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“...AND THE ‘BEAT’ GOES ON.” The Experience of
Black Ghanaian Women in Canada: A Case of Domestic Violence

by

Patience Togo, B.S.W

A Thesis proposal submitted
to the Faculty of School of Social Work Ethics Committee
In partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of
Master of Social Work

School of Social Work
Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario

July, 1999

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“... And The ‘Beat’ Goes On.” The Experience of
Black Ghanaian Women in Canada: A Case of Domestic Violence

Submitted by Patience Togo, B.S.W.

In Partial fulfillment of the requirement for
The degree of Master of Social Work

Thesis Supervisor

Director, School of Social Work

Carleton University

Date

DEDICATIONS

I dedicate this work in memory of the **Finest**, my late Mother **Mrs. Agnes Fiagbenu-Ansong**, for being the fertilizer in the soil that made the little bud grow into a big tree with productive fruits. You will always be in my heart. Thanks for making all the 'wrongs right'.

And for my **Sweet** Husband **Jacob B. Togo** for his love, support and understanding in making all my dreams come through.

Finally, to my **Dearest** daughter **Kokui Elikem Togo** for putting up with all my long hours of work and for all the encouraging words. I made it because you were the 'Perfect little Big Sister'.

I love you all.

ABSTRACT

This exploratory study is an investigation of domestic violence against Black Ghanaian women by Ghanaian men in Canada. It is my contention that certain Ghanaian cultural and traditional practices contribute to the violence Black Ghanaian women experience in Canada. A Black Structural Feminist framework is employed to inform the study. A qualitative approach was used to gather the data for the study. The significance of the investigation is to begin a dialogue to address the issue of domestic violence. I believe that there is the need to acknowledge the existence of this social problem in the Ghanaian community, and to break the silence.

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Chapter I

BLACK GHANAIAN WOMEN AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN CANADA

Introduction

This thesis is principally an attempt to understand Ghanaian women's experience of domestic violence from a Ghanaian woman's perspective. It is an addition to the continuing efforts of other Ghanaian women in our struggle to end the oppression of domestic violence of all Ghanaian women. This research is both a struggle for me on a personal level, as a Black Ghanaian woman, a partner and mother of a female child. I am socializing my girl child in a way that she can understand some of the struggles that women experience in life. I know that the results and conclusions from this research will not answer all the questions and problems surrounding Ghanaian women and domestic violence, but it will begin the breaking of the silence around the violence which is inherent in our culture and traditions. It is my intent that this piece of work will make a contribution to the issues surrounding women and violence that will encourage further research on the topic. However, my search for answers to this social phenomenon began a long time ago.

The first time I questioned domestic violence against women in Ghana by our men, was one evening in 1986, when my mother walked into our home with the wife of a family friend who was bleeding through her nose with her face all battered. I was so horrified at the sight and the condition of the woman that I asked my mother "what is happening?" She responded by saying, "Afawobo is hitting her again; this time I think something needs to be done."

My first reaction to the incident was, “why not report the abuser to the police or the victim’s family?” I remember my mother saying to me, “you are too young to understand what is really going on, it is a very complex situation.” She meant that violence against women has been a long practice in Ghanaian society, and that men could beat “their” women with impunity when they so desire. From that day, I began to observe and question the violence that many women suffered at the hands of their male relations - fathers, brothers, chief-leaders, husbands and male friends. After years of critical observations, I have come to understand why my mother said, “you are too young to understand . . .” I also observed that the ‘hitting of a wife’ is more complex than what I thought of that day when I questioned my mother about what had happened to our family friend. The complexity is exacerbated when it is found that Ghanaian women are experiencing domestic violence from Ghanaian men in Canada, far away from Ghana.

In my eight years in Canada (1991-1999), I have heard similar horrendous stories about Ghanaian women abused by Ghanaian men in Canadian. Many questions come to mind including, “why are Ghanaian women experiencing domestic violence in Canada where legal charges could be laid against their male partners?” This and other questions led me to seek some explanations for this kind of violent behaviour displayed in Ghanaian families in a “free society.” When I decided to investigate this issue of Ghanaian women and domestic violence in Canada I met with much discouragement, the worse of which is the absence of relevant literature and the silence of the abused by men about this social problem. There is little written specifically about the issue within the Ghanaian communities in Canada. Another African researcher had a similar difficulty

when she decided that “. . . it is the marked lack of information on domestic violence that makes it essential to address” (Ofei-Aboagye, 1994: 925).

Therefore, this exploratory research project, the continuation of that long journey which began for me as a female child in Ghana, is an attempt to understand why Ghanaian men and women continue this cycle of abuse and silence so far away from home. The research documents the voices of seven Ghanaian women, who have experienced domestic violence from their Ghanaian male partners in Canada, and my experience provided the data for the study. The study examines the accounts of these women, discusses my knowledge and experience on this issue and the limited reports available, and traces the link between culture, traditions and domestic violence and how it is mediated by race, gender, and class in the Ghanaian social environment in Canada.

