spelled out in the work duties to assist them. The importance of mentoring relationships for women in the workplace
has been documented as critical for their socialisation in various professions (Hill & Ragland, 1995).

Other participants who had informal mentors, including Lacha, reported that mentors used family members and social networks to guide and support them. This practice assisted many participants to gain entry into the social networks of their mentors as they were introduced to influential people who helped with their advancement. Lacha narrates her story:

[Mentor] is my friend … [and] role model … Her whole family helped me and my children understand the culture [and] opportunities here … When [daughter] finished Year 12 she got good marks but I told her to work and save money before going to uni … [mentor] took us to see one lady, and [daughter] got scholarship to go to uni [straightaway] (Interview with Lacha, 22/06/09).

For all the participants, the mentors embody their hopes and expectations as they guide them through unfamiliar contexts. Various studies report that mentoring is essential for the successful integration of minority black women such as the African migrant and refugee participants in this study (Bahniuk & Hill, 1998; Bristol & Tisdell, 2008; Farrow, 2008; Hansman, 1998), because “women of colour are twice removed from the ranks of dominant culture based on their race as well as gender [and] their potential need for the benefits of mentoring appear to be even greater” (Hite, 1998, p. 786). Other studies have also shown that education and training programs combined with work experience in the form of work-placements and internships with mentors, successfully assist migrants and refugees in gaining appropriate employment (Bloch, 2004; Carr, 2004; Refugee Council of Australia [RCOA], 2005). Scull particularly notes that mainstream work placement of migrants and refugees “has the potential to achieve greater aims by contributing to the process of raising awareness of [migrant and] refugee
issues in the workplace and the community, and hence providing a sustainable long-term impact” (2001, p. 57). Apart from assisting migrants and refugees with their enculturation process, mainstream work-placements and mentoring programs also assist employers and mainstream workers to change their misconceptions and prejudice about migrants and refugees, reducing racism and discrimination.

It is apparent from the participants’ stories that the formal, non-formal and informal education and learning contexts that they engaged in, including mentoring and work placement, helped them to develop knowledge, skills and understandings of the Australian way of life, which in turn assisted them to build confidence, self-esteem and a sense of belonging in their new environment.

5.3 Coping factors and mechanisms

Apart from the formal, non-formal and informal education and learning experiences illustrated in the above section, the participants recounted a number of factors and mechanisms that helped them to gain the skills and confidence to cope with, and overcome, the overlapping barriers and challenges they encountered. These included social support networks made up of informal support from family, friends, neighbours, peers, and colleagues; formal specialist support agencies with people from both their ethnic communities and the wider Australian community; volunteering and casual employment; their resilience and determination; and spirituality and faith in God.

5.3.1 Social support networks

As mentioned in Chapter 4, the participants had lost their social support networks of family and friends, and encountered family conflict as a result of the changes in their
traditional roles without familiar support. Hence social support networks emerged as a significant adaptive strategy in this study as the participants had to find people who would support them and facilitate new social connections that will assist them to overcome the challenges they faced. In addition to close associates such as family and friends, the participants overwhelmingly cited the incredible support from neighbours, peers, colleagues, and support groups from their ethnic and mainstream communities as factors that assisted them to deal with their settlement challenges. While some of these support networks were created by the participants to enhance their social engagement and acculturation, others were part of the government’s formalised mechanisms to facilitate migrants and refugees’ integration into Australian society (Spinks, 2009).

All the participants credited their family members’ support as invaluable in their ability to cope with many of the challenges they faced as they frequently acknowledged the kinds of support provided by different family members. Fatuma talks about drawing on her children’s strengths in her settlement and learning journey:

My children became my teacher for many things because they learned quick … they were helping me talk for things, teach me new words [vocabulary]. They give me power to learn English and computer … My first son got his driving [licence], got his car [and] he was taxi driver for everybody …. He showed me lots before I go for proper [driving] lesson … I make big progress here because they encourage me for everything I want to do (Interview with Fatuma, 19/06/09).

Nyainbo is grateful to her parents and husband, and refers to her young son as her “number one cheerleader” whilst working full time and studying:

I wouldn’t be able to do all these [wife, mother, work full-time, study part-time] without my family. My mum lives in the next suburb … so when it gets too much for us [husband and I] we just drop [son] … Sometimes mum cooks for us because I’m particular and don’t want junk food. My husband can’t cook but he does other things to help. Yeah that’s how I manage to keep on with my study, work and family life without going crazy (Interview with Nyainbo, 22/06/09).
Some studies on migrants and refugees revealed that men whose status is usually undermined as a consequence of migration resist their spouses’ active participation in education and employment activities (Guarnizo, 1997; Nsubuga-Kyobe, 2007; Parrado & Flippen, 2005). This study, however, showed contrasting findings—many of the women reported that their spouses encouraged and supported them physically and financially in their efforts to up-skill through various adaptive education, learning and employment strategies. The constant encouragement and reassurance from their spouses boosted their morale and energised them to face numerous challenges. Sally talks about her husband relocating to the NT to enable her do higher education studies whilst working:

> We moved to Darwin because it was difficult for me to work, study and take care of our kids so my husband looked for a job here … When I started working, I thought of sending [youngest child] to mum in [original country], but he organised his work hours so we can take turns looking after the kids … He has been like a brother, friend, real pillar for me. He knows when I finish my degree, life will be good for our family, but still not many [original country] men will do what he is doing for me (Interview with Sally, 5/06/09).

This finding is supported by prior studies that migrant and refugee families often support changes in women’s traditional roles, especially in formal education, because they perceive a closer link between education and employment opportunities to the family’s sense of ‘making it’ in their host community (Ojo, 2009; Skilton-Sylvester, 2002; Zhou & Bankston, 2001). McAdoo (1978) observes among black migrant families that “aspirations for college and professional positions are stressed as family goals, and the entire family may make sacrifices and provide support” (cited in Higginbotham & Weber, 1996, p. 419). Similarly, Shaw’s (1999) study of teachers-in-training reports that support from their partners and families were highly critical to their success.

The respondents also cited the importance of social relationships such as friends, neighbours, and other migrants and refugees as providing them general encouragement.
to navigate their way through the challenges of acculturation, finding employment, and interacting in public and private contexts. For instance, Therese credits her accumulated knowledge, skills and career progress to the support from her friends:

What really helps me, are my networks, my friends … they are invaluable! … The people I know have helped me with so many issues, encouraging me all the time [and] I’ve learned heaps … Yeah, when you are new [and] trying to establish, find a job, [and] find your way, you need such good people (Interview with Therese, 12/05/09).

Many of the respondents identified the warm hospitality and friendships extended to them by members of their ethnic communities as invaluable in coping with loneliness and the loss of their familial social networks in their departing countries. May states:

When we got here, one African woman [name] heard about us, and she talked to other [African] women … For almost two years, they were helping with children’s school, my uni, jobs … [and] because we don’t come from same country, that one forced me to speak English [and] helped improve my English … They showed me good things for my progress, even buying my apartment, they helped me talk to real estate [agent and] bank manager (Interview with May, 10/06/09).

Many of the participants reported that they ventured out of their isolation and made friends with people in the wider community from diverse sociocultural and economic backgrounds to broaden their community networks and feelings of belonging and inclusion, as well as acquire practical information about the different cultures in Australia. Mangi befriended an Australian family who had lived and worked in Africa. She describes their friendship:

I met this couple, socialites who worked in [three African countries] … They had books on almost everything under the sun and I borrowed books about NT and Aboriginals because I wanted to know more about white settlement and the impact on Aboriginal people … They had many friends from different backgrounds and they used to organise high teas to give me the opportunity to meet their circle of friends and other community people … I got to know many wonderful people … I even used them as referees for my first job (Interview with Mangi, 8/06/09).
As in Mangi’s case, many of the participants were introduced to relatives and friends of their friends who created fictive kin networks, and extended their informal networks. They all felt that the nurturance and support they received from their family members, friends and neighbours contributed to their achievements. It is clear that the support from established migrants who have been through migration and adjustment process and have ‘learned the ropes’ were also very helpful as the participants positively affirm their experience.

Other authors observed in their studies that family, friends and ethnic community members helped to provide vital information and social services for newly arrived migrants and refugees (Bertrand, 2000; Donkor, 2000; Guo, 2007; Okai, 1995). In particular, the ethnic solidarity provided many of the participants in the studies with valuable social, economic and information resources by acting as interpreters, identifying education and training programs and giving academic, moral and physical support. These ethnic community groups “are particularly helpful for refugees [and migrants] [as] they provide good support … and often help to reduce stress and promote understanding of the new society (Bertrand, 2000, p. 8).

### 5.3.1.1 Community settlement support group and community-based migrant and refugee agencies

The illustrative quotes in the above section indicate that family members and friends were the most significant source of social support. However, participants also talked effusively about other crucial support and services provided by formal networks such as Community Settlement Support Group volunteers and specialist migrant and refugee agencies. These organisations provided a range of services including useful information,
advice, guidance, orientation and training programs for many of the participants, “for
the purpose of upward social mobility, which necessitates integration and joining the
majority group” (Chan & Christie, 1995, p. 85). The participants reported that these
community settlement supporters played a major role with their initial social, cultural
and practical orientation. They linked them with the structures that provide a range of
social services, and helped them to access these services. They actively helped them to
build networks of friends and join welfare groups for emotional support through
friendship and integration. Florence describes her experience:

Many wonderful people came to the airport for my family. They took us to the
house ... I couldn’t believe there was everything – beds, chairs, food and they had
dinner with us. Next day, they took us to the shops, Centrelink and Bank ... I
learned many Aussie ways from them, and I think they learned African respect for
elders from us (laughs) ... We can’t let each other go, we’re still family because
they helped so much (Interview with Florence, 18/06/09).

They indicated the community migrant and refugee settlement support scheme as a key
intervention that helped them to deal with lots of issues. The reassurance and
compassion they got from these people eased their anxieties, and alleviated the initial
sense of isolation and disconnection they felt in their unfamiliar environment. The
participants highlighted the support that the group members provided in relation to
household and other material goods, access to language training and employment
opportunities. By bringing the participants into mainstream public places such as parks
and schools, the host volunteers helped the participants become familiar with daily
routines and cultural values in their new homeland. The majority described the trusting
relationships and genuine friendships that have developed with some members of their
support group. With many of the participants, these friendships have moved on to
familial relationships as they refer to them as extended family members. Mercy attests to such relationships:

I know God gave me this group of volunteers to help my family … I see them like my brothers and sisters and that’s how they feel about my family. My children call them aunty and uncles. They connected us to their families and friends [and] sometimes we go for holidays together … There is nothing I do that I don’t discuss with them as they encourage me for everything, my uni, the house [and] I am really grateful for our relationship (Interview with Mercy, 5/06/09).

The above excerpts describe how the participants’ personal relationships in their respective social interactions provided them with opportunities for enriching and expanding their linguistic skills, cultural competence and identities. The social interactions that they engaged in and the context in which these interactions took place shaped their propensity to learn and increase their knowledge. As local supporters, the community support group members acted as mediators and friends to the participants, creating and strengthening the social networks between the wider community and participants. The sociocultural understanding built through these relationships assisted many of the participants to develop relationships with other Australians, which provided them with an established and well-resourced network of community members who helped them deal with various challenges.

In addition to the community support group volunteers, the role of community-based organisations and agencies is underscored by the participants. They reported benefitting from the advice, orientation and training from community-based organisations, including MCNT, Anglicare, Melaleuca and AAFA because their services were tailored towards their advancement, and facilitated their transition to their new community. Unlike the community settlement support group members, community-based migrant and refugee agencies and organisations had paid and volunteer staff with diverse expertise. These
organisations provided computer classes, parenting classes, family counseling and employment readiness programs. They also provided space for the participants to congregate, form relationships, share their experiences, reflect and learn from their individual and collective experiences. For many of the participants, the social space from these organisations offered meaningful and trusting contexts for them to discuss and solve their problems and develop relational understanding of different social and cultural norms in Australia. For example, Kiden received assistance from an organisation she speaks fondly of:

Multicultural Council organised different activities for us. We got information for women’s health, parents’ classes … We go there to share our problems … [and] we learn from everybody. That is good because I know I am not facing problems alone … sometimes, they organise cooking class, we cook, share our food [and] recipes … They have [sewing] machines and the women help me mend my kids clothes, no charge [free of charge]. Before I bought my computer, I just go there with the children for homework, and they show me how to do email [and] my CV (Interview with Kiden, 13/05/09).

As Kiden described, many of the community organisations facilitated workshops to address intercultural dialogue through leisure and recreational activities such as cooking, sports and sewing that brings migrants and people from the wider community together. Besides the provision of practical skills, advice and guidance, many of the participants alluded to the positive environment and the general atmosphere of understanding, empathy and support that they experienced with the community-based organisations. The participants found easy access to settlement advisors with different expertise helpful for dealing with diverse issues. As Sheba attests:

[Organisation] was like my second home … anytime I need to talk to somebody, I will just go there … yeah all of them [staff] were pretty good [and] you don’t feel bad talking to them … they don’t judge you … always do the best to help me discover things for myself (Interview with Sheba, 15/08/09).
Many of the respondents who frequently used the services of these organisations concur with Sheba’s views as they felt that the advice and reassurance provided by these organisations alleviated a range of their frustrations and anxieties, enabling them to recognise their existing potential and empowering them to be self-confident. The community organisation centres served as transitional places in the participants’ efforts to rebuild their lives in their new community. Some of the participants indicated that being able to discuss their issues with other women who had similar experiences at these centres, assisted them to reclaim their sense of capacity and reframe the challenges they faced. The learning from these spaces helped the participants to develop a greater sense of affirmation, validation and belonging. These findings show that when these participants learned about each other’s experiences, they were able to resist self-blame and enhance their hopefulness. Having support and social networks from both members of their ethnic and mainstream communities through the community-based organisations, expanded the participants’ social networks because it facilitated formal and informal connections and opened up opportunities for them to meet and build new social relationships. Various studies have emphasised the role of community based and ethnic organisations as fostering participation in the host community to help migrants and refugees develop a sense of self-efficacy, trust, civic skills and attitudes (Campbell et al., 2006; Donkor, 2000; Gibb, Hamdon & Jamal, 2008; Guo, 2007; Nsubuga-Kyobe & Dimock, 2002). Okai’s (1995) study of the role of ethnic community groups and organisations in African migrants and refugees’ integration in Australia found that the settlement process was very successful amongst migrants and refugees that had strong support from community-based groups and organisations. Aptly summarised by Tastsoglou and Miedema in their study of immigrant women in Canada, both the
community settlement support group and community-based migrant and refugee agency mechanisms offered “informal links of companionship and mutual aid that provide a sense of belonging and emotional and other support [and] the outward linkages of networks that provide people with ladders to change their situations … and levers to change their social locations” (2000, p. 86), and allowed the participants to build bridging social capital and develop ties with mainstream society. It is evident from the narratives that social support networks and relationships were invaluable in the settlement experiences of the women in this study. This provided a form of social insurance, providing communication and information networks, and creating norms and sanctions that facilitated social action.

5.3.1.2 Institutional support

In all the institutions where the respondents undertook formal learning, there were mechanisms that facilitated access to their lecturers, academic advisors, counsellors and other supporting staff. The 21 participants who undertook formal courses identified the vital support provided by institutional staff members who listened to their issues and gave them the guidance they required in the form of encouragement and reassurance. This support spurred most of them into successfully achieving the outcomes of their education, training and learning programs. For instance, before Indio enrolled in a university program, she was unsure of the discipline she wanted to undertake and talked about her positive experience with the academic staff:

I talked to a few lecturers [and] … they were extremely helpful because there was a different set-up of the training up here in the NT. They explained to me that because of the large Indigenous population, students have to study certain units about Indigenous ways … I am glad that I learned about both Indigenous and mainstream perspectives during my training, because now I am able to work in different areas instead of just seeing one side of the coin (Interview with Indio, 11/06/09).
Withnall (2006) maintains that in adult education and training, retention of students begins with the enrolment process and that successful enrolments lead to further enrolment and retention. As was the case with Indio, she successfully completed her diploma and proceeded to do her degree. She is currently doing postgraduate study in the same institution as a result of her initial positive experience with the academic staff.

Florence also commenced a degree program and was struggling after two years juggling family, work and studies. Florence reports on the incredible support she received when she went to talk to her course coordinator:

I was struggling with my course and wanted to stop. I went to see my course coordinator, and she said ‘Oh I’m very happy you came to talk to me’ … She suggested I defer my degree and do Certificate IV … [and] they transferred some of my credits from the degree … I’m really happy I did this one [Certificate IV] first because it’s practical and I learned many things, very useful in my degree now … Yeah she [course coordinator] showed me better way for my problem (Interview with Florence, 18/06/09).

When Florence was asked why she was confident to go and talk to the course coordinator, she replies:

I believed if I talked to her, she will be able to help me …. I have always had confidence that she is experienced and good person [and] you can trust for honest advice [because] all the time she is interested in how I was doing with my studies, even she will ask about my kids (Interview with Florence, 18/06/09).

Similar to Indio and Florence, many of the participants reported that they had progressed and completed their educational and learning goals because of the immense academic and pastoral support they received from institutional staff. They stressed that they persisted in their education because they did not want to disappoint committed staff who valued and shared their determination and aspirations through their support.
5.3.1.3 Group and peer support

The participants’ sociocultural practices encouraged group-generated knowledge and problem-solving (Onsando & Billett, 2009), and several reported positively on how learning in groups with their colleagues and peers gave them a sense of belonging and confidence. They belonged to different affinity groups, including ethnic, academic, professional and religious groups. They utilised their relationships with their colleagues and peers in these affiliations to develop important skills for their survival. Lea Astin’s (1993) study shows “the strongest single source of influence on cognitive and affective development is [one’s] peer group because working together enables people to learn from each other” (cited in Tett & Maclachlan, 2008, p. 667). She further points out that in learning contexts, people make meaning with others “because learning is a social activity as well as a cognitive process, and part of that meaning for … learners is learning who they are, that they are not different or alone in struggling to master the technicalities of our [the dominant society's] conventions” (p. 667). Group and team learning provided space for the participants to learn and practise working out differences and negotiation skills, which they later transferred into their interactions with people in the wider community. Through group and peer learning activities, they developed a network of acquaintances to meet their social and professional needs. Furthermore, their sense of who they are changed within the group learning contexts, and helped them to re-create their identity, assert their agency, and form objective attitudes, as highlighted by Carol in the following quote:

Class discussion groups allowed me to learn from my peers and vice-versa … It was intimidating at first, but gradually I learned to negotiate my stance [and] I guess my mates got to know me and started respecting my views … Eventually some of my views changed [and] I began to like them, yeah appreciate and respect their opinions, not taking things too personal [and] I felt I was part of the mob …
They [course mates] helped me with my work [and] personal things like getting my first car (laughs). Two of my classmates … helped me [because] I didn’t know what I was looking for … I can recall so many incidents where many of them went out of their way to help me--sharing their notes, giving me lifts home … they were extremely helpful! … I learned so much, yeah being objective [and] open about a whole lot of things (Interview with Carol, 6/06/09).

Carol’s group learning through discussions and collective tasks assisted her social attitudes, values and relationships with people from the wider community. This finding confirms Heaney’s (1995) observation that “when learning is defined as an individual’s ongoing negotiation with communities of practice, this ultimately gives definition to both self and that practice, [and] explains adult learning in a variety of social groups and settings” (cited in Merriam, Courtenay & Baumgartner, 2003, p. 173). Some of the participants also found the support of their colleagues ‘in the same boat’ quite incredible. Jomey talks about her colleagues in AMEP and the valuable support and encouragement they provided as they developed into a learning community that inspired each other beyond their academic aspirations:

AMEP helped me lots! When I got here first, there were few African women in AMEP, mainly Asian women and Bosnian … but I go there and I talk, talk, [and] talk to all the women who [are] in the same boat with me, no English and we laugh and I forget my problems and loneliness. I didn’t like weekends because I missed my classmates. That time we [are] sharing our problems together … Now we all speak good English and we [are] still friends (Interview with Jomey, 29/06/09).

Jomey points out that the group learning gave her the opportunity to share her experiences, fears and anxieties with her peers and vice-versa. In sharing their experiences, Jomey was reassured when she learned that other members had similar challenges. Jomey and her classmates also felt that even though they were not proficient in English, they were not deficient or ‘lesser human beings’ but they were capable learners. As the group members started to phone each other, assist in getting employment in the wider community and practise their language skills, their learning
group shifted emphasis from learning as transmission, to learning as doing and a social activity where “collaborative practices mediate opportunities for learning” (Guile & Young, 2001, p. 59). Through group and peer support, the participants were able to make meaning of their situation in a comfortable and emotionally safe environment. As highlighted by Jomey, in sharing their experiences and useful strategies for getting employment, the multicultural student group that Jomey was part of learned how to navigate the system with their limited English to avoid isolation, exclusion and extend their networks. They therefore developed strong bonds of friendship, sharing their networks and ideas through mutual learning that allowed for collective consciousness-raising and transformative learning to occur (Freire, 1973; Mezirow, 2000). Clearly, Jomey and her classmates bonded as a social support system and emotional ballast in facing settlement challenges and learning English together. Their mutuality in working together regardless of their heterogeneous ethnic backgrounds, and differences show how common goals of migrancy can be a force for empowering and transformative learning in the time of transition.