The study is carefully presented to the public so as to protect the identity of the participants (ie. the women and counselor). Any documents that may invite risk to the women's lives have been omitted (ie. letter from counselor, names of women, etc.). For instance, a newspaper report of a very recent violence in the Ghanaian community in Canada is evident of the danger that these women face (**See Appendix D**).

It is my contention that the subjection of Ghanaian women to domestic violence in Canada, at the hands of their Ghanaian male partners, is linked to some of the abusive cultural and traditional norms, values and practices inherited and transported from Ghana. Furthermore, as discussed further in the study race, gender and class do influence this violence. It is an established fact that because we are social products of our environment, our behaviour in most cases is rooted in the culture and traditions in which we were/are socialized. Similarly, as social beings, we are a part of the collective behaviour of our

community which is also a product of the prevailing culture and traditions. Therefore, with migration culture (Ghanaian) is transferable from one place to another where it becomes a sub-culture within a dominant culture (Canada). It is within this transported Ghanaian sub-culture that the abusive behaviour of Ghanaian men towards Ghanaian women takes place in Canada in the form of domestic violence.

I acknowledge that domestic violence against women is also prevalent within the dominant Canadian culture. Moreover, domestic violence against women is a universal problem. While this commonality exists, there are still some remarkable differences. The commonality of the problem may be attributed to the universal patriarchal ideology with its attendant socialization and sexual division of labour that, at the discretion of men, relegate women to a reserve army of labour with productive as well as reproductive functions to the discretion of men. One of the differences between the Ghanaian subculture and the dominant Canadian culture is that there are other attributing factors (ie. nationality, skin colour, ethnicity, etc.) which add to the tolerance and passivity of Ghanaian women in Canada towards violence committed against them by Ghanaian men.

The dominant literature presents considerable evidence to support the conclusion that male violence against women is an issue of power and control (hooks, 1989; Davies, 1994; Collins, 1990). However, by contrast, little is written and known about the role of culture and traditions in violence against women, as it relates to Ghanaian women. The gathering of the documentation for this research project is a way of exploring the issue of violence against women as it pertains to culture and traditions, among Ghanaian families in Canada.

It is important to recognize that this research is by no means an attack on the Ghanaian culture or men. However, it is one way for Ghanaians as a whole to start questioning some of the cultural and traditional practices that are oppressive to half of its society. I am proposing that Ghanaian culture should not be static, but rather evolve with the changing times. Some of these traditional practices today may have been useful at the time when they were first established (ie. polygamy), but may be abusive now in a society which is considerably more individualistic than it used to be.

The Problem and it's Significance

As I have stated earlier, the experience of Black Ghanaian women and domestic violence is similar to women experiencing violence globally. However, I have argued that there is an added dimension to the experience of Black Ghanaian women which is unique and peculiar to their experience, which includes the legacy of abusive national cultures and traditions. This is significant in terms of the impact and consequence of domestic violence on their lives, and calls for a better understanding of the unique cultural and traditional practices which is the focus of this study.

Most Black Ghanaian women who experience domestic violence in Canada, are usually silent about it because of the cultural and traditional interpretations and meanings attached to the consequences of reporting such incidents or seeking help. Their migration to other parts of the world can hardly break the strong socialization links that have been embedded in cultural and traditional practices of the country of their origin. Because these links are strong with the community and family in the country of origin, any attempt to break them may result in domestic violence. On the one hand, Ghanaian

women experiencing domestic violence in Canada have to battle with the consequences of breaking and leaving violent relationships as well as the pressures of being in a new country. The men, on the other hand, transform the consequences that women fear into threats to perpetuate violent acts against their female partners.

I have found that an effective social work practice in dealing with the problem is to be aware of, not only the presenting issues but also, the invisible issues such as the history, culture, traditions and the other social aspects of the women's lives. This calls for a better understanding of existing barriers when dealing with these abused women. Unfortunately, issues such as culture and traditions are not adequately examined as part of intervention. Therefore, I contend that social work practice should include the recognition and exploration of other issues such as culture and tradition when dealing with culturally new Canadians. I am of the view that with the understanding of these other aspects of Black Ghanaian women, it will be easier to help women in violent situations as well as create an awareness for service providers of the effectiveness of understanding the culture and tradition of any group of people.

The study establishes the hypothesis that the human person is a product of culture and tradition and holds, that for clearer understanding, any study of domestic violence must fathom and factor these concepts into the analysis. This exploratory study which aims at satisfying this condition is the beginning of a necessary investigation of a problem that is both silent and invisible within the Ghanaian community in Canada. One of its objectives is to help Ghanaian women and women with similar culture to break this oppressive silence. Other families of different culture could also benefit from this study

by becoming aware of some of the initial roots of domestic violence that are embedded in cultural and traditional practices.

The Fabric of My Identity

As a Black Ghanaian woman and the researcher of this social issue which I am passionate about, it is painful for me to be critically examining the very culture that I am part of. Nevertheless, I have adopted an open-mind and employed the highest level of professional skills and integrity in my investigation of the issues, including finding the links between cultural and traditional practices that contribute to domestic violence against Ghanaian women.

As I stated earlier in the study, growing up as a girl in Ghana, I witnessed many family members, friends and other women being violently abused. I have always wondered why this was accepted and allowed to go on. Later, when I came to Canada, I was shocked to find out through my interaction with other Ghanaian women, that many of them still experience domestic violence, even in Canadian society where laws, and regulations that protect women are enforced. It is my conviction that any form of violence committed by men against women is unacceptable, and that women need protection against all types of violence. However, the root of these abusive habits must be exposed. What is behind this kind of behaviour among Ghanaian men? Why do they not change even when there are serious legal consequences for inflicting pain on women in the Canadian society? As a member of the Ghanaian community in Canada, it is troubling to listen to women in the community say things like, “I feel so helpless about my situation, but I know I am not the only one going through this. Each time I walk

around, “I can see the same sadness that I have in the eyes of many others” (Interviewee 1, 1999). Such expressions led to my title, ‘**And the “Beat” goes on . . .**’ The ‘Beat’ signifies the following important themes: the **violence** in the **culture** and **traditions**; the **struggle** on an **individual level**; **resistance** through studies such as this; **education**; **advocacy**; **etc.** On a personal level, the beginning of the long journey which began for me as a girl-child and will likely continue long after this study, is summed up in this poem:

And The Beat Goes On

**We dance to culture’s harsh tunes
Designed, choreographed and executed by men
Solely for all women born to man
From the nooks and crannies of Abor
To the plush offices of Accra and the homes of Zabzugu
Our souls, dignity and humanity
March in step to the soulless
And degrading inhumanity**

**We move from South to East or North to West
Hoping for refuge and respite
But even in the beauty and glamour
Of Toronto, London, Paris and New York
The filth of home clings to us
As the frightening and dehumanizing ‘beat goes on.’**

**By, Jacob B. Togo
May, 1999**

A Personal Journey

The Fall of 1991 was the beginning of the growth of new buds on an old tree, as we will say proverbially in Ghana. The buds were new kinds of questions that I had about Ghanaian culture and traditions. The old tree is the old question that I asked my mother eight years ago. The turning point that gave birth to this idea of a research came

as I spoke to women and men in the Ghanaian community I often heard repeated over and over again, “we are Ghanaians no matter where we are.” On those occasions when I have tried to express my concern about certain abusive cultural and traditional practices I was confronted with a similar response to that of another Ghanaian scholar who states that, “I am [we are] trying to incorporate what is essentially a western phenomenon into the Ghanaian culture” (Ofei-Aboagye, 1995. 926). This did not weaken my enthusiasm, because I continue to examine the social conditions that Ghanaian women are faced with in Canada by, “replaying and observing old cultural patterns with new insight” (ibid.).

This led to another stage of my journey, which is to examine the links between cultural and traditional practices and the perpetuation of domestic violence against Ghanaian women in Canada. In my investigation of the issue, I began by looking at different aspects of the Ghanaian culture and traditions that contribute to domestic violence within the Ghanaian community in Canada.

Research Questions

This thesis addressed the following major questions: 1) Is domestic violence against Black Ghanaian women in Canada a reality? 2) If so, how is it identified and defined? 3) Why do these women stay in violent relationships in a country like Canada where they can be legally protected and helped? 4) Do culture and tradition play roles in the occurrence of domestic violence against these women? 5) What are the forms of violence used against these women in the family circle? 6) What roles do race, gender and class play in the domestic violence process and its perpetuation? 7) What are the consequences of domestic violence for the violated women? 8) What role does

socialization of the sexes in the Ghanaian culture play in domestic violence? 9) What are some of the effects of marriage and dating processes within the Ghanaian sub-culture in Canada on domestic violence? 10) Does the role of the immediate and extended family within Ghanaian culture have any impact on domestic violence? 11) What are the support systems available for Black Ghanaian women in their community who are experiencing domestic violence in Canada? These and other relevant questions were explored during the research.

Propositions

There are three propositions made in this study. First, the experience of domestic violence of the Black Ghanaian women in the hands of their male Ghanaian partners are inexcusably linked to some of the violent cultural and traditional practices of the Ghanaian society. A clear understanding of this is gleaned from the examination of those aspects of the Ghanaian social structures that impact on the lives of the Black Ghanaian woman (Ofei-Aboagye, 1994; Oppong, 1974; Nukunya, 1969; Busia, 1958).

Second, theoretical approaches that are utilized in other western cultural context in addressing domestic violence, are useful to a point. However, for the examining Ghanaian of woman's experience an additional approach is necessary. These models do not speak in the entity to the reality of the Ghanaian woman and their experience of domestic violence. Consequently, it is difficult for social services providers to understand the situation of Ghanaian women experiencing domestic violence which prevents them from providing appropriate services and options. Also, superimposed are the evitable problems of African women (ie. structural inequalities, racism and other

discriminatory practices). These women experiencing domestic violence internalize these perceptions and societal stereotyping which shape their responses to available services or discussion about their experiences.

The third proposition, is that this study has critically examined the existing aspects of cultural and traditional practices and found that these are linked to the perpetuation of domestic violence against Ghanaian women in Canada. These findings do offer a greater understanding and awareness of these aspects and the impact on the lives of the Black Ghanaian woman in Canada.