The support from peers and group members complemented participants’ formal learning through informal and incidental learning, boosting their emotional well-being, their self-confidence and self-esteem. The personal relationships that developed within the different groups resulted in group members frequently reciprocating in socially supportive ways. These networks helped the participants to develop the communicative competence and sociocultural practices they needed to engage productively in their new society as well as the relationships of reciprocity and trust required for the accumulation
of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000; Field & Schuller, 1997; Putnam, 1995).

Similar to this study, Norman and Hyland identified in their study that social interaction is a major factor in increasing people’s confidence. They conclude that “although the individual learner can affect his/her own level of confidence, [lecturers] tutors, peers, mentors and workplace supervisors help increase the learner’s confidence by providing support, encouragement and constructive feedback” (2003, p. 270). This study’s findings on social support networks are also consistent with several studies which point out that social support networks promote a sense of agency and empowerment in migrants and refugee women because such relationships provide the emotional and informational support that women require for sociocultural, economic and political advancement (Cakir & Guneri, 2011; Gibb et al., 2008; McMichael & Manderson, 2004; Tatsoglou & Miedema, 2000).

5.3.2 Employment

Since the main source of regular social contact with wider Australians is often through the workplace, employment is viewed as a significant factor in helping migrants and refugees with acculturation, exclusion and invisibility (Liebig, 2007; Mestan, 2008). Many authors including Colic-Peisker identify employment as a significant factor in the successful integration of migrants and refugees because “employment seems to be the single most important aspect of successful resettlement and social inclusion in general” (2003, p. 17, see also Bloch, 2004; Gartrell, Edwards & Graffam, 2006; Khoo & McDonald, 2001). In this study, volunteering and casual employment emerged as
important learning and adaptive strategies because despite their pre-migration professional credentials many of the participants’ efforts to gain appropriate employment were constrained by institutional and structural barriers, and they resorted to transitioning into voluntary work and low-paid precarious jobs to overcome these barriers.

Volunteering is a significant activity in Australia, and people volunteer for various reasons, ranging from altruism to learning new knowledge and skills for personal growth and career advancement (Volunteering Australia, 2007). The majority of Australians express altruistic reasons for volunteering, and similarly many of the participants indicated that they volunteered because they wanted to ‘pay back’ to the wider society. In particular, all the 14 refugee participants stated that they wanted to give back to the community as they had enjoyed the hospitality and compassion of the Australian government and local people during the initial stages of their settlement. Other participants expressed that they used volunteering as a strategy to engage in their new community, gain access to labour market opportunities, obtain local work experience as well as increase their confidence “while strengthening personal, family and community capacity” (Leong, 2008, p. 67). This corroborates Faris’ suggestion that “learning acquired through volunteer work is a major motivation for many volunteers [migrants and refugees] who wish to gain new skills” (2005, p. 30). The participants who undertook voluntary work found it highly useful in a number of ways as illustrated below in some representative quotes:

I was working as volunteer in my children’s school and virtually walked into a job. I actually started volunteering because I was new [and] wanted to know the area, make friends [and] be part of the school community … This position came up and one of the parents nominated me and I got it (Interview with Therese, 12/05/09).
I started baby-sitting for my neighbours and one of them was a volunteer at the women’s shelter. They needed more volunteers [so] I went with her ... I worked in different admin. jobs [and] got to understand Aussie jargons [and] the nature of work ... When this position came up, they asked me to apply [and] I got it ... I recommend this [volunteering] to new migrants and refugees all the time, because it’s the best way to put your foot in the door ... We Africans are new here and there are all sorts of myths about us [and] apart from making friends, it [volunteering] is a way of proving your worth, giving employers opportunity to learn about us. Most of the people who listen to my advice and do volunteer [work] end up getting [paid] work (Interview with Mangi, 8/06/09).

These participants’ excerpts indicate that volunteering was a successful stepping stone to labour market opportunities because they were able to demonstrate their competence and create relationships and networks that assisted them to gain paid employment. Their participation in volunteering activities allowed them to learn and develop new skills, while building cultural and social capital in the new environment (Bourdieu, 1986).

Some of the participants also reported that to carry out their volunteer tasks, they were given orientation and formal training for volunteers. This formal and informal learning through volunteering, improved their working knowledge and skills, which heightened their confidence and self-worth to enroll in further education and training. The following quote from Vilma illustrate how her increased knowledge and skills through volunteering gave her confidence to carve out a career in childcare:

I was pregnant with [name] and my husband left me. I got depressed [and] I used to take my son to day care and I will volunteer to stay there because I was lonely … They were doing training for Certificate II for Childcare and the boss [manager] asked me to join ….She [manager] gave me full-time job when I finished training … I learned loads of English and Australian ways from the kids. You know [for] kids, they don’t judge you, they just want to have fun – like if I say something and they don’t understand, they will crack up and say it with their Aussie accent and I will repeat and we all crack up … when I don’t know the name for something. I will trick them [and] say tell me the name before I can give you, [and] that’s how I learned. I didn’t feel nervous and afraid learning with them. This really helped me get confident again after all my problems Uhm, it was fantastic learning experience (Interview with Vilma, 8/07/09).
Vilma gained a sense of purpose and achievement through her volunteer activities which helped to rebuild her confidence and self-esteem. Similar to many of the participants, she identified communication skills, learning local terms, jargon and refining her accent as some of the important learning through volunteering. Vilma also reports that whilst she had volunteered to get over her depression and isolation, the friendships from the centre’s community – staff, students, parents and in particular the manager – gave her a sense of belonging which eventually helped her to discover a career pathway and became part of the centre’s ‘family’. She learned a lot from the kids, developed new skills and interests that led to her career in childcare. For participants such as Vilma, volunteering helped to create “friendly alliances and forge bonds of fraternity well beyond the private sphere of kin and personal companions” (Wilkinson & Bittman, 2002, p. 18). Similar to the immigrant women in Tastsoglou and Miedema’s (2000, 2005) studies in Canada, making friends and creating social networks were important outcomes of the participants’ volunteer work in this study.

The participants’ excerpts exemplify the way in which volunteering became a learning process enabling them to see the opportunities they have within the complex and often confusing system of structured inequality, and how to navigate through the system to their advantage. Volunteering also offered them opportunities to experience positive companionship and bonds of mutual regard which were transformed into forms of civic engagement. The strategy of volunteering to gain appropriate local work experience, understand the employment system and workplace culture, create networks and get local references for paid employment was successful for the majority of the participants as indicated from their narratives. The experiential learning from volunteering assisted the
participants to regain human, cultural and social capital, self-esteem and confidence (Bourdieu, 1986; Brettell, 2005; Erel & Tomlinson 2005; Guo, 2007; Schugurensky & Mündel, 2005; Slade, You & Schugurensky, 2006; Tomlinson 2010; Volunteering Australia, 2007). The finding confirms Beeckman’s statement that “volunteering is at the heart of community building. It brings the individual self-esteem, a sense of usefulness and is one of the most powerful ways to create and enhance a sense of community belonging and social cohesion” (2012, p. 4). Elsdon also indicates that incidental learning including “confidence, empowerment, making constructive relationships, organizational learning and ability to shoulder responsibility” (1995, p. 79), was the most important and valuable learning that happened during volunteering.

Apart from volunteering, some of the participants engaged in casual employment as they accepted work in positions that were below their qualifications. They sought employment with employers who were sympathetic to their circumstances and while these jobs were often underpaid and unstable, the participants indicated that they felt respected, confident, useful and took pride in their contribution to their host community by providing accessible services to marginalised people. Such workplaces were used at various times by the participants to re-launch their career, learn about Australian workplace culture, and for mutual support. For example, Carol, whilst studying for her degree, was employed by a non-profit organisation to assist new migrants and refugees overcome cultural barriers and achieve self-reliance. The salary was low, but Carol enjoyed her work because of the positive working environment:

The salary wasn’t all that good but at least I felt that my boss appreciated my input on different issues and I was able to help other migrants and refugees … I learned heaps … [and] by the time I finished my degree and started a proper job with
I was aware of workplace issues, employee rights [and] confident to negotiate my salary, so I guess it helped me heaps (Interview with Carol, 6/06/09).

Kiden, whilst waiting for an apprenticeship position, took a casual labourer’s job and talks about her learning experience:

I worked for the banana farm [and] I learned many Aussie things [because] my supervisor was a very good man … One day, I told him you have to take my pay [wage] because you helped me with my English and Australian history (laughs). I was learning plenty Aussie ways because all the people [staff] liked talking with me [and] they were teaching me the history about Aboriginal people, white people coming from Britain [and] Islanders working in farms … They were really good, happy people – yeah all the time they were making Aussie jokes and I picked many things from them (Interview with Kiden, 13/05/09).

As noted in the participants’ excerpts, the workplace became another source of regular social contact with people from different cultures and native English speakers and offered them real life situations for sociocultural and language learning. Whilst engaging with the wider community through casual employment and volunteering, many of the participants acquired intercultural competency and the necessary skills to negotiate and articulate entry into appropriate employment and further education and training. This demonstrates that volunteering and casual employment were powerful sources of learning and pathway to paid employment for the participants. The workplace also offered a safe haven and a new form of acceptance and community because the support network of work colleagues that the workplace provided lessened their feeling of loneliness and gave them space to find mutual support. The sense of belonging and the feeling of usefulness to their new society were important to the participants, who had experienced discrimination, loss of familial networks, self-esteem and self-confidence. These findings are consistent with other studies which reveal that migrants and refugees require access to labour market opportunities to develop and enhance the necessary
skills to cope with settlement challenges (Bloch, 2004; Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2007; Liebig, 2007); and echoes Hannan’s suggestion that for migrants and refugees:

Employment provides a vehicle for rebuilding trust in society – a concrete way of moving into action and taking back control of their life again. This involves re-establishing oneself by rebuilding one’s identity, so that it is no longer associated solely with being a [migrant or] refugee and potentially a victim (2004, p. 27).

5.3.3 Resilience and determination

Resilience, which is a positive adaptation in the face of adversity (Boadu, 2003; Gebre, 2008; Schweitzer, Greensdale & Kagee, 2007) is another theme encountered in this study. This character strength and attributes such as determination, persistence and tenacity served as facilitating factors in the participants’ learning journey. Resilience was displayed by all the participants, as they talked repeatedly about their inner drive to improve their circumstances in Australia. Many of the respondents had been through turbulent social, cultural and political conditions, surviving civil wars, apartheid and patriarchal practices of oppression and prejudice. As they endured these sociocultural and political challenges, they developed resilience in confronting limitations and boundaries. This indicates that these facilitating factors are deeply rooted in the participants’ antecedent cultures that teach them to be resilient in the face of adversity. Throughout the interviews both migrant and refugee participants revealed that the knowledge and skills they gained, and lessons learned from their pre-migration challenges built the resilience and determination that propelled them through their settlement, education and learning challenges. As Sally explains, African women’s resiliency that motivates them to persist during adversities is deeply rooted in the antecedent cultures:

We have three children [and] I work full-time, study part-time, [and] my friends think I’m a superwoman because I don’t complain and say negative things about
my situation. But yeah, I think this positive, strong attitude may be cultural with us Ghanaians [because] you know how it’s like taboo to say negative things about yourself. It’s like we believe saying or thinking something negative is self-fulfilling prophecy so whatever the situation, you just shake yourself and move on (Interview with Sally, 5/06/09).

Sally’s statement is reinforced by Mangi who says:

My mother taught us not to allow problems to define us. And I guess she meant [that] instead of allowing life’s problems [and] difficulties to destroy us, rather we should allow them [to] refine us, improve our lives [and] learn from them. Yeah when you are down, you adapt or disappear … it’s like you go through the mill several times and then you get so strong every problem just drops off your back (laughs). I guess I grow stronger through my problems and that’s why I am so resilient … ‘No pain, no gain’ is my mantra (Interview with Mangi, 8/06/09).

For many of the refugee participants, the loss of loved ones, coupled with the deprivation of basic human rights built their inner strength and promoted resilience. Many of them compared their pre- and post-migration circumstances and reframed their experiences positively to indicate that they had gained enough strength to be resilient and determined in coping with settlement issues from their pre-migration life conditions. For instance, Lacha explains that her personal history of civil war, dispossession and loss of family members, had given her mental strength to face her settlement challenges.

After going through problems for war – no food, losing family, I am now [a] strong woman. I [have] survived many bad things in my life [and] any problem I face for this place, I [have] got my way to make things good … People ask me why I am laughing all the time [and] I don’t get depressed, [but] I can’t, because I [have] seen worse things. I may not be happy with the things happening in my life now but they won’t break me (Interview with Lacha, 22/06/09).

The participants’ emphasis on their resilience and other attributes as facilitating factors did not mean that they were not affected by the challenges they experienced. On the contrary, it illustrates their capacity to deal with some of these challenges, turning the negatives into positives to facilitate their learning process. For instance, as earlier highlighted by Mercy (Section 4.3.2.5), the racism she experienced from one of her
lecturers was turned into a positive. Instead of giving up the pursuit of further education in the same university, it made her stronger and more determined. Mercy puts it this way:

I think that racist experience gave me strength to prove I can study for anything when I work hard [and] since I finished my degree I [have] done many courses. I am doing my masters now [and] I know one day … I will do my doctorate like you [laughs] (Interview with Mercy, 5/06/09).

Fatuma also complained about the exploitation (Section 4.3.2.6) from an employment agency during work-placement that she believed would provide her with paid employment to move out of welfare benefits. Even though she was disappointed with the outcome, Fatuma reflected on her learning experience and realised that further education would give her the opportunity to change her circumstance. She decided to return to TAFE to complete Certificates II and III in Community Services Work that assisted her to get a “real job”. She felt exploited but rather than turn away from education and stay on welfare benefits, she used her experience to articulate a future that would prevent further exploitation. All the participants displayed enormous amounts of resilience and determination as they seemed to bounce back quickly from negative issues, became more driven to succeed and stay focused on their goals. They were very open to discuss their problems and it was remarkable how they seized the opportunities they were given in their host society while still carrying their past horrendous experiences. They ended such discussions with positive statements about their hope and faith in God and the future, demonstrating their resilience and fortitude, illustrated in Kalumburu’s statement below:

I believe that God has given me a purpose [and] nothing is daunting … Another thing that keeps me going is, as a child my parents always told me, ‘The sky is your limit’ … so I’m always determined to get over whatever challenges I encounter to finish whatever I start. That’s why I always tell my students, ‘The sky is your limit
[and] if you want to change your situation through education, you have to be in the driver’s seat of your learning and allow me your lecturer to be your guide’. These beliefs and attitudes really help me to focus and feel that nothing is unattainable. My values, beliefs through my faith really strengthen me, give me the inner drive and resilience that keep me on the ball (Interview with Kalumburu, 5/07/09)

All the participants are resiliently resourceful, exhibiting high levels of personal strength and resilience in dealing with their transition into a new society and this facilitated their learning process. It helped them to navigate and manoeuvre through barriers and challenges permeated by the intersections of race, gender, ethnicity, migration and refugee status. Bryce-Laporte (1982) comments on the resilience, tenacity and persistence of African immigrants; “as a selection of people, Black immigrants represent persons who are highly disposed to run risks and engage in sacrificial, persistent, and ingenious activities in order to accomplish their life goals” (cited in Boadu, 2003, p. 136). Schweitzer et al. (2007), in their study of the coping resources of Sudanese refugees in Australia, found that the participants’ inner strength promoted resilience that gave them the determination and perseverance to face their settlement challenges. Mc Hutchison states that “refugees and migrants are motivated, resilient and hardworking … almost all would study further to enhance their employment prospects … [and] are incredibly keen to make a contribution to their new homeland” (2011, p. 1). Mueke also found in his studies that after years of surviving conflicts, oppression and painful separation from their familiar contexts, many migrants and refugees become resilient and develop “social competence” (1992, p. 520) which helps them to cope with barriers, obstacles and numerous challenges in their host communities.
5.3.4 Spirituality and faith in God

Another key finding in this study was the participants’ involvement in religious institutions. As migrants and refugees who have experienced lots of relocations and subsequent changes, the participants mentioned that their spirituality and faith in God constituted ‘rare constants’ in their dramatically changed circumstances in their new society. As declared earlier by Kalumburu, almost all of the participants reported that when they faced difficulties, their trust and belief in God became their anchor as they offered meaning for events they could not control, and assisted them to accept some of the irreconcilable circumstances they experienced. Many of the participants, including Bridget Jones, made references to God as the source of their inner strength and inspiration demonstrating hope, faith and spirituality when confronted with personal and institutional barriers. She substantiated her spirituality with Bible passages summing up her faith in Psalms 23 (The Lord is my shepherd) and 91 (The Lord is my refuge and my fortress). Bridget Jones further adds:

Growing up in the church with my father as a Reverend Minister, I have always been strong in my faith in the Lord [and] that has really helped me – keep me grounded and sane in lots of issues … when you feel guided and protected in whatever happens to you by a superior God, it helps! It sustains you – quite fulfilling, [and] peaceful to know that God is with you in good and bad times (Interview with Bridget Jones, 9/07/09).

Bridget Jones’ excerpt echoes the sentiments of other participants who referred to God as the stabilising force in their lives. They believe they were resettled in Australia because God has positive plans for them. The participants’ narratives about their beliefs concur with Gladden’s finding that “religious beliefs form the backbone of refugee [and migrants] beliefs about their situations, their futures, their ability to make meaning out of events that have taken place in their lives” (2012, p. 188). As part of their religious
beliefs and spirituality, 23 participants indicated they belonged to religious institutions (church/mosque) which played a major role in the social, cultural, economic and psychological adjustment they required during the settlement process. Participation in religious activities formed a crucial activity for these participants because they provided a milieu they were familiar with, and the religious practices and activities provided emotional connection to their country of origin. Similar to the South Asian women in George and Chaze’s study, “attending religious services provided the participants with solace and healing through prayer, in a manner that was in keeping with their religious upbringing” (2009, p. 275). Apart from the opportunity for praying and worshipping together as equals, these institutions involved the participants in their religious activities and provided them with a platform to share their experiences. Indio acknowledges such experiences when she states:

I work closely with kids and lead the Sunday School team. My involvement has helped them [church management] to realise our [Africans] spiritual gifts … we even have ‘African Day’ every first Sunday of the month and we organise everything and usually finish with African lunch. Many of us [Africans] do church cleaning, morning tea, home fellowship, fundraising … We feel like part of the church family [and] I can honestly say from my church environment that we all share as equals in Christ’s family. It’s great opportunity for us Africans to have such supportive environment to build our confidence, make good friends, develop [and] share our spiritual gifts … Our choir even performed at the Darwin Festival recently [and] yeah if you look at American blacks like the actors and singers, they have humble beginnings from local churches. So who knows? Only God! (Interview with Indio, 11/06/09).

Indio’s comments illustrate the cross-cultural integrative function of the church because the mainstream members interact on equal terms with the African members, which give the latter, a perceived notion of equality and acceptance. These religious institutions served as ‘safe havens’ for the participants’ social interaction with people from the wider society and opportunities to participate and contribute to society, which help with their
integration (Hirschman, 2004). As articulated by Indio, the social, emotional and spiritual support, acceptance from the mainstream congregants, encouragement and inclusion in church activities, assisted the African congregants to cope with experiences of prejudice and exclusion. The participants’ involvement with the church/mosque’s activities helped them in public speaking, becoming more assertive, independent, confident and resourceful. These are skills they needed to successfully engage productively in their new society. At the time of the interview, 18 participants revealed that they were serving in leadership and civic roles in different Christian and Islamic faith groups. Hence, participation in the activities of religious institutions became a strategy that provided the participants with learning opportunities, avenues for social advancement, leadership, community service, respectability and opportunities for status recognition and social mobility. The participants also indicated that because of their faith and belief in God, they did not feel hopeless or see themselves as victims. Previous studies (Donkor, 2000; Goodman, 2004; Khawaja, White, Schweitzer & Greensdale, 2008), have found that religious faith was one of the major coping strategies for African migrants and refugees. Oh and Yoshikawa (2011) reported on how migrants and refugees’ faith and spirituality gave them inner peace, tranquility and direction in life when faced with struggles and challenges during settlement. Similarly, Nanton’s (2005) study found that the women participants’ faith in God was a transcendent support in coping with life challenges, and for constructing knowledge and meaning-making in their learning experiences. For the participants in this study, their faith in God was a resource and a source of support and hope. Overall, the participants’ spirituality and the religious organisations that they participated in strengthened their resolve to succeed in their new society.
5.4 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the strategies the participants accessed to build their capacity and confront their settlement challenges in their host community. The participants identified adult education as a significant strategy in building their human, cultural and social capital to survive in their host society. This was palpable from their narratives, which entailed hope for better life for themselves, their families and communities. The willingness and high levels of motivation to avail themselves of educational opportunities in their new environment are encapsulated in the unanimous expressions of their determination to effectively engage and contribute to the sociocultural, economic and political activities of their new society. They were enthused by education and learning as a panacea to their successful settlement in Australia.