Definition of Terms

The following terms that are employed in this paper are defined from the perspective of a common Ghanaian usage. It must be pointed out that the interpretations differ somewhat from the commonly understood usage of the same terms in Canada. They are as follows:-

Domestic Violence, is defined in this study as any cruel act(s) where physical, emotional, verbal, psychological, sexual, financial, etc. are used in a domestic or family and / or extended family setting in which males inflict pain on females. However, such acts, done in the name of culture and traditions, are not considered by the society as violent (i.e. wife battering).

Black African Structural Feminist Approach informs the oppression of Ghanaian women as they relate to the structures of the Ghanaian society. This approach gives voice to Black Ghanaian women. It names, examines and analyses women's experiences as they relate to race, gender, class, culture, traditions, family, etc. It also

looks at the social, political, economic, and religious, structures that perpetuate cultural and traditional practices that influence the experiences of Ghanaian women and men.

Race, includes all the different nationalities living in Ghana who are also considered Ghanaians among whom are; Lebanese, Jews, East Indians, Greeks, British, other Europeans and others. Race is therefore, defined in Ghana as it relates first to the culture. The colour of one's skin,(fair, dark or light brown) and the texture of the hair generally used to identify those of different racial background enhances the cultural component. A person's ancestral heritage and ethnic traditions are significant in defining race in Ghana. For example, Black women whose ancestral heritage is Ghanaian are regarded as being of a different race to Black women with a British heritage who claim Ghana as their home.

Gender, is defined as the distinction between females and males. It is also defined by the different roles assigned by the society to the sexes. Gender decides the way girls and boys are socialized. This is done according to the kind of work they are trained to perform, the behaviours they are taught, the customs and ritual that each sex has to adhere to, etc. A girl is always socialized to do the cooking, cleaning and caring for the home, while boys are socialized to be independent to enable them provide financially for their future families. Traditionally, girls are taught to be subservient to all males in the society.

Class, is defined in relation to a person's or family's economic success, educational background, the kind of employment one is engaged in, as well as the social status or position one has in the job. It is influenced also, by the region one comes from, whether it is a rich region in the sense of economic success. For example, the kind of

cash crops (i.e. cocoa and coffee) and livestock (cows, goats etc.) that are cultivated in a particular region identifies the wealth of that region. The people from that region are considered to be in a higher class than the people from an economically deprived region. It is also important to note that although a person may belong to a rich region, s/he may not be considered of a higher class because other factors such as gender and age, play a role in determining one's class. However, in this study class makes little difference to the violence Ghanaian women experience.

Culture, generally may be defined as the customs, habits, values, ideology, religious, and political behaviour of a group. In addition, from a Ghanaian perspective, culture is defined according to one's clan or ancestral heritage. In all the cultures in Ghana, women are the subservient persons especially during their youth and child-bearing age. For example, each clan has different ways of performing marriage or puberty rites. Most of these rituals are mainly done to girls and young women. It is interesting to note that women are the bearers of the culture and become more culturally important in old age.

Tradition, is defined in the literature as a long established custom or practice that has the effect of an unwritten law. But for most Ghanaians tradition is culture that is established and accepted by society as the norm and is seldom questioned. For example, originally the culture was that before marriage can be viewed as official a specific process had to be followed by both families involved. This practice was done for so long that it is now no longer a cultural practice but a marital tradition among Ghanaians.

Sexual Socialization, is different for males and females. The sexual behaviours that are accepted for males are not tolerated from females. For example, a woman is

socialized to understand that it is the duty of a man to make all initial sexual advances. If she does she could be labeled as a bad woman and rejected by men as being unfit for a wife.

Family, consist of mother, father, children, grandparents and other extended families such as uncles, aunts, nieces, nephews, etc. In marriage both families of the couple are joined to become one large family.

Matrilineal, refers to a person's inheritance on the basis of claim to the lineage and property of the mother's side of the family.

Patrilineal, is the claiming of lineage and property from the father's side of the family.

Background Setting

Ghana is situated in West Africa and is a former colony of Britain. The people in Ghana are called Ghanaians and comprised of diverse ethnic groups with different historical and cultural backgrounds. At present the population is estimated around 4 million with over 25 major languages and numerous dialects (Manuh, 1997; Nukunya, 1969). The major language groups in the South are the Akan's; Ewe's; Ga/Adamgbe, the Guan and Hausa in the North. Each of these language groups are centralized in particular Regions. The country is divided into 10 different Regions, each with diverse cultures and traditions.

There are different social structures in Ghana, including family structures, marriage, traditional polity, and socio-economic structure. Although there are differences among these social structures, there are also some commonalties. The differences in these social structures are reflected in the dialect spoken, religion, lineage system, and socio-economic patterns within regions or whether in rural and urban settings. Commonalties can be seen in the perceptions and attachments to social structures such as the family, the institution of marriage, and the educational system.

There are three major forms of religions in Ghana, Christianity, Muslim, and the traditional Ghanaian religions. Religious affiliation is not always culture specific, for it depends on the individual and sometimes family faith. Another difference is reflected largely in the patrilineal and matrilineal systems of descent (Nukunya, 1969; Assimeng, 1976). There is a third system called the double-descent¹ system, found among a small group of people. Socio-economic structures are also different depending on the Region.