The chapter has also presented a range of settlement and educational support programs provided by the participants’ accounts of their personal and social worlds, which helped them acquire human agency to change and gain control over their lives. Through these mechanisms, the women built cultural and social capital by engaging in new social interactions with people in the course of accessing networks and resources that were previously beyond their reach. The different strategies which helped to foster the capacity within the participants to build and maintain trustworthy relationships, indicating social capital were also discussed. For instance, through formal, non-formal, and informal learning, the participants gradually obtained knowledge and skills required for the development of social networks and social capital. The different relationships and networks that the participants developed with other students, work colleagues and neighbours provided them with further education and learning opportunities.
While this chapter has focused on educational attainment, learning strategies, coping mechanisms, and personal attributes that facilitated the participants’ learning journeys, the next chapter will focus on the outcomes and achievements from the participants’ adult education and learning.
Chapter 6: Outcomes and achievements from adult education and learning

My education has helped me tremendously—yeah to have the strength, resilience and perseverance to overcome the initial barriers and challenges, and do things for myself and my family, is no small feat … To understand the complex systems and conventions—for me is all because of my education! Education is the key to my success here [and] I can attest to the confidence it [education] gives you to do things when you are [a] migrant and refugee. I am a living example! (Interview with Carol, 6/06/09).

Chapter 5 discussed how the respondents in this study engaged in adult education and learning activities in formal, non-formal and informal contexts as strategies to gain the knowledge, information and skills required for managing the changes in their lives and surviving in their new country.

This chapter focuses on the adult learning outcomes and achievements identified by the participants. Carol’s extract above encapsulates the various outcomes and achievements gained by the majority of the participants through adult education. These include their empowerment, English language proficiency, increased participation in the labour-force, and social and community involvement, culminating in individual and collective progress and transformation. The chapter is structured as follows: Section 6.1 discusses the participants’ empowerment as a result of their education and learning. Section 6.2 presents achievements in English language, economic and community participation, family engagement and well-being. The discussions highlight the relative importance of the participants’ accomplishments as measures of their individual and community capacity that enabled them to overcome barriers and challenges, and achieve successful settlement and integration in their new community. Section 6.3 summarises the
outcomes and achievements of the participants’ education and learning. The following research questions guide the focus of this chapter:

*How does African-Australian women’s capacity to operate in their community change through adult education?*

*What is the role and impact of adult education in the settlement and integration process of African-Australian women in the NT?*

### 6.1 Education, learning and women’s empowerment

The participants’ engagement in education, learning and re-skilling activities were empowerment tools that allowed them to access opportunities, carry out their civic responsibilities and make decisions for themselves and their families. As discussed in the literature review (Chapter 2), while there are multiple theoretical and operational definitions of women’s empowerment, a small number of concepts underpin the definitions. These include options, choice, control and power, greater access to knowledge and resources, and the ability to make decisions and influence outcomes that are important to women and their families (Batliwala, 1994; Kabeer, 1999; Rowlands, 1997; Stromquist, 1995; UNDP, 2005; UNFPA, 2004; World Bank, 2004, 2008).

This study conceptualised empowerment through the participants’ experiences and perspectives, as the development of agency, self-efficacy, self-confidence, self-worth and concomitant attitudes and behaviours that helped them confront their settlement issues. During the interviews, many of the participants reported how they felt empowered and liberated as they developed cognitive skills, competence and attitudes through their education to effectively confront and overcome their issues. They talked
about how their educational experiences have resulted in changes of their views of themselves and others. They highlighted the changes in other people’s perception of themselves, growth in status, and respect and acceptance from others. The respondents also reflected on their significant personal growth manifested by their new knowledge, skills and attitudes, increased confidence and self-esteem, as well as enhanced opportunities and ability to engage effectively in their new community. They talked about being more reflective and tolerant, feeling stronger and more empowered. Mangi, for example, believes that with her new sense of confidence she can “make decisions and not feel guilty because I know what I want, and nobody can toss me round” (Interview with Mangi, 8/06/09). The strength and knowledge she gained to assert herself is clearly illustrated in her excerpt reported earlier (Section 4.3.2.5). The empowering aspects of education as perceived by the respondents are captured in the following excerpt by Kalumburu:

By the time I finished the course, I was confident that I could do more. It’s just that sense of empowerment, yeah achievement you know, the ability to engage in problem-solving issues, assert and justify your inclusion – be it at work, the family – the ability to make worthwhile, informed decisions that affect me, my kids and even my students [and] my ability to engage confidently and effectively with power structures at work and in the community … For instance, when I completed my Cert. IV Workplace Assessment, my boss was dilly-dallying who to appoint as coordinator in our team and I queried him because I was the only one who completed that training and I got the position. Well, before that time, I’ll just let [it] go (Interview with Kalumburu, 5/07/09).

Similarly, Carol discusses her newfound awareness and consciousness through her education thus:

As I continue learning, I become aware and conscious of how education has opened several doors and windows for me. It’s very empowering [and] I don’t know how to articulate some of these feelings and thoughts – but it’s like a re-birth and you are never the same. It makes you strong – like giving you wings to fly (Interview with Carol, 6/06/09).
The increase and growth in self-confidence, self-esteem, independence and passion for continued learning implicit in the participants’ stories are also reported in a number of studies on marginalised adult women learners from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Abbott-Chapman, Braithwaite & Godfrey, 2004; McGivney, 1999; O'Shea & Stone, 2011; Tett, 2000).

Some of the participants, including May, describe their educational outcomes in emancipatory terms and share how their own education has increased their knowledge, skills and confidence, allowing them to eliminate some of the patriarchal norms they encounter as women, as they challenge traditional gender roles. They speak about the shift in their perceptions about their positionality and power, and attribute these to their education, as May asserts:

Education helped me lots for this place. If not for education [ex-husband] will still be kicking [and] cheating me … I left him because I can work with my paper [certificate], and look after my children … You think my daughter, [name] will be door mat for men when she grows up? [laughs] No way! She is gonna follow my footsteps, take education seriously because she knows the power education can give you is freedom [and] strong mind that you can be same person like man … get a job and good life (Interview with May, 10/06/09).

It is apparent from May’s assertion that there are some changes in the traditional hierarchy within her household. She indicates that education empowers women to take actions that challenge patriarchal norms and become role models for their children, particularly daughters.

The above-mentioned excerpts confirm Gwako’s observation of Kenyan women that, “education opens a broader range of options for women and generally makes them more receptive to new ideas” (1997, p. 140). Several other evaluations of women’s education have equally reported the profound change in women and different understandings of
“self” through education which impact on self-esteem and feelings of empowerment (Belenky et al., 1997; Burchfield et al. 2002a, 2002b; European Association for the Education of Adults [EAEA], 2010; Hossain, 2012; Jejeebhoy, 1995; Medel-Añonuevo, 1995; Stromquist, 2002; UNESCO, 2009).

6.2 Impact of adult education and learning

In this study, the notion of empowerment expounded by the participants in their narratives is similar to Kabeer’s study, which highlights change that expands “people’s ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them” (1999, p. 437). As illustrated in the participants’ narratives, they perceived their empowerment developed through education built their capacity to make effective choices and transformed those choices into their desired outcomes. They were able to redefine their power relationships at the familial and community levels. The various indicators that the participants used to determine the levels of empowerment as outcomes and achievements of their adult education and learning included, their English Language proficiency, labour-force participation, social and community participation, and family well-being. These themes will be discussed in the following sections.

6.2.1 Impact of education on English proficiency and communicative competence

English is the official language in Australia, hence its proficiency ranks as one of the key human capital traits that migrants require to succeed in their settlement (Chiswick & Miller, 2007). The participants in this study showed strong achievement in English language skills and communicative competence. As migrants and refugees, they believed that their ability to operate in English effectively had a direct impact on their
successful integration in their new society, which confirms earlier findings (Creese, 2010; Stewart & Nam Do, 2003). Schuller et al. note that, “knowing English is fundamental to the … integration of migrants and refugees and can transform their lives” (2002, p. vii).

All the participants currently speak English fluently and credit their proficiency to their education and learning in different contexts. Throughout the interviews, many of the participants stated that their English language proficiency was critical in various aspects of their lives because it allowed them to engage constructively and productively in their new society. They highlighted the important role that their English competence played in facilitating successful settlement, including a pathway to building social networks and employment, accessing information for education and community services, and participating effectively in their respective communities. English proficiency also gave them the opportunity to socialise with people outside their families and ethnic communities, and to establish new networks. It improved their leadership and networking abilities, which in turn increased their self-confidence and led to their participation in different community activities. For instance, Fatuma who used to rely solely on interpreters when she first arrived in Australia, shares her joy of not having to rely on “strangers” to translate and intervene on her behalf:

Now I don’t need help to do things like before because I know English … it’s a good feeling for me … because I don’t need interpreter to talk my secrets for my doctor, Centrelink, school, [and] shop (Interview with Fatuma, 19/06/09).

Fatuma’s ability to speak for herself without an interpreter made a considerable difference in her personal life as she can independently and confidently access resources and most importantly preserve her dignity because she no longer has to worry about
confidential information and inaccurate translation of her information. The enormous benefits of English language competency that Fatuma and other participants shared in this study have been noted among other African migrants and refugees. Kariuki observes in her study of African refugee women that the self-reliance and confidence gained from linguistic and communication skills were integral to their ability to “break the dependency syndrome, rediscover their sense of dignity and reaffirm confidence in their capacity to solve their problems” (1998, p. 143).

The acquisition of English language skills also improved the participants’ standards of living. They were able to obtain resources and draw on previously inaccessible information, community services and institutions, including further education and re-training opportunities leading to increased productivity. As reported earlier (Section 5.2.2.1) 11 participants reported that their successful English language education inspired them for further studies. Marienne, who initially spoke fluent French and limited English, says:

My English helped me make many good friends, get my job [and] really gave me confidence to do many studies. After I finished AMEP, I did my disability course, business certificate, started the shop … now I’m doing my nursing (Interview with Marienne, 3/07/09).

Likewise, Manninen (2009) found in his Swedish study that the majority (93 percent) of migrant students’ proficiency in the host country’s official language motivated them to enroll in further studies. The participants’ linguistic skills enabled them to make connections and be part of mainstream Australian social and cultural life. Their deep sense of belonging in the host community as a result of their language proficiency and communication skills is captured by Mangi:
Having strong understanding of English has been the best part of my education because it has given me a deep sense of belonging [and] helped [me] make lots of progress … Ehmm, Nelson Mandela said, ‘You speak to a man in a language he understands, it goes to his head but you speak to a man in his own language, it goes to his heart (laughs). This is so true because people easily accept me when I speak English like them (Interview with Mangi, 8/06/09).

The participants’ English language proficiency also expanded their capacity to learn and adapt to new technologies. They were confident using the internet and other social media with people outside their familial networks; this helped to create and establish new relationships and networks. As expressed by Kiden, English in Australia is both an individual and social possession because an understanding of the language signifies social membership. Hence learning and being able to speak English allowed her to interact and reach out to the broader Australian community and make friends with people from a wide range of ethno-cultural backgrounds. She states:

My friends are not only Africans. I have Aboriginal friends, white people [and] friends from Brazil, PNG and Asians because I speak good English now. I feel confident approaching different people. They understand me and I understand them [because] we all speak English (Interview with Kiden, 13/05/09).

Only four of the participants had a driver’s licence on their arrival in Australia, but by the time of this interview, all indicated that they were competent and qualified drivers, and they attributed this achievement to their English proficiency. Obtaining their driver’s licence increased the respondents’ sense of autonomy as they could confidently move around and explore their new community independently. The increased physical mobility enhanced their self-confidence and involvement in social and economic activities. Their ability to drive was not only important for transporting their family and assisting other community members, but also gave them the option of getting jobs and living in areas of their choice as they did not have to restrict themselves to areas that had public transport access. They could also engage in different community events, sports
and leisure activities, which helped to expand their network and overcome their sense of isolation and loneliness.

Apart from extending their own progress with their linguistic skills, the majority of the participants acted as cultural advisors and interpreters in both their ethnic and mainstream communities. Vilma relates one such experience which she attributes to her English language proficiency:

> Education for English is life here in Darwin because without English you can die. I say this because of what I see with my two eyes at RDH. This African woman, her baby was sick. She couldn’t speak English and I interpret for her because I speak Swahili. She was very happy and told me, ‘God save my son for bringing you here’, but I said to her when you are in a new country with different people and different language, education for language [English] is life because it helps you know many things … My English helps me for everything I do here (Interview with Vilma 8/07/09).

Similarly, Esperance talks about her work with mainstream institutions as an interpreter to highlight this special role of several participants:

> Many of our people [Africans] have difficulties understanding the system especially the law with family relationships, domestic violence [and] because of my English I work as [an] interpreter … I am like a bridge helping them and government people understand each other … I do interpreting at the courts, hospital, schools and help with Family in Cultural Transition orientation for new people (Interview with Esperance, 8/06/09).

Overall, the participants shared a deep understanding of positive experiences on how their improved linguistic and communication skills have enhanced their self-reliance, independence, confidence, self-esteem, economic well-being and social integration. Several studies report that migrants’ proficiency in the host country’s official language enhances their economic and social participation and successful integration (Boyd & Cao, 2009; Chiswick & Miller, 2007; Creese, 2011; Rooth & Saarela, 2007; Schuller et al., 2002). Mattheoudakis contends:
Speaking the language of the host country enables immigrants to interact, understand and make themselves understood – to express their feelings, needs and requests, to make themselves heard, make their own culture known, make their presence felt [and] that the smooth and productive social integration of immigrants is possible only after they have mastered the language of the host country (2005, p. 323).

For all the participants, English was a great asset because their proficiency and effective communication skills provided enhancements in other aspects of their lives, such as economic and labour force participation, social and community engagement and family well-being. The impact of adult education including English language proficiency on these areas is explored further in the following sections.

6.2.2 Impact of education on labour-force participation

Consistent with earlier studies (DIAC, 2012b; Hugo, 2011; Richardson et al., 2004) the majority of the participants in this study indicated that their education has increased their access to the labour market and independent income through employment. At the time of the interview (May, 2009–February, 2010), all the participants were engaged in both paid and voluntary employment commensurate with their education and experience.

Vilma describes her enhanced vocational skills and subsequent employment:

First, I studied childcare and got the job in [name] … I work for hospital too because I did aged care. [It’s] easy to get jobs because they [employers] know I can do the job … I tell my friends [that] once you get the paper [qualification], you can talk confidently for the job and they [employers] will give you, pay good money, then you can have good life! (Interview with Vilma, 8/07/09).

The socioeconomic status of the participants measured through their employment was evident because most of the participants had moved from unemployment and underemployment to working at employment levels appropriate to their educational qualifications and skills. These jobs were a source of income, status and self-actualisation for the participants, as they had achieved their goal of participating in the
labour-force. As indicated in Vilma’s excerpt, there is unanimity among the participants that the acquisition of Australian qualifications and experience contributed to gaining access to the labour market.

Coming from patriarchal societies, where women are mainly involved in domestic roles, the opportunities education brought participants satisfied and fulfilled them. The change in gender roles as a result of their education opened a broader range of occupational choices including some traditionally male-dominated occupations, and they were also proud in gaining new employment and/or promotion in existing jobs. Indio recalls her experience before she got her TAFE lecturer’s position after completing her degree:

My degree opened doors for me because I had many offers even before this one, and when I started they made me the coordinator! Yeah I couldn’t have achieved all that with just my Cert II when I moved up here from [interstate city] (Interview with Indio, 11/06/09).

A number of studies show that women spend a large proportion of their earned income on the family by providing food, healthcare, education and home improvement (Annan, 2000; Clinton, 2011; Ki-Moon, 2010; Nanton, 2005). A similar pattern emerged in this study. With income from employment, the participants were able to provide financial assistance and invest in their families’ relationships and well-being. The participants reported that employment was more valuable in their new social context as their financial contributions were essential to their household’s survival. In a new country, a source of livelihood is an integral part of empowerment, and employment provided economic security for participants as they could afford their primary needs, such as food, housing and clothing to survive in their new environment. The participants maintained that their access to paid jobs gave them leverage and high status in their household affairs because of their financial contribution to household expenditure. They indicated
that the financial importance of their salaries to the household economy gave them increased influence in household decision making. For example, 12 out of the 15 married women revealed that they had joint responsibility for household decisions, including finances. Florence, who was married before migrating to Australia with her family, disclosed that decision making in her household had changed since her education and subsequent paid employment. She states:

Back home, he [husband] had big position with good money and he was buying everything so didn’t bother with my money…. But here we need both salaries to make ends meet … he knows I understand the life here and how to put our money together, and then we plan for our family together so we don’t get short [of money] (Interview with Florence, 18/06/09).

Florence’s comments reflect her husband’s acknowledgement of her financial contribution and the significance of her input into their family decisions, giving her an elevated status. Her comments also show the transformative process for herself and her husband grounded in personal and cross-cultural education and learning experiences. According to Collins, such transformative processes, particularly for men, “is a self-conscious struggle … to develop new interpretations of familiar realities … in order to reject patriarchal perceptions of women and to value women’s ideas and actions” (1990, p. 27). The majority of the participants also believed that their education played a crucial role in their financial emancipation from their male relatives and government sources, and effected changes not just in themselves but also within the family unit, as illustrated in the case of Florence’s husband. The participants’ self-earned income and control over their income instilled a sense of pride, confidence and self-esteem.

The participants’ education influenced their personal preferences, guiding their choice of expenditure, resulting in more prudent and efficient household management. They
invested more in goods and services relating to the acquisition of knowledge and businesses to obtain higher rates and returns. These included paying for private health insurance and further education for themselves and their children.

Similarly, UNHCR observes that during refugee resettlement, “economic self-sufficiency is one of the most important factors in successful integration, with earning capacity influencing the ability to ‘purchase’ many other resources required to rebuild life in a new country, among them health and education” (2002, p. 21). Clinton also notes that “educated women’s expenditure has a multiplier effect as they lead to social cohesion and … help ensure more educated and healthier citizens [and] more educational opportunity for children” (2011, p. 5). In addition to contributing to their household and nuclear families’ progress, many of the respondents were able to send regular remittances to their extended families and friends in their original countries and refugee camps. Jomey for example, explains how her employment allows her to provide financial assistance for her family:

When I started work, I got advance pay [wages] for my six weeks’ holidays … I sent the money to mum to go for exile in [country of refuge] with my [siblings] and use the money to find a place [accommodation] … I’m sending money every month to support them [and] do their papers to come here … I am happy for my job because I can’t help them if I didn’t get this job [and] maybe they will be killed for war by now (Interview with Jomey, 29/06/09).

It is clear from Jomey’s excerpt that the financial gains from their employment helped the participants to build a new life in Australia and fulfil financial obligations and commitments to their extended family overseas. For all these participants, their ability to contribute financially to their family members’ welfare makes them feel valued, culminating in a sense of self-importance. Their financial contribution to the development of their extended families’ quality of life through regular remittances is a
way of maintaining family relationships from a distance and fulfilling their supporting roles as mothers, daughters, sisters and aunties.

The respondents’ income also helped them to realise a range of socioeconomic benefits in private and public services, and gain access to amenities of everyday life such as houses, cars, computers and mobile phones which are important for their independence and self-sufficiency. As Kiden articulates:

All the things I do in Australia, like my work, my house, my car, unit [investment property], cleaning business, my friends, volunteer [work], how can I do them if I didn’t get education? Education opened many opportunities for me to make good money and live good life (Interview with Kiden, 13/05/09).

When prompted to elaborate, Kiden reveals:

[Ex-husband] moved out for another woman [and] if no education, I will take Centrelink money, no English, no friends, no work [and] get depression … with education, I am happy … I tell all the African women, education is very important for every woman in Australia to get [a] better future and good understanding, and you don’t feel stupid [and] alone [because] you get confidence to make friends, paper [certificate] for work, get salary for good life [and] help family (ibid).

Kiden’s story illustrates that her education, employment and financial independence positively affected other aspects of her settlement journey, including her social networks, feelings of belonging, overall emotional well-being and life satisfaction. Other participants expressed similar sentiments that their education and subsequent employment gave them the financial independence and freedom to move out of abusive relationships. These findings corroborate prior studies, including Blackwell and Bynner (2002), who note that education has a positive influence on women as “educated women have the greatest opportunity for economic independence [and] higher post-divorce self-esteem [because] their educational attainments protect them against economic hardships that follow divorce (cited in Owens, 2004, p. 13). Kabeer (1997) also found that new
waged opportunities in employment for Bangladeshi women made it possible for them to leave unhappy marriages. Other studies among African women report similar findings (Donkor, 2000; Manuh, 2000; Mapehadzama, 2007; Pacheco, 2011). The economic freedom and independence that employment offers women through education embed Sen’s position when he argues that education “enhances the lives we lead and the freedoms we enjoy. Expanding the freedoms not only makes our lives richer and more unfettered, but also allows us to be fuller social persons” (1999, p. 14), confirming the findings that education and access to economic capital enables women to control the decisions that affect their lives.

The participants were able to choose the context in which they lived and worked to increase their social status as many of them worked in prestigious and better paying jobs. They could also access credit facilities to engage in real estate as many are in the process of purchasing their own homes and a few own investment properties. Others were able to locate to safer and more secure neighbourhoods with better educational and leisure facilities for their children. Mercy states:

Education really help me stand on my feet and do things by myself … support my children and buy this house … I like this place because it’s [a] safe, quiet, nice suburb, close to my children’s school and [workplace] … My education has played a big role in my family’s stable and secured life (Interview with Mercy, 5/06/09).

Unlike recent studies reporting that refugee migrants are less likely to purchase their own homes, and use government subsidised housing (ABS, 2006b; Beer & Foley, 2003; Hugo, 2011), Mercy’s excerpt represents the majority of refugee participants (11 out of 14) who are in the process of purchasing their homes or rent privately.
A combination of the participants’ social and human capital gained through their education and training, helped them to reposition themselves in their community. In contrast to what earlier studies (Flanagan, 2007; Hugo, 2011; Taylor, 2004) report as a homogeneous group of African women who use their education for modest, subordinate positions in the caring professions, the respondents in this study are using their education in tangible ways by contributing to their ethnic and wider community’s social, and economic spheres through investment in properties and establishing small businesses. Four participants are among the growing number of African-Australian women in the NT involved in small business enterprises providing commercial services such as cleaning, childcare, and family-run shops for African goods. When asked, what has helped you in establishing and managing your business? Carol, who manages her family’s business, responds:

It’s all about the knowledge, skills, different education experiences and frameworks that help me make wise and informed management decisions … My education really gave me like a canvass [or] platform to launch from … Yeah the confidence, and courage to even contemplate and eventually establish this business … I guess these are skills you can acquire through a higher level of education and experience … it [education] is the key to everything – good job, house, quality lifestyle, doing good business [and] social mobility (Interview with Carol, 6/06/09).

The other three business owners equally attribute their entrepreneurial ability to their education and training. They indicated that education provided them with a good foundation of skills and ability for business ventures. Managing their own businesses gives them a level of autonomy, dignity and control to engage in trades they are passionate about. There is a substantial body of literature on the relationship between migration, education and entrepreneurship (ABS, 2008a; Assaf, 2008; Collins, 2008; DIAC, 2010a; Kloosterman & Rath, 2001; Odoom, 2014). Migrants and refugees’ zeal in entrepreneurial activities was evident in the 2000 Business Review Weekly’s annual
“Rich 200” list, which revealed that five of Australia’s eight billionaires were from families that had originally arrived in the country as refugees (DIAC, 2010a).

While employment was a means of acquiring economic security and independence for themselves and their families, the participants also view employment as a way of ‘giving back’ and contributing to their new country that has given them opportunities to rebuild their lives. Their labour market participation helped them to contribute to the economy as workers and taxpayers, and to the productivity of Australian economy, as explained by Fatuma:

[The Australian] government helped my family for money the time I got here. Now I finish my education, and I am very happy I can work, and I can pay tax because that one [tax] help for many, many things like houses, schools and hospitals for everybody (Interview with Fatuma, 19/06/09).

Fatuma’s reference to her income tax contribution shows how education enhanced the participants’ productivity to achieve their objectives of ‘paying back’ the generosity of the Australian government as a way of reclaiming their self-esteem and dignity. Their contribution to Australia’s economy through employment helped to re-build a positive identity as active participants in the country’s economy, not as welfare recipients. Contributing income tax through employment also assisted the participants to fulfill their civic duties and resist the media and politicians’ depiction of migrants and refugees as always ‘taking’ from the government. Their satisfaction about their contribution to Australia’s economy through their education and subsequent employment and tax is crucial for a feeling of inclusion and belonging in Australia as they are confident about their contribution to society, rather than feeling they are a drain on the economy.
Another benefit of the participants’ achievements through their education is social mobility. As migrants and refugees who were initially excluded socially, getting employment allowed them to engage in social interaction with other people from different backgrounds. Participating actively in paid and voluntary employment reduced the participants’ sense of social isolation and served as a pathway to community participation, and social inclusion, and increased their sense of belonging and social status. Bynner, Schuller and Feinstein (2003) note that even in conservative class-conscious English society, education enhances people’s social class substantially because it facilitates the development of social skills which support their confidence and advantage in the labour market and protects them against unemployment. Financial remuneration through salaries provides recognition of their contribution, but most importantly enhances economic self-reliance, confidence and self-worth. Apart from the contribution that education makes to wealth creation at the individual and societal level, Bynner et al. contend that “education is an absolute pre-requisite for the promotion of personal well-being and a cohesive society” (2003, p. 359).

Engaging in different levels of education offers the participants labour market inclusionary transitions, provides various opportunities to progress to employment, and maximises their social and economic participation in their new society. In the next section, the impact of education on the participants’ engagement in their community and family wellbeing is presented.
6.2.3 Impact of education on community participation and family engagement

The slogans, “educate a woman, and you educate a community”, “when we empower women through literacy, we empower communities, nations and the entire human family” (Ki-Moon, cited in UN Women, 2011, p. 2), and “teach the mother and reach the child” (Cuban & Hayes, 1996, p. 2) were all evident in this study. The participants indicated that their education has not only been “a significant instrument of change in their lives” (McLaren, cited in O’Shea & Stone, 2011, p. 285), but it has also affected family and community members through their activities. They shared the benefits of their education through their engagement with family and community members, culminating in the building of their community’s capacity to overcome their settlement barriers and challenges. This shows that the participants utilised their knowledge and skills from their adult education to become agents of change for their family and community members.

As discussed in Chapter 5, the majority of the participants engaged in educational activities to increase their chances of “getting better life for their children”, “help family”, “act as role model for my children and my people”, “encourage and help my community people”. It was therefore not surprising that in recalling the outcomes and achievements of their education, a recurring theme was their belief and feeling of obligation to use their education to empower themselves and the people around them. Apart from their personal achievements elaborated in the previous sections, the participants indicated that they were gratified by their knowledge, skills and confidence, which enabled them to increase their involvement in activities that benefited their family and community members. They had acquired knowledge and skills to stand up for
themselves and were willing to assist other people to do the same. Many viewed education as a process of reciprocity and shared experiences of the various ways in which their knowledge and skills enabled them to actively engage in progressive and productive family and community activities, as Florence describes:

Anytime we hear new Sudanese people are coming, we go to the airport to meet them. We help them settle with house, school for kids, Centrelink, banks [and] jobs … We like doing that for new people because … we have learned many things in the past 10 years [and] it’s good to share with our people so they don’t get confused and frustrated as many things here are different (Interview with Florence, 18/06/09).

As illustrated above, Florence and many of the participants undertake a wide range of services including the provision of social services, community welfare, advocacy and lobbying, mentoring and emotional support for other migrants and refugees. In addition, they provide information and advice on education and training, schooling, housing, transportation, childcare and interpreting for people with limited English, helping to alleviate barriers and challenges during the early stages of settlement.

Many of the respondents participated in community activities and networks inside and outside their community groups, and in a number of instances mentioned that their education and learning were the factors that contributed to their capacity to participate in these activities. Such activities also propelled many of the respondents to re-start training for careers in fields that offered them the opportunity to express their collective and civic-minded values. The following extracts provide examples of how participants’ community activities grew out of their academic disciplines, professional roles, and familiarity with their ethnic communities and the broader society. They describe ways in which adult learning experiences provided them with the tools and opportunities to engage in their communities. Bridget Jones says:
Looking back, I can see my education [and] training as stepping stones and they have had huge impact on me for who I am now in terms of the things I do in the community … I give motivational talks, mentoring, financial management … my educational experiences give me confidence to believe in my gifts and talent in public speaking … I [also] use community theatre, drama and musicals, church choir [to] help young people, women, refugees [and] Aboriginal people break down barriers [and] feel good about themselves. I enjoy helping people gain skills, empower themselves to deal with everyday issues … blossom into powerful, confident people - it’s a real joy to experience such transformation (Interview with Bridget Jones, 9/07/09).

Similarly, Therese declares:

My education has no doubts given me tremendous opportunities to commit and push my social justice beliefs in the community … For me education is a tool to do what they say in America, ‘Don’t ask what your community can do for you, but rather what you can do for your community’. Yep, helping to make changes and improve people’s lives is my goal, especially people with limited English … Coming from a French-speaking background, I know they are capable, [and] just need the language, some self-esteem [and] confidence … The positive outcomes [and] success stories from working with people [migrant and refugee families] over the years really push me to do more (Interview with Therese, 12/05/09).

It is implicit in the above stories that the respondents’ formal adult education, professional training and informal relationships have contributed to the development of a greater sense of individual and collective agency and confidence to articulate their beliefs and passion in community development. The participants’ personal developments and achievements are interrelated, with the majority reporting that their increased self-confidence as a result of their education led to their community engagement, whilst others mentioned that their initial involvement in their community activities enhanced their self-confidence to further extend their engagement. The participants’ networks and community activities varied with their educational attainments and employment because most of their networks and perspectives were formed through the institutions that enabled them to engage in activities beyond the African community. For example, Cheetah is highly educated and has held high profile jobs. She describes her holistic attitude to community engagement:
In terms of my community work, my commitment is to the whole community, not just one group, like African people … I have got to a stage where my education, life experience [and] with my ability, I engage confidently with the entire community … Recently, I was on a sub-committee for the Law Society to develop resources … [and] strategies for community education – sort of create a bridge to inform and educate different ethnic communities about the legal ramifications of daily living in Australia … I [also] have a concept for a project to raise public awareness of Territory women’s contribution to their communities’ development … [and] will highlight the works of women from all walks of life, usually the ‘unsung heroes’ (Interview with Cheetah, 17/06/09).

In addition to using their skills and networks to help people in Australia, Sheba and other participants mentioned that they also support development projects in their countries of origin. Sheba has allegiance to her Sudanese community in Australia, and often works with youth groups and the elderly. She has also maintained her connection with her country of origin and fundraises to support her father’s education project. She states:

I help Sudanese girls … [and] volunteer at youth hostels, old people’s home and Multicultural Council with [new] migrants and refugees. But I also help people back home … and raise money for my father’s education project for young people … I do this because my own education changed my life so much [and] I know [the] same thing can happen to those kids and their families (Interview with Sheba, 15/08/09).

The above extracts demonstrate the participants’ increased responsiveness, innovation, deep and multiple involvements in community activities in different realms. They were able to think in a more global way, and view the world differently as they took on visions that transcend ethnicity, gender and race.

There are no established African-oriented settlement agencies in the NT, hence all the participants indicated that they have voluntarily developed and nurtured strategic partnerships with government and non-government agencies, working with established settlement organisations and civil societies to provide inter-cultural perspectives and
advice to meet the African community’s needs and aspirations. They identified a wide range of organisations and institutions where they work as volunteers; and these include old people’s homes, educational and health institutions, faith organisations, youth centres, sports’ clubs, and migrant and refugee resource centres. Within these organisations, they have provided a variety of services including industry-specific services and cross-cultural training for community workers, and facilitated cultural transition orientation programs for migrants and refugees. Others have volunteered in schools and migrant resource centres to help people with interpreting and acquisition of English language skills. They have also worked in a number of programs to facilitate access to employment, education and counselling, and provided information on settlement and integration services. Their volunteer work has given many of them the opportunity to claim membership in the broader society through networks, and provided points of recognition outside the African community. It has also deepened links between various ethnic groups, established presence and promoted positive images to dispel stereotypes about Africans within the broader community. Many of the participants aptly point out that the diverse network of support, friendship and active community engagement creates acceptance, a sense of belonging and stronger bonds of community inclusion in their new society. Romana is involved in settlement and integration programs and explains:

When I got here … there were no programs for ethnic communities to integrate into mainstream … I joined other ethnic groups … [and] lobbied for a body to represent our issues [and] that’s how Multicultural Council NT was started and established a Migrant Resource Centre. I was involved with the adult ESL … Since then, I have been active in many community groups due to the growing numbers of migrants and refugees … yeah the [organisation] involves me in all sorts of things because they really need a local person with networks and people’s skills and good understanding of Territory culture (Interview with Romana, 6/01/10).
The participants’ education gave them a sense of self to enable them to negotiate and construct multiple identities, and adapt to suit changing circumstances and choices. They worked to support connections that enabled their family and community members to fulfill their potential. They established informal groups, stimulated productive discussions and encouraged cooperation between diverse groups. Through their community activities, the participants contributed to empowerment and social cohesion within their new society by building the capacity of their ethnic community, and creating supportive environments for people from their ethnic and the broader community to work together, make connections, break down barriers and achieve social change. This further demonstrates that “women are the adults with the biggest responsibility toward family and household, [and] they tend to be engaged in community-level based demands of infrastructure and services” (Stromquist, 2006b, p. 146).

Whilst the participants advocated for, and pursued programs to empower people in both the private and public sphere, they provided linguistically and culturally appropriate support in education, health and financial management that complemented mainstream services through information sessions and support groups. Barbara, Kiden and Esperance are involved in various educational, health and recreational programs. Barbara teaches girls and young mothers about sex education and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). She also interprets for people with limited English. She says:

I teach young women about pre and post-natal care, STDs, AIDS and safe sex … Many women want to know about genital cutting [FGM] and they invite me to talk to their mothers [and] husbands about it [FGM], yeah to increase awareness [and] educate them about dangers for that old practice. It’s a sensitive subject and I’m happy people want me to help them understand … I visited [an] Indigenous community [name] on cultural exchange, working in the clinic [and] school – great experience! … I do interpreting and I always use that opportunity to encourage people for education … And it’s good to see many women are studying and doing things for themselves now (Interview with Barbara, 8/06/09).
Kiden and Esperance belong to the two largest African groups in the NT and their community activities include organising community meetings, solving family problems, and providing essential information for new migrants and refugees on parenting skills, local foods, time and money management. Kiden shares some of their activities:

We [women] have meetings to support everybody with problems … we visit when they have babies and birthdays and [when] there’s death we give donations … We put money [amount] together every two weeks [and] give to one person in turns and they can buy fridge, chairs, pay school fees … Slowly, the women are learning to plan their money, not borrow from people [and] cause trouble (Interview with Kiden, 13/05/09).

Esperance describes her engagement with parents and their children:

First thing I tell them is no ‘African time’ here in Australia (laughs). For example, if doctor’s appointment is nine o’clock, you get there ten minutes early. Same with taking kids to school … go early then you can talk [and] make friends with other parents … it’s also important to talk with teachers about your children’s progress (Interview with Esperance, 8/06/09).

The participants recounted how their education and subsequent community engagement gave them a great deal of visibility and a ‘voice’ within their ethnic communities and the wider society because they actively engaged constructively in public discourse to disseminate information on their community’s issues, resources, values, aspirations and strategies for settlement and integration. They indicated that several organisations and agencies regarded them as consultants, advisors and resource persons for their ethnic communities because they provided intermediary ‘bridging’ service sharing their insights, social and cultural capital and experiences. As a result, many of the participants are officially recognised as experts through their appointment to national and local advisory boards and committees promoting interaction between government and civic organisations, working parties, mainstream and ethnic minority groups. With their knowledge and understanding of the social, cultural, economic and political systems in
Australia, they are able to advocate, network, and engage in expert discourses and public
conversation, articulate and contribute to policy-making process and make a difference
in their community life. For example, Mercy states:

People want me to represent them because they say ‘you can understand [and] you
can face them’! Uhmm government people, NGOs call me all the time for this and
that for our [African] community … I’m also encouraging other people to come out
and learn things. That’s reason I always take them to meetings and also help them
with their studies (Interview with Mercy, 5/06/09).

When Mercy was asked why different organisations invite her for different issues, she
responds: “Oh my God, do I need to tell you? Definitely, it’s my education, my
education, has made me strong [and] they know I don’t muck around” (Interview with
Mercy, 5/06/09).

Carol serves on numerous boards and advisory committees. She explains:

I do lots with our community. Sometimes I feel like I am on every committee for
Africans, refugees [and] multicultural issues. I get invitations from government
people, NGOs, schools, church, women and youth groups [and] they want my
perspectives on different things – help develop programs [and] organise information
sessions, create partnerships, access resources and information … Even our boys
and men sometimes I work with them [laughs], which is good because it’s changing
things in the community as some of the young girls are now saying if [own name]
can do this then we can do it and that is sort of softening male dominance … Uhmm
it’s a good feeling that people are interested in my ideas [pauses] but who will listen
to me if not for my education, I wouldn’t even know what to think or say! I feel
highly privileged and honoured that men and women – like mum’s age group talk to
me about [their] problems (Interview with Carol, 6/06/09).

These excerpts highlight the perspectives of many of the participants, who were often
invited as public speakers, role models, mentors and advisors in both government and
non-government organisations to contribute to policy development process and
academic course development. As informed representatives of their communities, they
participate in public forums in many institutions enriching and enhancing the social and
cultural capital of both migrant groups and the broader society. They are confident to
assume leadership and decision-making roles in their families and communities. They create space and services to ensure that people have greater access to valued resources and information.

Their education also provided the participants with a sense of control over and management of their own lives. It gave them the cognitive capacity to articulate complex content and technological information required to participate in community activities such as high-level advisory boards and committees. The participants hence operate as “imaginative diplomats” (Gilchrist, 1998, p. 80) in roles such as mediators, advocates, advisors, organisers and mentors creating opportunities for people from diverse backgrounds to work together on their shared aspirations. As noted by Dharmalingam and Morgan, “new information and new opportunities produce pressure for change” (1996, p. 201), and once the participants acquired the necessary skills, knowledge and understanding of how to function in their host society, they combined their traditional family caretaker role with working outside the home to make positive changes in their families and communities’ lives. Their involvement in public spaces offered them new opportunities to play leadership roles and take part in decision-making structures and become outspoken leaders. This reflects Sweetman’s observation that “women’s roles in contributing to household livelihoods and in other roles outside the domestic sphere, including decision-making in community bodies and organisations … bring new opportunities for leadership (2001, p. 5). For example, Carol’s excerpt highlights how education enhanced her leadership skills. As one of the highly educated and articulate women in her ethnic community, she has earned the respect of both her community and mainstream people. In a community known for male chauvinism and patriarchal
attitudes, Carol is highly respected by both male and female members for her credentials, leadership and intercultural skills as well as her passion and commitment to her community’s advancement. Greenstreet highlights similar findings in a study of women’s education in Ghana where he points out that “educated Ghanaian women are highly esteemed [and] are admired by their own sex and generally socially accepted by the opposite sex [men]” (1972, p. 355).

Other respondents also talked about how their education has influenced their leadership styles, interactions and relationships with people, indicating a strong thread of role modelling and mentoring to build people’s capacity. Kalumburu talks about the people she has assisted as a mentor and role model:

I’m actively involved and do lots of work with my African community especially the youth in mentorship and leadership capacity building programs … Other ethnic community groups invite me to work with them on settlement and integration issues. The Bhutanese community invited me to work with them on employment issues, and I have worked with the Baha’i Faith, Indonesians, Burmese, Thais, [and] Timorese. I’m like [an] advocate, mentor [and] role model but I have equally learnt so much from [these] different groups. I mean working with all those people has been life-changing for me (Interview with Kalumburu, 5/07/09).

Whilst working with various committees and networks, the participants use their membership and opportunities to forge connections across differences of race, ethnicity, gender and class. There was increased willingness to stand for elections in governance and leadership roles, with two participants serving as local government council members, and others indicating their aspirations for political office in the future. Therese talks about winning the local council position:

I got elected to the [city] Council [and] it’s [a] great opportunity to serve my community. I can now take our [African] issues directly and get my fellow councillors to help us [Africans] get into community things like the [city] annual festival … We first performed at the festival two years ago and people loved our show. It helped us [Africans] to share our rich culture, food, music, dance, artifacts – sort of educate people that we have better things to offer than the pathetic [and]
negative images on tele [television]. Many of the Africans who performed said afterwards they met people in the mall who told them they liked their performance. I think it really boosted their confidence [as] it’s a good feeling [of] acceptance … Now we are part of the festival organising committee … It’s amazing what just putting my hand up to serve on the council can do for our people [Africans] and our multicultural community in a place like [city] (Interview with Therese, 12/05/09).

As elucidated in the above narrative, education transformed the participants’ cultural differences to intercultural assets and many of them accessed and created opportunities for cultural exchanges. The community activities that Therese was involved in empowered other Africans by offering them opportunity to share their culture in their city’s festival. These activities foster a partnership approach with other ethnic minority communities and the wider society, and ensure that Africans play an active role in their community’s festival. Since such activities are community-wide initiatives that provide spaces enhancing community networks, it raises visibility for the participants and the African community within the wider society, demonstrating that community strengthening and empowerment of individuals are mutually enhancing. As members of the African community, Therese and the other African performers have a sense of ownership of the process which boosted their confidence and sense of inclusion. They used their active participation to purposefully promote their cultural values, facilitate cultural harmony and build bridges between their ethnic communities and the wider society. Therese’s community engagement as a local councillor also strengthened her position to advocate for, and promote the entire African community’s social and cultural capacity which gave them a ‘voice’, and visibility to be nominated to serve on the festival’s organising committee.