¹ 'double-descent' is another kind of descent system which is a combination of both matrilineal and patrilineal systems.

The more fertile Regions are more economically well-off than others, because of the staples which are mainly cash crops (ie. cocoa) and urban areas are usually more economically stable than rural areas.

Within each ethnic group there are sub-groups comprising of Clans. A Clan is usually traced through blood relations or the extended family systems. Most traditional social organization revolve around the extended family system. The extended family becomes a unilineal descent group with a definite identity and membership that controls property, applies social sanctions and practices religious and traditional rituals (Busia, 1958; Pellow, 1966; Forte, 1959). To some ethnic groups individual loyalty to lineage overrides all other loyalties. For others, a person marrying into a group, may never become a complete member of the spouse's lineage but adopts its interests (Nukunya, 1969; Busia, 1958). For example, when an Ewe woman marries an Akan man although she is not seen as a member of her husband's Akan lineage (matriarchy), she has to adopt his Clan interest of 'wofa se'²

Polygamy is a common form of traditional marriage but it is on the decline for economic reasons. About one third of all marriages are polygamous (Manuh, 1997). There are also some similarities in customary rites (ie. widowhood rite, naming ceremonies), however, each Clan does it differently depending on the individual clan as well as their locality. People in the urban areas tend not to enforce some of the expectations (ie. puberty rites). Others ignore them completely because of their locality which reduces community pressures on families to let their daughters undergo these rites.

² 'wofa se' is an Akan term for a maternal niece or nephew. It is also significant in terms of inheritance. This kind of inheritance system give the children of a husband's sister the 'cultural and traditional' right to inherit an uncle's property.

Sometimes there is confusion as to whether or not a person needs to undergo certain ritual because of an intersection between lineage and descent. For instance, my parents both came from different lineage and descent background. Hence, there was a confusion as to whether or not I had to undergo the puberty rites which is needed when looking at the issue from the point of view of my father's matrilineal side. My mother's descendants do not have any such thing as puberty rites for young girls. In a nutshell, Ghana is not made up of a homogenous group of people with homogenous cultural and traditional practices. However, there are similarities in the concepts, meanings and implications of most of the cultural and traditional practices throughout Ghana. It is important to note, that in spite of the diverse cultures and traditions, domestic violence is commonly perpetuated.

Organization of the Material

This research is organized into six chapters. **Chapter I** is an introduction of the research problem, Black Ghanaian women experience with domestic violence in Canada. The assumptions, purpose and the goals of the study are outlined in this chapter. Also included in this chapter is the definition of the problem, its significance; the definition of the term used in the study and some background information of Ghanaian social structures.

Chapter II discusses the theories and approaches which guided the research. There are three different approaches outlined. The reasons for choosing these collective approach are also explained in the chapter.

Chapter III outlines the methodological approach used and the ethical considerations of the study. The strengths and limitations of the study are also discussed.

Chapter IV the literature available around the subject area of women and domestic violence as well as Black women and domestic violence are reviewed. An overview of cultural and traditional violence in Ghana is also presented.

Chapter V offers a profile of the women interviewed as well as themes that emerged from the interviews.

Chapter VI is a discussion of the findings of the study, the conclusions drawn and its implications for social work practice. Finally, recommendations are made for further studies with Black Ghanaian women who are experiencing domestic violence in Canada.

Chapter II

A GHANAIAN FEMINIST EPISTEMOLOGY

Introduction

This exploratory study, about domestic violence against Black Ghanaian women in Canada, is informed by Black African Structural Feminist approach as well as other relevant approaches. In spite of the usefulness of these other approaches there was the need for an approach that could address specifically the violence experience by Black Ghanaian women in their own setting. The Black African Structural approach offers the women in the study the voice and freedom to define, examine, and name the structural inequalities in the Ghanaian cultures/ traditions that shape their experiences of domestic violence in Canada. It emerged from the literature and the women who participated in the study. Elements deriving from other frameworks such as Black Feminist Thought and African feminism, are useful for the successful application of the Black African Structural Feminist approach to the study, and in explaining the experience of Black Ghanaian women and the issue of domestic violence.

Black Feminist Thought

Black Feminist Thought as purported by feminist writers such as: Brand, 1994; Moreau, 1996; James & Busia, 1993; Collins, 1990; hooks, 1984, etc., acknowledges the experiences of Black women and their ways of knowing and understanding the world around them as being different from other women. It also examines, and interprets the social relations of Black women's experience in relation to race, gender and class. Black

Feminist Thought also “. . . reflects a proactive/reactive stance of pragmatic activism which addresses those issues deemed deleterious to the well-being of Black women” (James, 1994: 2). Black Feminism is comprised of an Afrocentric and gender consciousness components that form the value system which is derived from a “shared history of people of African descent” (Collins, 1991: 206). These Afrocentric values are core and still very much present in Black thought processes which have survived racial oppression through periods of slavery, imperialism, colonialism and apartheid (Collins, 1991).