Some of the participants also use their knowledge and understanding of Australia’s cultural norms to assist with the cultural transition of other migrants and refugees. They
help in building cultural bridges and facilitating the syncretising of the traditional and the new cultures among their ethnic community members. Jomey’s case is typical:

I was asked to do Harmony Day event, like Africa Day … I got special room to show things about Africa – videos, music, photos, clothes [and] the African parents explained our culture to people … then we had the big African lunch and dance for everybody … It was really good [and] the teachers, my friends, parents and the principal, she was hugging me and she said, [name] thank you, I’m happy you work here because you bring joy to the school. I said to principal you gave me and all the African people opportunity to shine here … Before that time, I didn’t know I can stand in front of everybody and talk for whole school … That time, I learned truly that here when you have English, you have education, you can get strong [and] do many things (Interview with Jomey, 29/06/09).

Jomey, as shown in her excerpt, has gained “tricultural advantage” (Leicester, 2001, p. 61) from her education, which she effectively used to participate in her host community.

The participants’ empowerment, agency, strength and resourcefulness are further demonstrated by their increased engagement in community organisations. They established ethnic community and country associations and the umbrella association, African Australian Friendship Association (AAFA) to promote their collective interest. All the different associations build connections between the diverse African ethnic groups and bridges across the wider society. They also provide a voice to represent the diverse needs and aspirations of the African community at various levels of government and strengthen the local African community’s presence in the NT. Through membership of various groups, many of the participants engage in community activities to encourage and support critical dialogue, build social networks and group solidarity, manage collaboration, promote collective empowerment, and reinforce a collective identity as African-Australians. The support from the participants often reduces the need for government and non-government agencies’ support for newcomers.
Whilst all the participants in this study are members of AAFA, 18 are founding members. Some also mentioned that they have held executive positions in AAFA, which shows that a significant number of African migrant women who have had varied educational experiences take up leadership roles in the community. AAFA has developed into a dynamic organisation and a mainstream organ for formal transactions between African-Australians and the NT government and other local and national mainstream institutions. Mangi who served in AAFA’s executive, shares her story below. She maintains:

I was one of the Africans who formed AAFA, mainly to support new Africans. I have since served in different executive positions … I usually ran information sessions for them on complex issues like family law – child protection, employment rights to everyday things like using the rice cooker, vacuum cleaner, washing machine … I organise cross-cultural sessions for service providers and refugee support volunteers … Last year myself and some AAFA women produced a Pan-African Feast Cookbook … and it was a sell-out. The money will be donated to charity … Apart from supporting our people and keeping each other company, it [AAFA] maintains positive networks and has promoted educational and sociocultural events to bring us [Africans] and other Australians together. Yeah, it has really given us [Africans] visibility here in Darwin because we now get invited to participate in many things (Interview with Mangi, 8/06/09).

It is clear from Mangi’s excerpt which is similar to the majority of the participants, they envisaged that within the Australian mosaic, building mutual support, solidarity and cohesion among the various African ethnic groups was important for their survival and effective integration into the broader society. Hence they used their newly acquired skills to initiate the formation of self-help groups, associations, leadership and partnerships to offer networking opportunities for new migrants and refugees, and mainstream people. There were also opportunities to share, debate and articulate settlement experiences, and to develop collective commitment to their community’s capacity building and empowerment. The reciprocity and mutual support enjoyed from
such associations provided structural support for the constant adaptation they made in their new situations, demonstrating that the participants basically formed the various associations to promote and advance the needs and aspirations of their emerging African community. As such they wanted to use their acquired knowledge, skills and experiences to build their entire community’s capacity, carve out niches of belonging, build webs of mutual support and contribute to their host community’s development.

There are strong similarities in these findings to prior studies, which found that racial-ethnic minority communities develop collective survival strategies to ensure their community’s management of change and survival within a dominant culture (FECCA, 2007; Guo, 2006; Okai, 1995). As members of multi-ethnic associations that have become frontline settlement support for new migrants and refugees on a range of services, the participants identify community needs, write grant submissions and regularly tap into government funding to address community aspirations. In addressing many of their issues, they enter into strategic partnerships with diverse groups including government agencies, civil society groups, multilateral organisations and a network of local and national committees to deepen their relationships and links in their new community and gain access to the broader society. For example, many of the participants as members of AAFA are part of different working groups that entered into partnerships with MCNT, NT Police and Indigenous leaders to address youth rivalry and violence.

Vilma says:

Aboriginal and African kids were fighting in [suburbs] … [and] we had to do something … The government [Department of Families and Children Services] gave us money to work with Aboriginal leaders like [names], Red Cross, Police and Multicultural Council [and] solve the problems for our kids (Interview with Vilma, 8/07/09).
In addition to promoting their collective interest and social capital through the establishment of community groups, the participants indicated that they also participate in community activities to promote harmony and improve the African community’s power position by providing a ‘voice’ and create a platform and space for community action. According to Orford (1992), “when a relatively powerless group takes some form of social action to improve its power position, this often requires … collective awareness, a common cause [and] the development of group solidarity” (cited in Siddiquee & Kagan, 2006, p. 191). This kind of group learning that leads to community action alludes to Freire’s (1972) concept of conscientisation which characterises the social process of learning by dialogue and participation. Such learning enables learners to develop critical understanding which empowers them to take critical action on issues that impact on their lives, as was the case of the participants in this study.

The participants’ engagement in community organisations also strengthened their confidence and networks with influential community people and allowed them to develop social and political awareness. They talked about social transformation and engagement in various community actions for socio-political change, indicating several instances where they expressed ‘voice’ and spoke up publicly against human rights violations, racism and social justice. Lacha shares her reflection of continued growth as a result of her education and her involvement in a protest march that required mobilising the African community and lobbying her Member of Parliament (MP) and other influential people’s support. She explains:

I got here, really broken refugee woman [but] I [have] become strong woman because of my good education … Many [African] people come to me for advice because they know I am strong for many things … Like the time Minister Andrews [Minister for Immigration] said bad things about us [Sudanese refugees], they
[Sudanese] were very upset [and] we had meetings with AAFA then decided to write a letter to him that we are not happy about his racist talk. We also agreed to [protest] march. I went to see [MP] for support [and] I told my church people, got permit from Police … Many people came to support us [and] they were happy for us because we stand for our rights … We gave the letter to [NT Chief Minister]. It’s good we do the march because we got [the] chance to tell our good stories (Interview with Lacha, 22/06/09).

The majority of the Sudanese participants (8 out of 10) were involved in the planning of the protest march, and 16 of this study’s participants took part in the march. They reported the confidence and skills required for engaging in this event, and attributed their success to their education which gave them an understanding of their civil and democratic rights in Australia. Their collective action did not only serve some of their practical needs of gaining recognition and ‘voice’ that their community deserved, but also challenged the NT and federal governments and the wider community to recognise and accommodate the historical, physical, political and sociocultural diversity, strengths and issues of their community. In the process, the Sudanese community and their nascent community-based organisation, AAFA, also learned to function within the social and political realities of their new society. They all experienced increased sense of personal and internal efficacy. They reported that they achieved their goals in this campaign because they were able to connect with politicians and the general public and raise awareness to listen to their side of the story. This confirms that the majority of the participants became instruments of social empowerment, generating awareness of their ethnic community members. This finding concurs with Robinson-Pant’s (2005) argument that when women are empowered with information, skill and awareness, they are able to exercise independent agency and challenge power relations. As the participants engage with family members and participate in community activities, they feel more connected and accepted. Their sense of inclusion is palpable, and this is very
important as it signifies a break from exclusion and marginalisation experienced by minorities, usually referred to as the ‘other’ by the dominant group (Kvasny, 2006). Jedwab suggests that participation in community groups and organisations, “promotes interpersonal trust and social bonds among community members and provides a solid foundation for community action” (2002, p. 83). Many of the participants use language that stressed change in their thinking which subsequently led to change in their decision making and actions in various situations, denoting new learning and transformation (Freire, 1972; Mezirow, 2000; Stromquist, 2006a).

The participants’ learning experiences raised their consciousness, making them aware of the inequities and needs of other vulnerable people, and created empathy to assist in improving their circumstances. They mobilised resources and established relationships to work with, and empower other marginalised groups, including Indigenous people, young people, old people and the homeless. The majority of the participants, including Erica, reveal the changes in their attitudes to people and the maturity they have enjoyed after moving to the NT, and pursued education, has ‘grounded’ them to the needs of other disadvantaged people. Erica discloses:

Before I came to [city], I didn’t know, ehmm actually understand Aboriginal people … I did my work experience at [Youth Hostel] and made friends with many of them … we talk about their stories [and] our issues … I don’t mind working with them [Indigenous people] after uni to support them in their education because I can see that just like me, their attitudes are changing … they think I am ‘cool’ and yeah we have lots in common and can work together (Interview with Erica, 14/05/09).

Erica’s story shows that as she gained command over her attitudes, ways of knowing and understanding of other disadvantaged groups through her education, she reached out to help them in their transformation and empowerment journey. As noted in the TLT and empowerment literature, transformed disadvantaged individuals eventually position
themselves to help liberate other oppressed people (Freire, 1972, 1973; Kabeer, 1999, 2001; Mezirow, 1991, 2000; Stromquist, 2006a, 2009). There is ample evidence from the participants’ stories that their education enabled them to become community leaders, advocates, role models, mentors, volunteers, members of faith-based and community-based organisations, and that their activities within these roles played a key role in building their family and community members’ capacity to challenge social and cultural norms that reinforce structural barriers to inequality. The findings also demonstrate that education has a positive role on all forms of the participants’ engagement in their community. Previous literature on adult education and learning is replete with references to the positive impact on community engagement as “the educated citizen is attentive, knowledgeable and participatory and the uneducated citizen is not” (Converse, cited in Campbell, 2006, p. 25).

As previously mentioned, emerging through the participants’ stories is the impact of their education on their family’s well-being, particularly their children. As parents with improved skills and knowledge through education, the participants were able to access social and economic opportunities that benefited themselves and their families. They revealed how their education has helped them to improve the quality of their family life. This centres mainly on how they have been able to assist their family members to navigate settlement challenges and negotiate the power dynamics of household management and decision-making with their male family members. Some of the participants, including Florence, describe how their education has helped family members to appreciate their intellectual ability, diverse knowledge and skills because they consulted and listened to their suggestions when making decisions that affected
their household. They indicate that their family members, particularly husbands, respect and value their informed contributions when making major decisions for their family’s advancements in areas such as children’s education, recreation and leisure activities, buying a house, car and other material goods. Florence describes her situation:

My husband, all the time asks for my opinion because he knows I understand many things now … I [have] got many friends from uni, church and work [workplace] and for me if I don’t know something I will ask them. He likes my ideas [and] attitude so any problems for our house, we talk together because we listen to how we can solve problems together (Interview with Florence, 18/06/09).

As the majority of the participants expanded their roles in the public sphere with their education, they earned the respect from their family members to re-negotiate their gendered domestic roles and felt a sense of self-worth. Mariama, for example, discloses:

[Husband] has changed [laughs]! He does not lecture me [and] buy things without talking to me … I mean he has always been very generous with his money but [he] hardly asked for my opinion [and] didn’t help much around the house. But now – he helps with cooking, cleaning, laundry … I’m more confident and feel strong to speak my mind … we talk about everything for [our] family, [and] I feel we are closer now (Interview with Mariama, 14/05/09).

Remarkably, some participants mentioned that their spouses gave them the upper-hand in household decision-making as articulated by Cheetah that, “[Husband] doesn’t mind me running the house because he thinks I’m strong, capable and I know what I’m doing” (Interview with Cheetah, 17/06/09).

The above excerpts exemplify the common view held by the participants that their education and learning activities raised their consciousness and helped them to view their own knowledge and skills as worthwhile. Their appreciation and belief in their own knowledge and opinions changed their perceptions about themselves in relation to their male relatives and they were able to negotiate important issues, and redefine gender roles within their families. They were equally understanding of their family members,
particularly their spouses, and developed trusting and mutually supportive relationships, which contributed to informed decisions that advanced their circumstances. For the majority of the respondents, participation in educational activities provided them with purpose and structure in their lives which have positively affected their personal identity. This led to a mutually satisfactory re-organisation of the domestic division of labour in many of the participants’ households. Because of the knowledge, skills and their social advancement they are able to offer positive support to their husbands and their children and achieve a better balance between domestic and family responsibilities. The participants’ comments also suggest an improvement in the balance of power within the household, illuminating that these women are not in subordinate positions in the private sphere. They are not the only ones who are being transformed by their education in their households, their husbands and children are also being transformed, confirming the participants’ transformative learning as an important tool for social transformation. Donkor made similar observations among Ghanaian-Canadian women whose education “enhanced their status … [and helped] in redefining gender roles” (2000, p. 200).

As discussed in Chapter 4 (Section 4.3.2.3), many of the respondents indicated that the intergenerational conflicts between African parents and their children stemmed from the parents’ illiteracy and lack of understanding of the wider Australian sociocultural values. The participants reported that they have had positive relationships with their children as a result of their education. They emphatically pointed out that they are role models for their children, indicating that they have become better parents because they can engage and understand their children better. The realisation of the intergenerational
transformation also enhanced their self-efficacy which led to increased parental warmth, and improved relationships and interactions with their children. Vilma says:

> My education make life easy for me and my kids because I can understand them and they are proud of me … My [first] daughter is like my sister, we talk about almost everything … [and] my small daughter, [name] when I started [working] for hospital, she was telling all her friends that ‘my mother is smart woman, she is doctor and I’m going to be a teacher’ … I told her I am not a doctor [and] explained my work to her. Now she tells her friends, ‘my mother is not doctor but she is smart woman because she can read for me’ (laughs) (Interview with Vilma, 8/07/09).

Vilma and many participants infer that they transmit their educational values to their children and that these children equally perform well through the positive examples of the parents’ achievements. Their stories are consistent with the respondents in Reay et al.’s (2002) study in the UK which reported that educated parents serve as positive role models for their children. Machin equally found in his study of young people and higher education in OECD countries, that “university education often benefited young people with better educated parents” (2006, p. 5). In terms of providing educative experiences for children, Bynner et al. (2003) suggest that educated parents are interested in their children’s education and promote stronger educational family environment and contribute to inter-generational transfer of human capital. Wolfe and Haverman’s (2002) study reveal that high educational achievement in one generation has positive effects in the next generation, highlighting a strong link between educated parents and their children’s high educational achievement.

As active participants in education and training, the participants serve as role models in their pursuit of education and integration into the new society. They report that their education provided them with knowledge, skills and values that enables them to better support and facilitate their children’s learning and development. Education provided the
participants with cognitive resources to enable them support and facilitate their children’s learning activities. Their participation in various educational contexts exposed them to Australia’s education system and sociocultural norms, enabling them to guide and support their children effectively in their education and smooth transition in the new society. Usually referred to as “first teachers” of their children (Bush, 1989; NT Department of Education (NTDE) (2011), the participants transmitted their traditional and broader Australian values to their children in prescribed ways that enhanced their children’s progress. They are confident assisting their children with their education because the children trusted and respected their intellectual abilities. Mercy cites a situation where her son told his teacher to help other students as his mother was capable of assisting him at home:

My boys think I am very, very smart because I have got all these papers [certificates] so they listen to me when I help them with their homework ... The other day, [youngest son] teacher told me [that] she was busy helping other children and he politely told her, ‘don’t worry about me, I will ask mummy, she is a [profession], she is good [and] she can help me’ (laughs) (Interview with Mercy, 5/06/09).

Mercy credits her children’s confidence in her ability to her ongoing education and learning, and the fact that she communicates the benefits of education to them. This finding is shared by Darling who notes that “parents act as role models for the literacy behaviours of their children” (1992, p. 3). Duckworth and Sabates also point out that “parents with higher education provide cognitively stimulating learning environments, engage in educational behaviours … [and] have higher educational aspirations for their children (2005, p. 241).

As educated parents, the participants are interested in their children’s progress at school. Furthermore, their education increased their ability to make informed decisions to meet
their children’s academic expectations. They utilise their social networks and material
resources of money and time to create a cognitively stimulating environment for their
children. For example, the participants mentioned that they read to their children, take
them to the library, engage in computer activities with them, and help with their school
homework. They are also involved in their children’s school activities, such as helping
with the library and reading programs, playgroups, sports, cultural and fundraising
events, and serving on school committees. Mangi and Therese talk about serving on
school councils and advocating for migrant and refugee families’ inclusion in school
activities. Mangi states:

The past 14 years I have served on school councils … I do children’s reading, after-
hours supervision, fetes, camping, sports … [and] I interpret for the women
[Africans] during parent-teacher meetings. Uhmm that way they can understand the
kids’ progress and the importance of education (Interview with Mangi, 8/06/09).

Therese shares similar experience:

As a member of the school council [and] PTA, I encourage African parents to get
involved in school activities because it’s good for them and their kids … The school
community is pretty multi-cultural and we usually bring different foods to sell and
raise money to support our kids for different things … The last time, we organised a
barbecue to raise money for two kids with cancer … we almost doubled our target -
the parents brought lots of food … and Woolworths, Coles and [name] greengrocers
donated meat, bread, groceries [and] drinks (Interview with Therese, 12/05/09).

Mangi and Therese’s excerpts resonate with Burchfield et al.’s study in Bolivia which
concludes that “more educated women had greater involvement with their children’s
educational activities than less educated women. They were more likely to help with
homework, visit their child’s school and read to them” (Burchfield et al., 2002b, p. 63).
Multiple studies have established the importance of parents particularly a mother’s
educational achievement to her family and children’s well-being (Annan, 2000; Clinton,
2011; Eccles, 2005; Feinstein & Sabates, 2006; Ki-Moon, 2010).
Overall, the findings confirm Crisp and Talbot’s assertion that education “provides opportunities for students, their families and communities … [and] helps them learn the skills and values they will need for … their future [and survival]” (2001, p. 2). The participants’ education enabled them to fulfill their sense of obligation and commitment to their families and communities’ development. Adult education and learning have been noted to have a substantial effect on family well-being and community engagement in a number of studies (Balatti & Falk, 2002; Campbell, 2006; Falk, Golding & Balatti, 2000; OECD, 2006, 2007; Preston & Hammond, 2003; Schuller et al., 2002, 2004). In their exhaustive study of the impact of education on civic and social engagement in the UK, Feinstein et al. (2003, 2008) noted that adult education and learning play a considerable role in the shifts in attitudes and behaviour of learners and contribute to social capital and enhanced interest in civic activity which serves the democratic goals of active citizenship. Nanton also concludes from her study of African diasporan women in the US that “women’s education is not an isolated event but one that has an impact in the family and society” (2005, p. 212).

This section has shown that education helped the participants to become active agents in their own lives, their families and communities. Their education built their capacity for self-determination and creative productivity and gave them a sense of urgency and need to build the capacity of their family and community members. Their learning experiences also shaped their knowledge, skills, habits and attitudes, instilling a sense of agency and responsibility to take control of their lives, and a feeling that they have something to offer other people to gain control of their lives. As Kalumburu aptly comments, “When you are educated, you don’t only become a master or mistress of your
future but also an important resource to all the people around, and you know, we African women always have lots of people around us to help!” (Interview with Kalumburu, 5/07/09), reflecting Mirowsky and Ross’ suggestion that with education “whenever someone does, everyone gains” (2005, p. 216). From their involvement in their own families, with other women and community groups, to the establishment of AAFA, the participants’ education enabled them to build their individual capacity and work effectively to build the collective capacity of their communities to access opportunities and overcome various barriers and challenges. The knowledge, skills, attitudes and resourcefulness developed through their education gave the participants the independence, autonomy and well-being to create good outcomes for themselves, their families and communities.

6.3 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the impact of the education and learning experiences of the participants on their lives, roles and identities in their host society. The acquisition of knowledge and skills, greater access to resources and information, and awareness and understanding of their new society empowered them to survive in their new environment. The chapter has shown that the participants’ educational experiences contributed to the development of a greater sense of personal agency, confidence and self-esteem that impacted positively on their linguistic capital, and opened “doors and windows” for them in the labour market, increasing their community involvement and family engagement in ways that benefited their family and community members. Their stories demonstrate the transformative shifts in their perspectives and identity. The participants’ narratives also show that their education directly built their capacity which
in turn transmitted to, and impacted on their family and community members through the participants’ achievements. Implicitly and consistent with Beck’s (2006) study, the participants’ adult education not only built their individual capacity, but transformed and built capacity at multiple levels, bringing lasting change not only on the individual, but also on communities.

Overall, the chapter accentuated the multifarious benefits of the participants’ adult education and learning, including increased productivity and earnings, enhanced social cohesion, active community participation and greater sense of hope, belonging and fulfillment. The next and final chapter will bring together the major findings of this study and draw some conclusions on the role and impact of adult education on the individual and community capacity building of African migrant and refugee women. These themes will be discussed within transformative learning theory, feminist perspectives and women’s empowerment literature. The implications for adult education practitioners and policy makers and future research will also be explored.
Chapter 7: Discussion, implications and conclusion

Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world (Nelson Mandela).

The purpose of this study was twofold. First, to explore African migrant and refugee women’s daily lived experiences to discern the role of adult education in building their individual and community capacity to manage change during their settlement process in cross-cultural contexts. Second, to use the findings to inform adult education theory, and offer suggestions for research and teaching and learning practice. With insufficient attention paid to the gendered dimensions of migration, there have been few studies on African migrant and refugee women in Australia. Thus this study also aimed to address that gap by adding the voices of African migrant and refugee women living in the NT. To achieve this purpose, the study employed a qualitative interpretive case study with multiple data sources. The study utilised transformative learning and social action theories developed by Mezirow (1978, 2000) and Freire (1972, 1973, 1994), and feminist standpoint as theoretical frameworks for locating and understanding the settlement experience of 24 African migrant and refugee women as a journey of learning, transformation, empowerment and social action. It also focused on the women’s lived experiences as legitimate and important sources of knowledge about education and learning during settlement in cross-cultural contexts. This chapter presents a summary and discussion of the key findings with reference to pertinent literature in transformative learning, feminism and women’s empowerment. The theoretical and
practical implications of this study for adult education, the study’s limitations and suggestions for future research are also discussed. The chapter ends with concluding remarks.

7.1 Summary of findings: Transformative learning and empowerment

The study’s findings have shown that migration of African women from collectivist societies to a predominantly Anglo-Australian individualistic society with significantly different sociocultural values provides a rich environment for cross-cultural education, and development of intercultural competence that facilitate Mezirow’s (2000) transformative learning phases, transformative learning outcomes, and empowerment (Brookfield, 2003; Freire, 1972, 1973; Stromquist, 2002, 2006a; Taylor, 2007; Taylor, Cranton & Associates, 2012). The study has provided insight and deeper understanding on the ways that African migrant and refugee women utilised education and learning opportunities to develop knowledge, skills and strategies to cope and survive when confronted with disempowering experiences during settlement in a society with different language and sociocultural values. The participants’ education and learning experiences spanned multiple life contexts in a wide range of social and educational sites through formal, non-formal, informal and incidental learning which indicated the enormous amount of transformative learning that accompanies the transition from a collective African society to an individualistic society. Such learning created significant life changes in the participants as the learning “shapes people; they’re different afterward, in ways both they and others can recognize” (Clark, 1993, p. 47). The changes in the participants’ meaning-making perspectives through cross-cultural education and learning
in this study are based on the three main themes which emerged from this study and presented earlier in Chapters 4, 5 and 6; and constituted the everyday lived experiences of African migrant and refugee women. In the next section, plausible explanations for the study’s findings will be considered in view of the literature on transformative learning, feminist standpoint perspectives, empowerment and gaining voice (Collins, 1998a; Freire, 1970, 1972, 1973, 1994; Harding, 1987; hooks, 1989; Mezirow, 1978, 2000; Smith, 1987; Stromquist, 1995, 2006a).

7.1.1 Transformative learning: Women, cross-cultural learning and transformation

As discussed in Chapter 2, Mezirow (1978, 2000) outlined a ten-phase process of transformative learning that commenced with a disorienting dilemma which sets in motion a critical examination of one’s underlying assumptions. This self-examination is followed by sharing one’s opinions with others leading to an exploration of new relationships, roles and actions, and eventually, “a reintegration into one’s life on the basis of conditions dictated by one’s new perspective (Mezirow, 2000, p. 22). Although the findings from this study parallel Mezirow’s TLT, the phases of transformation for the participants in this study are not linear, and the nature and extent of transformative experience varied for each of the participants. However, all the participants talked specifically about major changes in their lives, families and communities which were attributed to the education and learning activities that they engaged in (Chapter 6).

Having migrated from a collectivist society to a multicultural society that holds Anglo-Celtic individualistic sociocultural values, the participants as African women were confronted with substantial differences in terms of race, gender, culture, social class,
ethnicity and language. They were marginalised into a minority status and classified by
the dominant society as powerless, passive and lacking integrative capacity (Andrews,
2007; DIAC, 2007b). The unexpected changes in their traditional gender, social and
family roles and networks; and complex barriers in the form of racism, discrimination
and non-recognition of pre-migration credentials (Section 4.3.2) that the women faced,
triggered culture shock and several disorienting dilemmas. These challenged them to
find new ways to learn, adapt, and survive in their new context. It was important for
them to develop a more critical worldview to help renegotiate their subjectivities and
reconstruct, redefine and re-establish themselves in the NT. The participants built
relationships, learned and reframed their meaning-making perspectives to be more
inclusive, discriminating, open and reflective (Mezirow, 2000). Through their education
and various situated learning activities, the participants gained intercultural competence
as they developed adaptive capacity and altered their perspectives “to effectively
understand and accommodate the demands of the host culture” (Taylor, 1994, p. 392).
This process of critical reassessment, evaluation and reflection of new understandings
and renegotiation of relationships brought a whole range of different emotions. The
kinds of decisions and actions that the participants were involved in with their family,
community and social relationships “are the outermost manifestations of their learning
and development” (King, 2005, p. 109). Such learning resonates with Mezirow’s (1978,
2000) transformative learning in which participants critically assess their own
assumptions and make appropriate adaptation to fit into the new context.

This study has shown that the central theme of transformation is the participants’ cross-
cultural learning experiences in Australia. In this case, the participants’ migration can be
seen as the trigger event for the transformation process, because their historical and socioculturally constructed meaning schemes were incongruent with that of their new society. The participants engaged in critical self-reflection, questioning and examining their existing values, deeply held assumptions and sociocultural beliefs, their frame of reference, and their positionalities from their pre-migration socialisation. Such critical reflection “involves a critique of the presuppositions on which our beliefs have been built” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 12), in order to discover alternatives to established and habitual patterns of thinking and doing things (Brookfield, 2000; Cranton, 2000). In Chapter 5, the findings suggest that the participants consciously decided to engage in formal, non-formal and informal education and learning activities to gain knowledge, cognitive and practical skills and participate in critical discourse, form relationships with other people, share, and exchange ideas and experiences productively in their new society. The participants’ multiple interactions with people from diverse sociocultural backgrounds helped in this process, as there are numerous examples throughout the study where the participants cite that social networks and engagement in critical discourse in these networks helped to alleviate confusion and gave them a sense of belonging and agency to make changes in their lives. Through critical discourse the participants realised that their issues were not unique and that they were “in the same boat” (see Jomey, Section 5.4.1.3) as other women, and that they could collectively work together, support each other to address their issues and take action. According to Mezirow people engage in critical discourse “when [they] have reason to question the comprehensibility, truth, appropriateness (in relation to norms), or authenticity (in relation to feelings) of what is being asserted” (1991, p. 77). In Chapter 6, the findings demonstrate the women negotiated new meanings, and shifts in their meaning.
perspectives, adopting new roles and ways of acting in their relationships with family members, friends, ethnic communities and wider society. They considered their personal and collective achievements as part of the transformation that accompanied their education and enabled them to engage productively in the social, cultural, economic and political arenas of their new society. This resulted in a significant aspect of transformative learning, which changed perspective as a result of better understanding of the self and others based on relationships and sociocultural influence (Mezirow, 2000).

It is apparent from the study that the participants’ focus of learning was “directly related to the experience of lived reality – the life world” (Garrick, 1998, p. 13). Their learning was fundamentally influenced by the challenges they encountered as a result of major differences in their sociocultural contexts and much of the learning assisted them to develop cultural and emotional intelligence. The participants also indicated that the support from significant others, including family members, friends, peers, colleagues, adult education practitioners, education institution support staff and community people, helped them in the process. This echoes conclusions in other transformative learning studies that adult learners need a sense of belonging and a supportive community to engage in the process of change and action (Fursova, 2013; Guo, 2006; Magro & Gorayshi, 2011; Schugurensky, 2002; Shaw, 1999; Zhang, 2005). Mezirow purports that adults develop “webs of affiliation within a shared life world [and] human reality is intersubjective; our life histories and language are bound up with those of others” (2000, p. 27). In his understanding of transformation and social responsibility through education, Daloz emphasises “constructive engagement with otherness” (2000, p. 110)
in which people develop an empathic connection with people who are different from themselves.

Throughout the participants’ narratives, critical reflection, critical thinking, critical discourse leading to perspective transformation and modification of actions were illustrated in many ways when they encountered disempowering experiences and disorienting events that challenged their expectations and established habitual ways of thinking and living (Chapters 5 and 6). As a result of their learning, the participants began to examine their sociocultural histories and identities from a new perspective. There were indications from the participants’ narratives that many began to critically reflect on, and challenge the patriarchal view of gender roles which subsequently and sadly, led to the end of some marriages (Section 4.3.2.3). This finding supports the evidence that education and learning encourages open-mindedness and offers the possibility of alternatives, including different ways of conceptualising gender roles for women from patriarchal societies (Donkor, 2000; Edward, 2007; Giles, 1990). Such transformations in the women’s perspective are at the heart of their development and empowerment. These findings concur with Mezirow’s (1978) suggestion that many of the “disorienting dilemmas” that triggered learning originated from broader life issues facing learners, and indicate that the level of personal disruptions in learners’ backgrounds may engender a high degree of their readiness and motivation for perspective transformation.

The findings from the study reflect the ultimate goal of transformative learning as the participants utilised learning opportunities to move from an unexamined way of thinking to a more scrutinised and critically reflective way of making sense of new roles,
relationships and actions (Clark, 1993; Coryell, 2013; Merriam, 2004; Mezirow, 2000). Fundamental changes are reflected in the way they viewed themselves in their personal life context: such as increased self-esteem and self-confidence in new roles and social relationships; empowered sense of self; more functional strategies and resources for taking action and gaining control over their lives; compassion for others; and new connectedness with others. The changes and shifts in the participants’ knowledge, skills and general capacity to engage in the social, cultural, economic and political activities are reminiscent of the transformation that many scholars consider as important aspects of transformative learning and empowerment (Freire, 1972; Kabeer, 1999; Mezirow, 2000; O’Sullivan, 2002; Rowlands, 1997; Stromquist, 2002, 2006a).

7.1.2 Empowerment: Women, education, empowerment and gaining voice

Another cardinal finding in this study is the relationship between the women’s education, transformative learning, empowerment and gaining voice. As noted in the study, the most pervasive changes connected with the theme of transformation were the women’s sense of empowerment and gaining voice. The participants consistently cited education and learning from varied contexts as providing them with a sense of empowerment that contributed immensely to positive adaptation, and assisted them in overcoming their settlement challenges and overall transformation. The empowerment characteristics displayed by the participants were discussed in Chapter 6 and included details of how they were empowered to confidently assert themselves in social relationships, cultural gender roles, engage in paid employment and actively participate
in decision making both in private and in public, and an increase in power and ability to act independently.

As strongly indicated in Chapter 4, the process of transformation in the participants was also largely driven by their awareness of their positionality within an interlocking sociocultural system of race, gender, social class and ethnicity in Australia as a minority, marginalised and powerless group without voice or visibility. The awareness of their powerlessness challenged the participants’ daily existence and compelled them to strategically engage in learning activities to “gain understanding and control over [their] personal, social, economic and political forces in order to improve their life situations” (Israel, Checkoway, Schultz & Zimmerman, 1994, p. 152). Freire argues that education that transforms and empowers learners can result from talking back and acting out when people are powerless, and as shown in their narratives, the participants’ education made them “feel like masters of their thinking” (1970, p. 110). This resulted in more functional strategies and resources for taking action and gaining control over their lives. With increasing knowledge, self-esteem and confidence in new roles and relationships, and involvement in new ways of knowing other than rational, the participants challenged some restrictive aspects of their traditional gendered roles. For the majority of participants, there was evidence of changes in the traditional hierarchy within their private and public lives as they changed their traditional beliefs and assumptions about patriarchy, and their perceptions of themselves in relation to their husbands and men in general (Section 6.2.3). In comparing their inherited patriarchal values with affirmative and feminist ideas in Australia, the participants’ statements (Sections 4.3.1.1 and 6.1)
illustrate how these women have now internalised the view that women are no longer inferior to men and that both genders should be given equal opportunities.

Based on the literature review (Chapter 2) of the concepts of women’s empowerment, the changes noted in the participants demonstrate their empowerment and ability to move beyond psychological levels of change to economic, social and political spaces that effect changes not only for themselves, but their families and communities too. For the 24 participants, education provided them with knowledge and skills to challenge the interlocking systems of race, gender and ethnicity, as well as access and control of mainstream economic and political resources that were previously denied them (Kabeer, 1999; Rowlands, 1997). The sense of empowerment the participants described is consistent with Freire’s (1972, 1973) concept of conscientisation, and Kabeer (1999), Rowlands (1997) and Stromquist’s (1995, 2002) facets of empowerment. These include a critical understanding of the women’s sociocultural realities (race, gender, social class, migrant and refugee status, ethnicity), increased feelings self-efficacy, self-esteem and self-confidence, consciousness and awareness of power inequalities, ability to organise and mobilise, and the capacity to generate income to be financially independent.

Stromquist (2002) emphasises that empowerment for women must have an economic component. Similarly the women in this study expressed that being financially independent strengthened their sense of empowerment as they were able to renegotiate and redefine their gender roles and positionalities within their family, ethnic community and the wider community (Chapter 6) because they were able to “state their rights with determination” (Stromquist, 2002, p. 29), in their own authentic voice.
Finding ‘a voice’ in this study was another important expression of empowerment for the participants because it meant being able to express their informed opinions in private and in public, actively engage in dialogue and having their ideas respected by people – particularly men – in both their ethnic and the broader community. As discussed in Chapter 2, the participants had come from patriarchal sociocultural backgrounds where gender roles are strictly defined, and women are expected to listen and obey men’s ‘voice’, therefore, finding a voice to speak out, and challenge power inequalities, gender roles, and the stigmatisation of their positionality was liberating and an ultimate indication of empowerment (Sections 6.1 and 6.2.3).

The participants had also been challenged by limited English language, accent discrimination and inability to understand Australian jargon. These language difficulties reported in Chapter 4 (Section 4.3.2.4) were portrayed as limiting the participants’ ability to communicate assertively, thus resulting in feelings of powerlessness and vulnerability. Gaining proficiency in English, the participants could engage in transformative dialogue which could only take place “when one has a genuine voice, one’s own voice to articulate one’s condition within the environment where one lives” (Asgharzadeh, 2008, p. 350). In Freire’s view, “changing language is part of the process of changing the world” (1994, p. 67), and for the participants in this study, finding ‘a voice’ meant they could interact with others confidently, and assertively engage in critical discourse and dialogue, voice their informed opinions in both their public and private lives, and no longer remain silent and invisible. For instance, Lacha’s story (Section 6.2.3) of finding her voice, demonstrates moving from being a “broken refugee woman” to an assertive woman who was able to mobilise her community members to
publicly protest against racism and discrimination. Mangi’s (Section 4.3.2.5) confrontational encounter with her GP is one of many indications in the participants’ stories that there was a shift in their power to speak their own truths, acquired from their own lived experiences as women on their own behalf, and that they were not prepared to acquiesce to other people’s definitions and expectations about them that lacked authenticity for themselves as individuals and a collective as African women. Carol’s (Section 4.3.2.5) statement also suggests that her education had transformed, empowered and given her a powerful voice to de-construct her stigmatised social position of refugee. She constantly engages in speaking activities to resist the negative and pathological representations of African refugees (Section 6.2.3). In other words, the new knowledge and skills obtained from their education helped the participants to increase ‘sense of self’ and move from silence to speech (Malicky & Katz, 1997). Hence they gained ‘visibility’ and ‘voice’ as informed, empowered and transformed women with greater social and economic independence and responsibilities in Australia. This theme reflects similar changes reported in prior studies (Bingman & Ebert, 2000; Donkor, 2000; King & Wright, 2003; Pacheco, 2011).

In this study, the participants’ increased autonomy and empowerment also concur with Taylor’s (2007) report of his review of 41 transformational learning studies which states that adult learning experiences include “transcended context, such as greater self-directedness, assertiveness, self-confidence and self-esteem, which support the emphasis of autonomy found in Mezirow’s interpretation of transformative learning” (2000, p. 184). The transformed perspectives of the participants made them more aware of their interdependent positionality as well as more discriminating and autonomous qualities
that are both congruent with their collective culture in their original countries, and the
individual culture in Australia. The cross-cultural context of the participants’
transformational learning allows for the psychological, emotional and intellectual
meaning making at both individual and collective levels. This study in effect highlights
the whole theory of perspective transformation in a cross-cultural context.

The foregoing discussion demonstrates that migration, settlement, education and
learning in a new and significantly different sociocultural context became a platform
where the participants’ meaning-making perspectives were critically questioned and
reassessed; power dynamics were renegotiated; and critical consciousness of their
positionality attained. Their transformation and empowerment were purposeful, as they
aspired for better lives for themselves, their families and communities. Mezirow states
that, “a mindful, transformative learning experience requires that the learner make an
informed and reflective decision to act on his or her reflective insight” (2000, pp. 23-24),
which is what occurred with the participants in this study.

Overall, the changes facilitated by the education and learning experiences in this study
reflect Mezirow’s (2000) understanding of a transformed adult, as these women were
able to overcome disempowering experiences and embarked on a wide range of actions
to reinforce their new shifts in perspectives. The transformation and empowerment that
occurred is evidenced through the way the participants used their new knowledge and
skills to challenge and overcome issues and barriers related to their sociocultural
realities through their productive engagement in their new society. Their narratives
indicate that they were able to re-evaluate the stereotypical traditional roles and
recognise their capacity to become agents of change and make changes to improve their
lives, and address their needs and that of other people. The knowledge and skills the participants acquired through their education have truly transformed their meaning-making perspectives and helped them to successfully navigate their complex settlement challenges. This concurs with other studies that emphasise not only the epistemological aspects of learning but also the ontological dimension (Belenky & Stanton, 2000; Belenky et al., 1997; Gilligan, 1993; hooks, 1994; Pope, 1996), since these women developed a new sense of being and acting that translated into proactive agency in their actions. For these women, transformative learning not only helped them to become “more liberated, socially responsible and autonomous learners,” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 30) but they also became more informed and engaged in autonomous action stimulated by an emotional sense of empowerment.

The transformative and emancipatory powers of adult education in various learning situated contexts have been well illustrated in the participants’ narratives in this study (Chapter 6). Most significantly they gained the sense of empowerment and agency necessary to renegotiate their subjectivities, and redefine their lives and that of their families and communities. This study builds on transformative learning and empowerment theories that transformed individuals engaged in authentic and productive practices that helped to liberate other oppressed people and contribute to collective empowerment and social action for change for their communities (Freire, 1972, 1973; Kabeer, 1999; Mezirow, 1978, 2000; Stromquist, 1995, 2006a). The findings from this study do not only substantiate Mezirow’s TLT (1978, 2000) and the triggers for it, but also go beyond its dimensions to highlight the role of sociocultural contexts and the importance of emotions, spirituality and relationships in the transformative learning
process (Chapters 4 and 5). This study posits that for non-Western groups such as the African migrant and refugee women, exploring the sociocultural, historical and political context of transformational learning better allows for intellectual meaning-making at both the individual and collective level.

7.2 Implications for theory, practice and research

As indicated in Chapters 1 and 2, limited research has been conducted in the field of migration and settlement that addresses the lived experiences and sociocultural realities of race, gender, social class and ethnicity that African migrant and refugee women encounter during settlement in the predominantly Anglo-Australian society. Therefore this study is an important contribution to the dearth of literature by looking into African migrant and refugee female adults’ learning processes in the NT. It serves an emancipatory function by giving a voice to the participants’ lived experiences, and demystifies the negative, pathological and ethnocentric ideologies propagated about African migrants and refugees, particularly women. This study adds to the growing body of research that explores marginalised people through their own voices, thus giving a voice to previously silenced minority ethno-cultural groups. As a novel study, this research increases the insights and knowledge of African female migrants and refugees’ learning experiences and has a wide range of implications for theory, practice and research in adult education and learning.

7.2.1 Implication for theory

The major implication of this study for feminism and adult education theorising is the need to seek diverse sources of knowledge construction particularly paying attention to
CALD women’s voices as the basis for creating knowledge that is useful to them. Over the past decades, knowledge construction in adult education has implicitly been guided from the assumptions of Western individualistic concepts. This study has demonstrated that it is worthwhile learning about the transformative and empowering role of adult education from the experiences and perspectives of African women challenged by race, gender, social class, ethnicity and English language ability. From the participants’ narratives, these African women face multiple sociocultural realities and perspectives during migration, settlement, education and learning, and adequate frameworks are required to explain their learning across these multiple sociocultural contexts. As indicated in Chapter 2, contemporary Australian society is increasingly becoming diverse, multicultural and multi-vocal, and the important role of education is to animate and facilitate the harmonious coexistence of diverse groups where different viewpoints can be expressed and negotiated. In this study, this process is revealed in the transformative and empowering learning of the participants through feminist standpoint and transformative learning theories.

7.2.1 Implication for feminism: Feminist standpoint theory

In conceptualising this study as empowering and giving voice to marginalised African migrant and refugee women, it contributes to feminist theorising. The participants’ transformative learning and empowerment stories counter the hegemonic discourses that have excluded African-Australian women’s migration, settlement and adult education experiences. By placing African-Australian women’s lived experiences at the centre of analysis, their voices are projected from their standpoint to tell stories of their ability to act as change agents and construct solutions for their challenges as a result of their
transformation and empowerment through adult education (Belenky et al., 1997; Collins, 1998a, 1998b; Harding, 1987; hooks, 1989; Smith, 1987). In other words, the voices from African-Australian women from diverse backgrounds (family, skilled and refugee migrants) produced what Collins refers to as “contextualized truth”… [that emerges] through the interaction of logic, creativity and accessibility” (1998a, p. 239), and raised their lived experiences from obscurity, because their education helped them “to transform themselves to a position of voice and visibility and articulate their self-defined standpoint” (Alfred, 2004, p. 139).