At the core of Black Feminist Thought is the placing of gender consciousness in the context of shared oppression which is based on a collective women’s standpoint. However, it argues that gender oppression cannot be separated from or transcend social relations of intersected race and class oppression. Black feminist theorists also argue that dominant ideology has contributed to the distortion, myth and lie which have historically and currently characterized Black women’s lives. Dominant patriarchal and capitalistic structures have socially constructed the pathology and stigmatized perception of the Black women’s experience of domestic violence. Therefore, Black Feminist Thought places Black women’s experience in the center for discussions and analysis of social issues that affect their lives (Collins, 1991).

James informs us that “Black feminist’s theorizing is rooted in the Black communities and nourished by them even as it challenges these very communities to address issues of internal oppression” (James, 1993: 1). The author goes on to say further that, “theorizing by Black feminists develops out of Black women’s experiences

of multiple interrelated oppressions including (but not limited to) racism/ethnocentrism, sexism/ homophobia and classism” (ibid.).

This framework gives me a starting point for critically examining the multidimensional oppressions shared by most Black women. Although, the Black Feminist Thought addresses the issue of race, gender and class of Black women, it does not include culture and traditional oppression. I am proposing that culture and traditions are at the core of the reality of most Ghanaian women and their experience of domestic violence. However, Black Feminist Thought is the first step in providing me with a clearer understanding of race, gender and class and as they relate to Black Ghanaian women’s experience of domestic violence. It also gives me the insight and understanding of race, gender and class and how these variables impact on the lives of Black Ghanaian women in Ghana differently to Canada. For example, race in Ghana comprises of not only the skin colour but also where one was born or raised. All of these play a role in how a woman is treated or related to by a man in the Ghanaian community.

African Feminism

Some of the core issues of the subject under study that are missing in the Black Feminist Thought are clearly addressed in African Feminism. African Feminism unlike Black Feminism stresses the need for the recognition of culture and traditions in the oppression of women from Africa. This approach is important to this study since it “combines racial, sexual, class and cultural dimensions of oppression to produce a more inclusive brand of feminism . . .” (Terborn-Penn, 1996: 4). It is an approach which speaks of the cultural and traditional experiences of African women and how this impact

on their lives. It is said to be the “ . . . ideology which encompasses freedom from oppression based on the political, economic, social and cultural manifestations of racial, cultural, sexual and class biases” (ibid.).

African Feminism addresses some of the issues faced by African women that have not been a priority for mainstream feminism. For example, dominant feminism demands individual woman’s liberation, but African Feminism is more concerned with the liberation of all African women with particular emphasis on culturally linked forms of oppression. Therefore, African feminists are “ . . . pushing women towards a greater boldness in addressing the economic, political, and [social] elements that determine and affect their status in societies that have distinct cultural and traditional and historical experiences” (Mikell, 1997: 5). These distinct cultural and traditional elements provide a symbolic reference point where African women in their struggle challenge the culture and traditions to achieve an equal role in their societies and be able to reject outdated cultural roles which limit women to particular gender roles (Mikell, 1997). African feminists are beginning to develop theories that speak to the reality of African women in ways that allow women in the continent “ . . . to re-discover African women as speakers and spoken about, as critic and creators” (Ogundipe, 1994: 3). Therefore, this new brand of feminism speaks to the needs of African women in ways that allow “African women [to] re-discover themselves again, recreating themselves and their lives in various social arena. . .” (ibid.).

African Feminism informs my knowledge and understanding of the experience of Black African women with a cultural and traditional approach that perceive the social relations of race, gender, and class in a different light from other approaches. However,

what I found in this framework that causes some concern is the general assertion that all African women have a similar kind of cultural and traditional oppression. It is important to mention that there are different nations with different cultural and traditional norms and values within the Black African continent. In general each country has specific kind of cultural and/ or traditional oppression that African women may experience. The African continent is not made up of a monolithic group of people. Even in Ghana there are different ethnic groups with distinct cultural and traditional practices.

The continent is made up of political, religious and cultural groups with “ . . . distinct differences in the application of basic cultural demands and [practices]” (Gudykunst, 1996: 199). Not every African woman is oppressed by the same cultural and traditional practices. For example, a white South African woman’s experience of cultural oppression is not the same as a Black African woman who has to undergo puberty or widowhood rites. Similarly, the rite to passage or puberty rites, as it is called by other Africans, is not experienced by every Black African woman.

There are also women in Africa who enjoy privileges and status such as the Queenmothers of various African countries. For these groups of African women it can be said that they enjoy political and/or social privileges because of the culture and tradition set out in Black Africa which gives them the opportunity to enjoy honoured political and social positions (ie. Queenmothers). As stated by Gudykunst, “cultures differ as much as the process by which cultures are expressed . . .” (Gudykunst, 1996: 198). Because of marked differences that are evident in cultural and traditional practices across the continent, African women’s experience differ from country to country and from one ethnic group to the other. African Feminism, as a generalist approach, speaks to some of

the issues but it does not completely inform my study. In light of this, I have found it necessary to incorporate my Black African Structural Feminist approach which enable to have a clearer understand and interpretation of the issue under study.