From the analysis of the participants’ lived experiences through a feminist perspectives lens, the women’s transformative learning is seen as enabling them to reclaim their voice and achieve a sense of belonging and empowerment. In most feminist literature women’s transformative experience is described as “finding voice” and “gaining voice” (Belenky et al., 1997; Gilligan, 1993; Hayes & Flannery, 2000; hooks, 1989; Stanley, 2009). Belenky et al. (1997) theorise that in such learning experiences, women move from being silenced to constructing knowledge. Since women’s transformative learning shifts them from inauthenticity to authenticity, and includes increased awareness of the limitations of societal expectations, women are able to name gender inequalities and oppressions. Similarly, the participants in this study named and reflected on their everyday challenges, such as race, gender, social class, ethnicity and linguistic ability (Section 4.3.2). According to Cooley, “the act of naming is powerful [as women] are no longer passive consumers of culturally imposed ideas, values, and beliefs, but directors, negotiators, interpreters, and creators … guided by an internal authority heretofore unknown” (2007, p. 306). These feminist ideas resonate with the transformative learning
experiences described in this study, as the women had to identify and confront their own hegemonic societal beliefs as well as Australian societal norms and values that constrained their progress, and had to change their meaning-making perspectives.

Using feminist standpoint theory and women’s empowerment framework, the voices and experiences of African migrant and refugee women provided deeper understanding of the intersectionality of race, gender, social class and ethnicity. Exploring these intersectional forces of oppression in this study helps to understand their subjugated knowledge and how these women positioned themselves differently within the education and training of migrant and refugee women’s discourse. The diverse standpoints give insights and better understandings of migrant women’s lived experiences and perceptions of the role of education in the reconstruction and rebuilding of lives in the NT. This study, in making space for African migrant and refugee women to present narratives of their lived settlement and educational experiences, has given voice and visibility to the participants. In the process, the study reaffirms what other feminist migration and education scholars have indicated – that the intersection of race, gender, social class and ethnicity are central to understanding processes of migration and learning, and successful outcomes of settlement and integration for women from developing countries in developed countries due to the significant differences in their sociocultural contexts (Alfred, 2003; Boyd, 2009; Creese & Kambere, 2003; Curran, Shafer, Donato & Garip, 2006; Donkor, 2000; Ho & Alcorso, 2004; Mahler & Pessar, 2006; Piper, 2008a). In this study, feminist standpoint theory helps to bring to the scholarly discourse of adult education and learning, particularly transformative learning and empowerment, the voices of African migrant and refugee women whose experiences
are not yet defined by the status quo in Australia. As reflected in the study, viewing migration, settlement, education and learning from the everyday, lived experiences of African migrant and refugee women provides another perspective from which to examine transformative learning and empowerment, and represents “a shift of focus from a deterministic individualistic paradigm to a more reflexive nondeterministic and collective one” (Byrd & Stanley, 2009, p. 660). This study also makes a contribution to feminist analysis of migration as a gendered process, which is an understudied phenomenon, and fills the gap in literature by adding the authentic voices of African migrant and refugee women on their settlement educational and learning experiences. The study challenges the hegemonic discourses that have suppressed these women’s narratives, and portrays them as important sources of knowledge about their everyday lived experiences. It makes a significant contribution to the debates and discourse on migration and feminism, and most importantly offers a critical perspective on the development of more sociocultural and inclusive theories of transformative learning.

7.2.1.2 Implications for adult education and learning: Transformative learning theory

The study makes a contribution to the extant knowledge about adult education, learning and capacity building, and the limited and emerging literature on migrant and refugee women. The study also adds to the literature on transformative learning theory by demonstrating that migration, settlement and integration process can be contexts for transformative learning of African migrant and refugee women. Furthermore, in highlighting how the sociocultural realities (race, gender, social class) of African migrant and refugee women shape their transformative learning process in
predominantly Anglo-Australian context, this study offers new insights for theorising transformative learning that is inclusive and socioculturally sensitive.

As indicated earlier, this study supports the body of literature addressing Mezirow’s TLT (1978, 1991, 2000) of education and learning discussed in Chapter 2. However, similar to previous studies, this study contends that Mezirow’s TLT needs to expand and broaden beyond the individual process of rational and cognitive change to include ideas associated with emotions, feelings and sociocultural contexts in order to be more useful in explaining the education and learning of marginalised women in cross-cultural contexts (Clark & Wilson, 1991; Daloz, 1986; Dirkx, 2001; Johnson-Bailey & Alfred, 2006; Lyon, 2001; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Merriam & Ntseane, 2008; Pope, 1996; Preece, 2003; Taylor, 2007; Tisdell, 1995). This study identified historical, political and sociocultural contextual factors as significant in transformative learning and clearly demonstrated that Mezirow’s TLT (1978, 2000) is insufficient to explore African migrant and refugee women’s education and learning in cross-cultural contexts, and the urgent need to combine with sociocultural theories such as feminism. This is due to the fact that Mezirow’s (1978) TLT resulted from his studies of re-entry white female college students, and largely ignored the historical and sociocultural context shaping women’s experiences, and reflects the values of the dominant Western masculine, white middle class culture. Therefore when used as an analytical lens for Black African migrant and refugee women who struggle with sociocultural realities of race, gender, social class and substantial differences in culture, it is important to combine these with sociocultural theories such as feminism to adequately explore and analyse their learning experiences.
This study is significant to the field of adult education and learning, particularly transformative learning, because African migrant and refugee women’s position within the interlocking sociocultural systems results in learning experiences that are different from the dominant Anglo-Australian society. Even though the participants expressed their experience within the transformative learning framework, their transformation was not separated from their everyday lived experience, rather it was an integral part of the reality of what it meant to be a black African migrant and refugee woman trying to survive in a new society that has ethnocentric and discriminatory views about their race, gender, ethnicity, social class, English language ability and pre-migration credentials. Hence, the participants’ notion of their transformation as a way of knowing, being and surviving is grounded in their sociocultural legacy and history. Their critical awareness of their positionality in Australia plays a significant role in their transformative learning, and demonstrates Freire’s (1972, 1973) conscientisation theory presented in Chapter 2.

In exploring the role of adult education in building the community capacity of African migrant and refugee women, this study has broadened TLT from the individual micro level to the mezzo community level, and contributes to the scholarly discourse to expand and enhance the robustness of TLT, bringing to the scholarly discourse the learning experiences of African migrant and refugee women as a move towards more inclusive ways of theorising adult education derived from African migrant and refugee women’s ways of knowing. The evidence from the study demonstrates that women’s epistemology (Belenky et al., 1997; Belenky & Stanton, 2000; Gilligan, 1993) and sociocultural contexts influence how they engage in the critical reflection, critical discourse, and subsequent action. The study contributes to the scholarly discourse on the
learning experiences of minority ethno-culturally diverse groups such as African women, and promotes a move to refocus on more inclusive ways of theorising adult education and learning derived from African migrant and refugee women’s knowledge construction and ways of knowing.

In effect, this study provides a theory that is grounded in the transformative learning and social action theories presented in the literature review (Freire, 1972, Mezirow, 2000; O’Sullivan, 2002). As discussed, Mezirow’s TLT (2000) is quite useful in understanding how African migrant and refugee women use educational opportunities to develop empowering, coping and survival skills during their settlement process. However, when applied with marginalised and non-Western women, such as the African women participants in this study, it has to be done in conjunction with sociocultural theories, such as feminism, that consider the intersection of the oppressive systems of race, gender, social class and ethnicity of the participants. The feminist standpoint theory utilised in combination with transformative learning theory in this study, was useful in explaining the women’s experiences in the dominant Anglo-Australian society. The study supports the quest for more critical approaches to adult learning theories that emerge from multiple perspectives and realities, and therefore suggests the need for greater openness to different ways of knowing, and recognition of the way migrants and refugees from diverse sociocultural and linguistic backgrounds can contribute to the development of new knowledge and ways of seeing the world.
7.2.2 Implications for practice

The study’s findings provide a deeper understanding and insight of African migrant and refugee women’s migration, settlement, education and learning experiences. These findings offer critical perspectives and add a new dimension to transformative learning education, and the literature on it. The study’s findings serve as a basis for developing sociocultural sensitivity within adult education and learning institutions, policies, and teaching and learning practice. The whole concept of learning is expanded to include the ways marginalised African migrant and refugee women with substantially different sociocultural realities, critically revise their meaning-making perspectives to interpret new and significantly different experiences as they engage in their daily life activities in a predominantly Anglo-Australian society. In practice, the study has pedagogical significance for policy makers, adult education practitioners and institutions as it challenges them “to be more inclusive and accept differences as valid and valuable expressions of the human experience” (Guo, 2009, p. 49), and work toward transformative educational change that is socioculturally sensitive. It is apposite to recognise practical implications for policy makers, adult education practitioners and institutions as it is clear from the participants’ stories in this study and other related literature that they have a critical role to play in the transformative learning and “support [of] migrant women’s capacities by enabling them to ‘find their voice’ and to both reaffirm and reassert themselves as individuals” (Fursova, 2013, p. 13).

The study reveals that despite Australia’s multicultural population and the increase in the number of African women engaged in education and learning in multiple life contexts (formal, non-formal, informal), many adult education practitioners and
institutions still do not know how to engage appropriately with this group of learners due to their “lack of cultural awareness of the complex issues” (Adamuti-Trache & Sweet, 2010, p. 22) that affect their learning. Adult education practitioners need to learn about the historical and sociocultural backgrounds of their African female students and make efforts to discover their webs of significance, because “cultural self-awareness, cultural knowledge about learners and instructional skills that are inclusive and empowering constitute the kind of knowledge and skills required for service to marginalized learners” (Guy, 1999a, p. 16). This means that it is vital that adult education practitioners develop intercultural competence with a comprehensive understanding of the sociocultural and historical backgrounds of their students and be culturally sensitive by recognising and respecting cultural differences (Guy, 1999a, 1999b; Taylor, 1994). Adult education practitioners and institutions can also promote cultural sensitivity in their teaching and learning practices by “developing multicultural literacy, which emerges from an attitude of cultural sensitivity [and] is essential in a multicultural society” (Fine, cited in Parker, 2001, p. 76). Ramsden notes that “good teachers have to be aware of their students’ needs and purposes, sensitive to their students’ perceptions of the course, and adapt their teaching and assessment methods accordingly” (1992, p. 216). If educational practitioners are aware of students’ sociocultural experiences and prior academic backgrounds, communication and learning styles, English language proficiency and knowledge of technology, they will be able to assist them better in their transition and adaptation into the host society (Dee, 2004; Dei, 2012). Adult education practitioners could come to terms with their cultural bias and prejudice by attending cross-cultural workshops or mentoring migrant and refugee students, and in the process learn to appreciate their cultural differences and shared values. In effect, adult education
institutions could provide professional development programs for adult education practitioners to enhance their knowledge and understanding of migrant and refugee women’s sociocultural histories and contexts and intercultural communication. The knowledge and skills from such programs will assist practitioners to be more understanding, culturally sensitive and empathetic, and contribute to the provision of curricula and teaching and learning practices that will assist in empowering and restoring learners’ diminished individual and collective agencies. Cross-cultural professional development workshops could be conducted in partnership with migrant and refugee organisations and their constituent bodies, and could also include established African migrant and refugee women from students’ communities.

As indicated earlier (Section 5.3.1.2), the role of adult education practitioners ranged from one of meeting the participants’ immediate needs to promoting transformation and empowerment by supporting and challenging them to think beyond and outside their current frame of reference. This reflects Brookfield’s assertion that it is “the particular function of the facilitator [educator] … to challenge learners with alternative ways of interpreting their experience” (1986, p. 230). The participants also reported that they learned more from people, particularly adult education practitioners that they could connect with, and trusted, because such people understood and valued their standpoints. Adult education practitioners should design their teaching and learning practices to make critical reflection a central focus, with the purpose of helping learners to rediscover their power and develop awareness of agency to transform their own reality. They should adopt a liberal approach of teaching couched in “acts of cognition not the transferal of information” (Freire, 1995, p. 67), and develop a horizontal student-teacher relationship
where the adult education practitioner works as a facilitator of knowledge and on an equal footing with the students, showing respect and empathy. hooks aptly states that “empowerment cannot happen if we refuse to be vulnerable while encouraging others to do so” (1994, p. 21). If adult education practitioners can model and present themselves to students “as people in the process of becoming” (Rogers, cited in Schapiro, 2003, p. 163), and in a mutual process of dialogue and inquiry with their students, they can help students to fully engage in the process of transformation and grow together. These aims could be achieved through creative and interactive teaching and learning practices that inspire critical reflection, critical thinking and critical discourse including self-reflective journal writing, life histories, problem-posing, discussion groups, peer dialogue, interactive workshops and small group activities. In addition, diverse literature covering gender, race, culture and ethnicity could be used to stimulate critical consciousness. To enable adult education practitioners to foster such learning in their teaching practice, Johnson-Bailey and Alfred recommend that “it may be necessary for one to undergo some form of self-reflection and transformation in order to teach transformation” (2006, p. 55). Educators may also begin their teaching with premise reflection, which involves “critically questioning our presuppositions underlying our knowledge” (Kreber, 2004, p. 31).

As established in the study, one of the most powerful ways of learning for the participants was through direct experience and connection with learning content and context. Students should be provided with a range of experiential learning approaches that are personally engaging and stimulate reflection, and offered the chance to gain a sense of agency. Such learning experiences include incorporating guest speakers, work
experience, mentoring and field trips where students could link their studies directly with the real world. Guest speakers with different perspectives that will expose and challenge learners’ worldviews should be utilised. This would implore learners to critically reflect, question and reassess their own values and beliefs and offer more opportunities to assess career possibilities through work experience, mentoring and volunteering programs. Flannery reminds adult education practitioners that:

If adult learning theories promote … the same mono-cultural environment of language, teaching/learning styles, and communication patterns, and ignores the influence of the social context from which learners come, failure to learn may well be perpetuated” (1995, p. 155).

The study shows that African migrant and refugee women from various age groups and socioeconomic backgrounds are engaged in education and learning activities in increasing numbers. Education institutions should be contextually relevant and responsive to the needs of this diverse cohort of ethno-culturally diverse women who are often full or part-time employees and actively involved in their ethnic and wider community issues as volunteers and community leaders. A transformation of the education and learning environment would make it visibly multicultural as well as more race and gender-sensitive. Education and learning is highly valued in the participants’ antecedent cultures, meaning more to them than simply improved vocational opportunities. An understanding of the participants’ motives for education and ways of knowing and being, may encourage a more culturally sensitive and flexible approach by practitioners and policy makers. Recognising and respecting these women’s other familial commitments would help to maximise their potential and successful engagement with the learning community.
Due to their positionality in Australia as a socially, economically and politically disenfranchised group, African female students were often alienated by the educational practices that are based on mainstream Anglo-Australian cultural values. Effective learning among such disadvantaged students demands that adult education practitioners reorient educational practices to incorporate their sociocultural values and practices into the educational process. Therefore, learning opportunities for African migrant and refugee women should be holistic and extended beyond instrumental and functional skills of literacy, to recognise the whole personal, social, and cultural transformations that are equally experienced in the adaptation, settlement and integration process. For instance, it is critical for education practitioners and institutions to organise orientation/induction programs aimed at assisting African women better interface cultural, school, family and work issues. Such programs could focus on helping them to better understand and cope with the interrelated issues of gender role conflict, role overload, time management, study skills and career pathways. It could also be an opportunity to introduce students to Australian sociocultural values and norms as students and adult education practitioners meet and freely exchange knowledge and ideas about their sociocultural backgrounds, practices and experiences.

As increasing numbers of African women with dependent children engage in education, there is an increasing demand for affordable, quality childcare during school hours. The majority of the women in this study cited childcare as one of their most pressing concerns whilst undertaking formal studies. The provision of childcare assistance for these women, who often have fewer formal and informal social support networks, must therefore be a priority for education and training institutions. Flexibility of courses and
programs offered, delivery modes including online and distance education, and scheduling of classes beyond weekdays and school hours, are other ways that formal education institutions could be more supportive and accessible for African female students who have conflicting gender role responsibilities. Sheared encourages adult education practitioners to adopt different methods of teaching and learning and move beyond the traditional methods, because “to limit ourselves to one methodological paradigm risks silencing those to whom we hope to give voice” (1994, p. 35).

Another important point is that the study reveals that African migrant and refugee women are not blank slates (Clayton, 2005), they come from diverse backgrounds and have an immense wealth of knowledge and experience from different histories, biographies and sociocultural contexts. However due to the rigorous restriction on the recognition of foreign qualifications, their foreign credentials and experiences were often devalued, discounted and not recognised. According to Bourke, migrants, refugees and international students are “one of the most important elements of international knowledge system” (1997, p. 327). In the current global knowledge economy, African migrant and refugee women as carriers of knowledge across borders should be encouraged to share their knowledge to the benefit of their Australian classmates, colleagues and educators. The “deficient migrant” approach, where the participants’ knowledge and skills were devalued, was an extremely disempowering experience for these participants. Delpit points out that “rather than think of these diverse students as problems, we can view them instead as resources 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” (1995, p. 69). Adult education programs
should focus on an asset perspective, acknowledging ethno-culturally diverse students’ strengths and talents instead of a deficit perspective that often marginalises their experiences. Adult education curricula should be inclusive to enable African female students to share their stories and contribute to programs. Adult educators should critically reflect on their teaching and learning styles to be inclusive and provide opportunities for open interaction in the classroom. Education practitioners, institutions and policy makers could also work together to simplify and articulate the accreditation process for foreign credentials to alleviate current bureaucratic impediments.

Furthermore, the study suggests that the participants learned best in contexts where their strengths and wealth of knowledge and expertise were acknowledged and valued. Adult education practitioners must engage in personal reflection with the students and evoke reciprocity and interdependency to make the process of teaching and learning transparent and synergistic. The participants valued learning conditions that supported their personal development, and it was extremely important to them to be engaged in activities that helped them reaffirm their existing skills whilst learning new ones. To this end, adult education practitioners should be inclusive, enabling students to have meaningful input into education curricula planning and evaluation. They should also emphasise local and daily lived experiences of their students and “begin with where their learners are at, recognizing the specificities of their communities, families, cultures, and histories and acknowledging their needs as well as their existing knowledge and skills” (Butterwick & Egan, 2010, p. 121).

The study reveals that racism, sexism, classism and ethnocentrism are prevalent, and as black African migrant and refugee women belonging to a visible minority, all
participants were adversely affected by these intersectional forces of oppression and discrimination. According to previous studies, ethno-culturally and linguistically diverse students who experience social exclusion and discrimination have adjustment issues compared to their peers, who face little or no discrimination and stereotypical events (Magro & Gorayshi, 2011; Mwaura, 2008; Onsando, 2014; Zhang, 2005). Educational programs and curricula could be redesigned to include work experience, guest lecturers and community excursions to encourage mutual learning and sharing between students and members of the dominant group/wider community to reflect and address issues of racism, sexism and ethnocentrism. Adult education practitioners should be open, thoughtful and sensitive in engaging in conversations about human differences and similarities, recognising and addressing issues of social injustices that pervade institutions creating enduring patterns of inequity through multicultural education. In other words adult education practitioners may need to reconstruct their curriculum and knowledge to reflect the interconnectedness of the multiple and diverse voices of their multicultural student population, and adopt a broader and inclusive agenda.

Adult education institutions could be more proactive in addressing issues of racism, sexism and ethnocentrism through the organisation of multicultural events on their campuses. They could also promote social inclusion and social harmony through public education programs in collaboration with migrant and refugee groups, and involve established migrants and refugees from the same cultural heritage as their students. Furthermore, adult education institutions could consider the employment of CALD education practitioners because, in as much as the participants appreciated the committed adult educators they have worked with, they also stressed the positive impact
they had with educated people from their race and ethnic backgrounds. They were concerned about the under-representation of various ethnic backgrounds among adult educators, and indicated the need for such a representation. The participants’ views and suggestions from this study are expressed in previous studies on how to deal with cultural diversity in teaching (Dei, 2004, 2012; Shaw, 2005).

Finally, the relationship between adult education practitioners and students is crucial, as “student and staff interactions are one of the most important characteristics of high quality learning” (Coates, 2008, p. 8), particularly for students from culturally diverse backgrounds. The participants in this study highly valued the relationship, support and encouragement they received from family members, friends, education practitioners, education institution support staff, neighbours, peers, and fellow students. Throughout their narratives participants highlighted how their interactions with social support networks played a crucial role in their resilience and persistence of their education, transformation and empowerment. In all contexts, the interactions and relationships with these networks created conditions that enhanced their learning journey. Such contexts also promoted critical dialogue, critical reflection, assessment and engagement with diversity required for their transformative learning. This reflects other research findings, including Mezirow’s, which clearly demonstrate that “the crucial role of supportive relationships and a supportive environment … makes possible a more confident, assured sense of personal efficacy, of having a self—or selves—more capable of becoming critically reflective of one’s habitual and sometimes cherished assumptions, and of having the self-confidence to take action on reflective insights” (2000, p. 25). These aspects of the participants’ stories show that adult education practitioners and
institutions can facilitate and provide opportunities for students to meet with diverse groups of people to establish networks, share ideas and experiences for mutual knowledge and understanding of sociocultural differences. This can be accomplished by organising peer support, buddy and mentoring programs, and group work as part of the curricula. Such social support networks and activities can generate avenues for regular communication and networking between diverse groups as well as provide students with a sense of belonging and security and assist in culling feelings of confusion, enhance their learning, and accelerate adaptation and engagement in their new context.