Black African Structural Feminist Perspective

The Black African Structural Feminist perspective goes one step further than the other approaches by revealing and interpreting the forms of oppression found within the Ghanaian social structures, (i.e. culture, traditions, race, gender and class) and how these impact on the lives of Ghanaian women in Canada. It also explains the importance of giving the women the freedom to define which structures impact on their lives since these structures do not have a common effect on the lives of all Black Ghanaian women. It is a framework which provides the women in the study with the choice to define for themselves their experiences of domestic violence base on their own reality. This reality can be best seen by these women rather than by others (ie. the researcher), since through their standpoint they are able to perceive and analyze the social issue that oppress them. One participant defines domestic violence as:

Domestic violence manifests itself in various ways. It is physical, mental, emotional, financial, spiritual . . . Sometimes you have a combination of one or two . . . When it is all together it is 'hell'. When he tells you you look fat, skinny, etc. . . . You know something is wrong . . . (Interviewee 1, 1999).

This woman offers her own definition of domestic violence based on her experience rather than using the dominant defined experiences of what constitute domestic violence. This is what is at the center of Black African Structural Feminist approach. It allows the women to use their own standpoint in defining what constitute their experience and how

they choose to name it. Therefore, I use the Black African Structural Feminist approach as a three dimensional prism through which I can share the reflections and understanding of the issues as revealed by the women in the study.

Theories help explain our understanding of the world and situations in which one is situated. Therefore, a theory can become an emotional subject especially when one is dealing with situations and subject areas such as domestic violence. It is equally difficult for me as a researcher, since I had not encountered most of these abusive experiences, but the issue is close to my heart because I am a product and part of their culture. As such, it is difficult to exclude myself from the process. The framework is part of my 'self situated' position which enables me to use freedom of choice as a liberating process from the indirect cultural and traditional oppression that I experience as a Black woman Ghanaian. What this framework does for both the participants and the researcher is that it advocates for an ideology of liberating ourselves through naming what we see as constituting our oppressions without being bound to the dominant definitions of what constitute our experiences of domestic violence. This can only be done because we are given the liberty by my Black African Structural Feminist approach to define for ourselves what our experiences are since we are not entirely influenced by the liberation approaches of others. Our liberation emerges from our particular history and culture which are unique to our experiences (Asante, 1988: 31). This use of our own 'naming' provides us with an understanding of our own reality. It is therefore important that I use Black African Structural Feminist approach that can interpret and explain the reality of Black Ghanaian women's experiences of domestic violence.

As a Black Ghanaian woman I found that all the other frameworks, although partially speak to my reality of the social issue under study, do not quite explain my understanding of the Ghanaian society in which I grew up. In light of this it is important that I formulate a framework that evolves from our personal experiences with the cultural and traditional practices in which these women and myself were socialized.

Furthermore, the Black African Structural Feminist framework helps explain how domestic violence shapes the individual experiences of Black Ghanaian women in different ways through the cultural and traditional practices in Ghana. The approach calls for an investigation and interpretation of the structural factors that influence the domestic violence against women in the Black Ghanaian Canadian community. It is central to giving the women the freedom to define, identify and name what these structural factors are, and how they impact on their experiences of domestic violence in Canada.

It is a framework which is being developed from the Ghanaian women's experiences which challenges the oppression of these women through cultural and traditional practices as they see it represented in their lives. It is worth repeating that this framework gives the women in the study the opportunity to define in what ways these structures impact on their lives. One Black feminist, Moreau, agrees with the self-defined standpoint for two reasons by arguing that "First, Black women need self-valuation and Black female centered analysis of our own experience . . . Secondly, the declaration of a self defined stand-point for Black women allows us to reject the practice of internalizing psychological oppression" (Moreau, 1996: 18). Similarly, giving Black Ghanaian women the freedom to self-define their oppression will allow us to reject the

cultural and traditional abusive practices that we have internalized as the 'norm' and begin to question how they oppress us.

My Black African Structural Feminist framework, when applied to the women's experience, offered them the lens necessary to identify, name and interpret their oppression. It is difficult to use approaches which are set outside of the Ghanaian culture to explain the experience of Ghanaian women, hence the need for a Black African Structural Feminist approach that links the women's oppression to the cultural and traditional practices of our society. It is important to emphasize that there is no universality of cultural and traditional experience in Africa. Therefore, giving Black Ghanaian women the voice to define how these different cultural and traditional practices affect their lives is essential. Without such a critical examination, we may assume that there is a homogeneous experience of African women based on common culture and tradition. By applying Black African Structural Feminist approach to the Ghanaian social setting, forms of cultural and traditional violence emerged that may have remained hidden which are evident in the findings.

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This exploratory study is an attempt to begin an investigation of the issue of domestic violence inflicted by Ghanaian men on Ghanaian women in Canada. The exploratory nature of this research lends itself most naturally to a qualitative approach within which in-depth, open-ended and face-to-face interviews were conducted with seven Black Ghanaian women, who have experienced domestic violence. Research in this area is desperately needed to give abused silent women a voice and to generate interest and concern for Ghanaian women's lives in relation to domestic violence in Canadian community (**See Appendix D**).