Adult education practitioners should also learn to be committed, passionate and empathetic, show understanding of students’ needs, and express care and love towards marginalised African migrant and refugee students who encounter racism, sexism and ethnocentrism as a daily lived experience. hooks (1989) reminds adult education practitioners that love is a crucial component of teaching for transformation and empowerment as it helps us move against dehumanization and against domination.

Overall, this study has revealed that Australia’s multicultural society is growing more diverse, and education has been the primary tool for migrant and refugees’ capacity building and acculturation. Hence, it is imperative that adult education practitioners adopt multicultural teaching and learning pedagogies that are more inclusive and embrace ethno-culturally diverse students’ sociocultural histories. In multicultural Australia, “appreciating diversity cannot wait until the time is right and all conditions are perfect. It must begin now” (Amstutz, 1994, p. 49). In effect, adult education institutions and practitioners should be equipped with teaching and learning resources that are representative of the multiple perspectives of Australia’s multicultural mosaic.
This study offers a proposition that value and credibility should be given to multiple voices in adult education and learning theorising, teaching and learning practice, shifting the knowledge that dominates the adult education field from an individualistic perspective to being more inclusive of multiple perspectives, and sociocultural theories that are helpful for explaining how individuals experience social phenomena such as those presented in this study. In doing so, adult education will embrace the more traditional theories that dominate the field, while at the same time opening up a scholarly discursive space that acknowledges, recognises and supports multiple perspectives, voices and ways of knowing, and stimulate interest in more inclusive sociocultural frameworks of adult education and learning.

7.3 Limitations of the study

As a qualitative case study, the findings of this study about 24 African migrant and refugee women are not intended to provide generalisations about the settlement and educational experiences of other migrant and refugee women from other cultures and countries. While generalisations may be made about other African-Australian women migrants and refugees located in other areas of Australia, their lived experiences may differ greatly. These findings reflect the essence of the African-Australian women participants’ lived experiences in the NT, and are unique to them as a result of their sociocultural values and personal histories. The small sample size and purposeful selection of the participants in the study also limits its generalisation.

It is important to note that all the participants had prior experience with formal education before migration to Australia. They had come from antecedent cultures that value the
emancipatory and transformative role education plays in people’s lives for them to achieve upward social mobility and economic empowerment, and they actively sought education and learning opportunities to improve the quality of life for themselves, their families and communities. Their readiness for education and internal motivation played a significant role in their lives. Hence, the importance that these participants placed on education and the value of education in their lives may have influenced the findings of this study, and these findings may be less relevant to migrant and refugee groups without the same view of education.

Despite the limitations, this study provides a deeper understanding and insight of African migrant and refugee women’s daily lived experiences, and serves as a starting point to the exploration of culturally diverse migrant and refugee women’s lived experiences, engendering and advancing more scholarly discourse and research.

7.4 Suggested future research

This study explored the lived settlement, education and learning experiences of 24 African migrant and refugee women to explicate the role of adult education in building their individual and community capacity. The findings of this study and the limitations above provide the basis for the suggestions for future research, which relate to the main purpose of adult education – to facilitate change, particularly for marginalised groups (Beder, 1989).

First, there are limited Australian empirical studies on African migrants and refugees engaged in adult education, and no literature was found which specifically examines the adult education and learning experiences of African migrant and refugee women in the
Due to the rapid increase in African migration to Australia, particularly the NT, timely research topics that have practical applications for the successful adaptation, settlement and integration into their new society are recommended. This study employed African migrant and refugee women as its focus, which has rarely been done in adult education research. The findings suggested that the empowerment and transformative learning outcomes of the participants were motivated by a desire to gain a sense of agency to control their world, and positively transform their lives, and that of their families and communities. Additional research is required to explore these issues for African-Australian men for further theorising about African migrants and refugees. A comparative study of African-Australian men and women could also be undertaken. It could be useful to compare the daily lived experiences of African women with other women from CALD background in the NT or other states/territories. Whilst this study concentrated on African migrant and refugee women learners, future studies may include adult education practitioners and policy makers in order to gauge their response to the role of education and learning in the settlement and integration process of African migrants and refugees.

Second, a longitudinal study is recommended to provide important information on the robustness and generalisability of transformative learning as a catalyst for successful integration of African migrants and refugees. Such a study may involve large numbers of participants, and integrate both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to provide valuable understanding of patterns of learning and acculturation processes. It may also explore specific educational contexts, including formal education VET/higher education, non-formal workplace training or informal learning.
Third, many studies on migrants and refugees lived settlement and learning experiences diminish the impact of sociocultural contexts. This study utilised transformative learning and feminist standpoint theories in an attempt to address issues related to sociocultural factors and personal histories including race, gender, ethnicity and social class. Given that African migrant and refugee women’s lived experiences are a new phenomenon in adult education and learning in cross-cultural contexts, future research could explore the perspectives of African migrant and refugee women students and adult education practitioners on the way educational systems have adapted to, and incorporate the sociocultural contexts of culturally diverse and emerging migrant and refugee groups, including African-Australians, to address their needs and aspirations.

Fourth, the study demonstrates that adult education assisted in building individual and community capacity of the African women participants and offered significant insight into the economic, civic and social outcomes of adult education. The processes and strategies involved in the skilling, empowerment and transformation of the participants are very important to policy makers, adult education practitioners and institutions, as successful integration of migrants and refugees is the major objective of Australia’s immigration, settlement and multiculturalism policies. In view of the current education and training funding cuts by federal and state/territory governments, it is imperative to establish that “education is not an option for governments, but an absolute pre-requisite for the promotion of personal well-being and a cohesive society” (Bynner et al., 2003, p. 359). Hence, further research is critical to elucidate the variety of complex interlinking effects that adult education has on public well-being particularly migrants and refugees, as the socioeconomic outcomes of education are related to social cohesion and social
harmony and the reduction of inequality. Other research opportunities in the future could include follow-up research with the participants in this study to document their development and change over a period of time as they continue to engage in transformative learning experiences. Such a study could be more focused and explore the participants’ engagement in their community’s development (leading and working for social change, or setting up their own business enterprises).

Since the researcher is from a similar sociocultural background as the participants, the study could be replicated by a researcher from a different sociocultural background (race, gender, and ethnicity) using participatory process of inquiry to compare findings.

Finally, for adult education field to become more inclusive of diverse groups and perspectives, more research on sociocultural issues such as intersectionality is needed to provide deeper understanding of ways in which racism, sexism, classism, ethnocentrism and other social realities can affect African migrant and refugee women’s lived experiences in the different education and learning contexts.

7.5 Conclusion

With the overwhelming increase in the migration of Africans to Australia (DIAC, 2012a; Hugo, 2009; Jakubowicz, 2010), the need to understand the lived experiences of African migrants and refugees, and appreciation of their social, cultural, and historical backgrounds cannot be under-estimated. This study has attempted to gain an understanding and insight into why and how African migrant and refugee women participated in adult education and learning activities during their settlement process, and the extent to which their participation impacted on their lives and how the change
manifested in themselves, their families and communities. Since African migrant and refugee women have been marginalised, and remain voiceless and invisible their experiences have hardly been sought, and the limited literature on them has been interpreted on their behalf by others (Tett, 2000). This study gave them the opportunity and voice “to reclaim their own memories, stories and histories as part of an on-going collective struggle to challenge those power structures that attempt to silence them” (Giroux, 1992, p. 170). The findings and implications of the study provide knowledge, understanding and suggestions that will hopefully contribute to better communication and understanding among adult education practitioners and institutions, the wider community and African migrants and refugees, and address the holistic nature of adult learning for people from culturally diverse backgrounds to build their individual and community capacity for successful settlement and integration.

Migration leads to changes in people’s lives, and what has emerged from this study is that education is a potent force which has enabled the African migrant and refugee women participants to find meaning in the challenges of their existence in their host community. In embracing the processes of change through active participation in educational activities, the participants have learned to adapt to new roles and employ a variety of coping strategies. Through education, they have gained linguistic skills and the ability to examine, understand and map out aspects of practices from their original sociocultural backgrounds and host community; and then make the changes they consider appropriate for survival in their new society. The participants’ narratives strongly indicate that adult education has assisted them in building their capacity to contribute to the development of their community by providing them with essential
social, professional, political, and cultural knowledge. Furthermore, it has provided them with skills to straddle multiple cultures to create a mélange of identities, and participate in the labour market, and bring economic, social, cultural and intellectual dynamism to the different communities they have been part of. Their stories provide evidence of altruism, resilience, empowerment, transformation, and great hopes and dreams, which can inform opportunities and educational pathways offered to other migrant and refugee groups. The inspiring and great adult educator, Paulo Freire stated that:

Although there is no denying the existence of real despair; or the historical, economic and social reasons behind it, I cannot imagine human existence and the necessary struggle to improve it without hope and without a dream (cited in Hossain, 2012, p. 5)

### 7.6 Concluding remarks: Personal reflection

Merrill states that, “education is … a space which enables women, both individually and collectively, to take stock of their lives and reflect upon their identities—a biographical reflection—developing and creating a transformatory life project” (2005, p. 48). The transformative power of education is well illustrated in the participants’ stories in this study. As a researcher, I have been transformed after listening to these amazing African women’s unique stories about their triumphs and tribulations – their personal stories of resilience, hope and faith, triumph over racism, sexism, ethnocentrism, discrimination, a deep desire for educational attainments and collective transformation and empowerment. Despite the overwhelming structural barriers and personal challenges that had the potential to cripple the participants and turn them into passive recipients of aid and services, rather they took advantage of the educational opportunities and the social networks to rebuild and reconstruct their identities. They were determined in their quest for an improved life, and their reliance on, and accumulation of extensive stocks of
social, cultural and human capital helped them to overcome the challenges associated with leaving their country of origin and settling in a country that is significantly different from what they were familiar with. They felt empowered and believe that with hard work they can achieve many things, and yet they are humbled by the acceptance and generosity of ordinary Australians, and are grateful for the progress they have made in their lives. It is hoped these women’s voices can be a reminder, and continue to inspire others – women and men alike, migrants, refugees and the wider society – to understand and appreciate the tenacity of these women to achieve their aspirations which demonstrate what Kalumburu aptly sums up as, “when there is a will, one will find the way” (Interview with Kalumburu, 5/07/09). It is important to nurture the courage and confidence in these women to know that their stories are worth sharing, because it is only through their authentic voices that they can confirm that their experiences are legitimate. As indicated earlier, it has been my intention through this study to contribute to the bodies of knowledge in both the fields of adult education and learning, and women’s studies on the African diasporan women’s voice on their lived experiences, and this study will hopefully lead to further opportunities and pathways to explore and traverse African migrant and refugee women’s daily lived experiences.

Personally, it seems like yesterday when I embarked on this learning journey, which has truly been a transformative learning experience. I have interacted and encountered some wise counsel from the participants, critical friends, my supervisors and many significant people from diverse backgrounds who have nourished and nurtured the process as well as challenged me on my beliefs, assumptions and professional practice, and assisted me to enhance both my rational and cognitive, and extra-rational and intuitive capabilities. I
have tried to understand the challenges I have encountered in this learning process as the
opportunity for developing a broader definition of the ‘self’ in relation with ‘others’, and
value the increased consciousness that I have gained, and the shifts in my worldview and
ways of being. I have learned to listen more carefully to my inner self and to the people I
encounter in my everyday world, and become more reflective and self-aware, more
sensitive and considerate.

Deegan and Hill (1991) describe doctoral thesis writing as a liminal journey of the self,
and this doctoral study may not have answered all the questions, yet it has helped me to
“gain understanding and wisdom in the process” (Ruona, 2000, p. 5), as the learning
journey has reminded me of where I have come from, where I have been, and where I
am now. In all of these I have been humbled by God’s amazing grace and love in
opening doors and windows for me to learn from some incredible people to build my
capacity, that of my family, and the communities that I have been blessed and privileged
to be part of. It is my belief that the end of this PhD learning journey marks the
beginning of another learning journey, and I am confident that, “I can do all things
through Him [God] who strengthens me. He [God], who has begun the good work [in
me] will be faithful to complete it” (Philippians 1 verse 6, Women of Destiny Bible,
2000, p. 1454).

As adult educators, Barr reminds us to continuously rethink and critically reflect and
deliberate over “questions of who we hear, how we listen, to whom we regard ourselves
as accountable, who we address or imagine as our audience, and how we address them”
(1999, p. 163). It is my hope that these critical reflections will assist us as adult
education practitioners immensely to promote and foster transformative education and
learning and make our teaching and learning pedagogies more inclusive. The growing number of CALD migrants and refugees will continue to impact educational systems, and as adult education practitioners we should heed to Dirkx’s suggestion that:

The best teachers of transformative learning are ourselves – our own lives in community with others. If we want to learn about fostering transformation among our learners, the most important way to begin the work is with this particular, common, and sacred life one has been given. It is a simple and humble, yet incredibly profound place to begin (1998, pp. 11-12).
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Appendix 1 – Questionnaire – Personal Details

Name: ..........................................................................................................

Address: ..................................................................................................

Phone No. ..................................... Mobile .................................. Fax ...........

African Heritage (Country of Origin): .....................................................

How long have you been in Australia? ...................................................

How long have you been in the Northern Territory? ............................

Age Group

18 – 29 ............

30 – 39 ............

40 – 49 ............

50 – 60 ............

Relationship Status

Married ............

Single/Never married ............

Divorced ............

Separated not divorced ............

Widowed ............

Other, Please describe ............

Dependants

Children ............

Other, Please describe ............

.................................................................................................
Education

University/Higher degree…. Qualification/s……
Trade/Vocational ………….Qualification/s……
Secondary………….Qualification/s…………
Primary…………….Qualification/s…………

Employment Situation

Working full time………..
Working part time………..
Self-employed……………..
Retired…………………..
Unemployed………………
Working without pay………
Full-time student…………
Part-time student…………
Household duties…………
Other, please describe…………

Type of position

Non-supervisory……………..
Supervisory……………..

If there is any other information that you feel is important for this study, you can write it down here.

........................................................................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................................................................
Appendix 2 – Semi-structured Interview Themes

The semi-structured interview open questions will be framed around the following themes, and participants will be allowed to determine the order of the topics and time to spend on each theme:

1. Family

2. Pre/ Post-migration experience – social, cultural, economic, political

3. Education experience (formal education experiences include ESL - AMEP; basic level of education; VET or Higher Education programs; and the apprenticeship programs. The non-formal education experiences include work-related (professional), work-placement, workplace mentoring, courses and personal interest programs. Informal education experiences included mentoring, self-paced study using books, audio-visuals; self-paced study using computers; attendance at informal presentations, conferences. Access to education and training programs - barriers and challenges)

4. Employment (access, barriers and challenges/strategies)

5. Social/Community support (networks)

6. Community engagement/involvement (cultural maintenance and identity; participation in the African community and the wider community)

7. Ideas/perspectives on role adult education and individual/community capacity building – Self enhancement, children, family and community members

8. Ideas/perspectives on African women’s involvement in adult education and training.


10. Overall suggestions/proposals/recommendations for improving settlement, integration, adult education and learning policies and practices.
## Appendix 3 – Participants’ Information

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Immigration Status</th>
<th>Original Country</th>
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<td>Zimbabwe</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 4 – Consent Forms

I……………………………………………………………….
of………………………
………………………………………
hereby consent to participate in the research, “Adult education and community
capacity building: The case of African-Australian women in the Northern
Territory of Australia” to be undertaken by Susana Akua Saffu, a PhD student from
Charles Darwin University.

I understand the purpose of the research is to gain understanding and insight of the
educational experiences and actions that African-Australian women undergo, which
build their capacity to contribute to their community’s development. It further aims to
understand how these women’s adult education experiences affect them generally
including family, employment and community engagement; and identify ways to
improve social and education services for African migrants.

I acknowledge that:

• the aims, methods, and anticipated benefits and possible risks of the study, have
  been explained to me by Susana Akua Saffu;

• I voluntarily and freely give my consent to my participation in such a study;

• I understand that the aggregated results will be used for research purposes and may
  be reported in scientific and academic journals;

• individual results will not be released to any person except at my request and on
  my authorisation;

• I am free to withdraw my consent at any time during the study in which event my
  participation in the research study will immediately cease, and any information
  obtained will be returned to me or destroyed at my request.

I acknowledge that I have read a Plain Language Statement that explains all aspects of
the research, including my rights regarding confidentiality and participation, and have
had an opportunity to discuss these aspects with the researcher, Susana Akua Saffu.

Signature:………………………………………………………Date……………………….
CONSENT FORM FOR QUESTIONNAIRE (PERSONAL DETAILS)

I……………………………………………………………….

of…………………………………………………………

hereby consent to participate in the research, “Adult education and community capacity building: The case of African-Australian women in the Northern Territory of Australia” to be undertaken by Susana Akua Saffu, a PhD student from Charles Darwin University.

I understand the purpose of the research is to gain understanding and insight of the educational experiences and actions that African-Australian women undergo, which build their capacity to contribute to their community’s development. It further aims to understand how these women’s adult education experiences affect them generally including family, employment and community engagement; and identify ways to improve social and education services for African migrants.

I acknowledge that:

• upon receipt, my questionnaire will be coded and my name and address will be kept separately from it;

• any information that I provide will not be released in an identified form;

• aggregated results will be used for research purposes and may be reported in scientific and academic journals;

• individual results will not be released to any person except at my request and on my authorisation;

• I am free to withdraw my consent at any time during the study in which event my participation in the research study will immediately cease, and any information obtained will be returned to me or destroyed at my request.

I acknowledge that I have read a Plain Language Statement that explains all aspects of the research, including my rights regarding confidentiality and participation, and have had an opportunity to discuss these aspects with the researcher, Susana Akua Saffu.

Signature:…………………………………………………………Date…………………………
Appendix 4 – Plain Language Statement

Dear Potential Participant,

My name is Susana Akua Saffu, an African-Australian woman currently undertaking a research for my PhD study through Charles Darwin University. I would like to invite you to participate in the research which I am conducting on “Adult education and community capacity building: The case of African-Australian women in the Northern Territory of Australia”.

PURPOSE OF STUDY
The research is an examination of African-Australian women’s migration and adult education experiences in the Northern Territory. The aim of the research is to understand the education and learning experiences that African-Australian women undergo which build their capacity to participate fully and contribute to their new community’s development. It further aims to understand how these women’s adult education experiences affect them generally including family, employment and community engagement; and identify ways to improve social and education services for African migrants and refugees in particular and other migrant and refugee groups.

BENEFITS OF STUDY
It is expected that the outcomes from this study will help social and education service providers to offer educational programs and support that better meet the needs of African migrants in general and women in particular.

WHAT WOULD BE EXPECTED OF YOU
If you decide to participate in this research, you will be asked to complete a form (questionnaire) with your personal details. This is so that I will know your name, address, contact number/s and a little bit about you. I will not provide these details to anyone else. You will also share your ideas and experiences of migration and adult education in conversations and interviews with me (done alone or with someone). The interviews will take about two hours and will take place at a location and time decided by you. I will write some notes during the interview, and record the interview on a tape recorder so I can transcribe it and listen to the conversation again, when required. After the interviews, you will need to talk with me again to check if your information is correct.

DISCOMFORTS/RISKS
You will be asked to talk about your ideas and life experiences of migration and adult education. If there are any experiences that you are not comfortable talking about, just let me know. If during an interview you are not comfortable we will stop. You are not under any obligation to continue. If you share any information and decide that you subsequently do not want included in the study, it will be removed from your interview report.
CONFIDENTIALITY
Your name and details by which you could be identified will not be revealed in the research. All your information will not be identified in any way and they will be stored securely and separately in a filing cabinet and in password protected computer files.

YOUR PARTICIPATION
I would be grateful if you volunteered to participate in this research, however, you are free not to, if you so wish. Even if you decide to participate in the research, you can withdraw your involvement at any time; and any information you have provided can be withdrawn as well.

RESULTS OF THE STUDY
The results of this study will be published and shared with all participants and other people. If the paper is not clear to you, arrangements will be made for it to be explained properly.

PERSONS TO CONTACT
If you have any questions about the research or want to discuss your participation, please contact me on phone: 89397365/0401066952 or email me at susana.saffu@batchelor.edu.au; susana.saffu@cdu.edu.au

If there is an emergency or if you have any concerns before commencing, during, or after the completion of the research, you are invited to contact the Executive Officer of the Charles Darwin University Human Research Ethics Committee, Ms. Plaxy Purich, on 89466498 or by email: cdu-ethics@cdu.edu.au. The Executive Officer can pass on such concerns to appropriate officers within the University.

Whatever your decision on this matter, I wish to thank you most sincerely for taking time to read this statement and considering its contents.

This information sheet is yours to keep
Appendix 5 – Pre and Postmigration education and training

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
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