Although this study is not generalizable, because of the small size of my sample, it may be helpful in informing service providers (i.e. Social Workers) about some of the unique situations of some women the Canadian society (i.e. Black Ghanaian women) that should be considered when providing services. Hopefully, it does contribute new knowledge to the field of Social Work and offers insightful information about ethno-cultural issues of a specific group of women.

Profile of the Women

I interviewed seven women for the study. All the women have lived in Canada for at least one year or more. The duration of their stay in Canada ranges from 1 to 13 years. All the women are either Canadian citizens or Landed Immigrants. Each woman has children whose ages range from 6 months to 13 years. All the children are Canadian

born and have lived in Canada since birth. All the women are Black Ghanaian women who have experienced domestic violence at the hands of their Ghanaian male partners. Five of the women are still in abusive relationships, and the other two are no longer in the relationships. The women are all from different socio-economic backgrounds, regions as well as cultural communities in Ghana. They are at present located in different geographical settings in Canada.

The small size of the sample justifies an emphasis on the respectability and credibility of the participants. There are several reasons for the small sample size of the study. The Ghanaian community is very closed when it comes to familial issues of this nature. As far as I know this is the first study of its kind done within the Ghanaian community in Canada. As a result, most women are still not very comfortable discussing their experience of abuse. Also, as stated earlier, since this is an exploratory study my aim was to have a small and workable sample that can afford me the opportunity to capture in-depth stories of the women's experience of domestic violence. It is my intention to use this study as a starting point for further research in this community in Canada.

Sampling or Selection Procedure

A snowball technique was used to secure the information from seven credible Black Ghanaian women who have experienced domestic violence and were willing to take the risk to share their stories with me. My initial contact came through conversations with a friend in the community who shared with me in confidence some of

her experiences of domestic violence. When I decided to investigate the issue, she agreed to be one of the participants and to let other women know about my study.

My decision for selecting such a technique is also due to the difficulty in locating women with such experiences who were willing to co-operate and participate as respondents and from whom information can be elicited. It was less problematic and safer for the women for me to have a small sample using a technique whereby one credible and respected woman respondent in the community encourages another with similar experiences, to participate. This technique appears to have offered the women more security by protecting their identity while sharing their experiences rather than a more formal procedure, which would have made it more difficult for me to obtain participants. Most of the women are usually categorized as 'immigrant women.' One interview was conducted in English and the rest were conducted in different Ghanaian dialects as the participants desired.

Data Collection: Sources and Methods

Face-to face in-depth interviews of about one to two hours were conducted by me with each woman using an interview guide. The interview guide was tailored around the subject under study. Also, it offered flexibility for the women to tell their stories in their own words. This also allowed both participants and myself to follow up on any issue or concern during and after the interviews. Issues explored included: the socialization of the women; their own definitions and experience of domestic violence; some cultural and traditional practices they felt impacted on their experiences; ways in which they dealt or are dealing with violence; some of their concerns around leaving the abusive

relationships; the support systems available to them; and reasons for choosing those particular resources (See **Appendix C**). Six of the women agreed to have their interviews audio taped for accuracy.

The preferred data collection method used was a feminist qualitative research approach which “requires information based on subjective impressions gathered on the subject” (Macionis et al., 1995: 61). I also performed content analysis of the few historical articles that are available. I was able to explain and interpret some of the contemporary questions such as those outlined in the section titled ‘**Research Questions.**’ In studying the relationship between cultural and traditional practices and the domestic violence experienced by Black Ghanaian women in Canada, I also reviewed relevant and related literature which included; books, articles, studies, reports, etc. that dealt with the subject of domestic violence, as well as, the historical context of Black women and violence. It is worth repeating that there is a scarcity of literature that relates specifically to the influence of culture and traditions on violence experienced by the women in the study.

Data Analysis

In this exploratory research, on Black Ghanaian women’s experience of domestic violence, I conducted a content analysis and used a qualitative feminist approach in the analysis and interpretation of the interviews. Following the transcription of the interviews, themes were extracted and categorized. Special attention was given to some of the structural influences in the experiences of domestic violence of the Ghanaian woman. This analytical approach helped me to understand some of the roots of Ghanaian

women's experiences of domestic violence in relation to culture and tradition, and how these contribute to some of the oppressive domestic violence experienced by Ghanaian women in Canada (i.e., family- socialization practices; economic; political; educational; cultural; traditions and religious practices). It also helped me to make the links between the contemporary forms of oppression experienced by Black Ghanaian women in the home in Canada and the traditional historical abusive status that women in Ghana experience.

Ethical Considerations

Informed Consent

My research about domestic violence experienced by Black Ghanaian women in Canada focused on the investigation of some of the cultural and traditional roots of that experience. My interviews with Black Ghanaian women who have experience domestic violence in their intimate relationship with their male Ghanaian partners demanded that I take seriously their safety. There were certain ethical considerations that had to be considered before conducting the research.

As I indicated earlier, I initially spoke to a friend who also introduced some other Ghanaian women to see if they would have been willing to share their experiences with me. I arranged an initial meeting with individual potential participants where I discussed my study and reasons for wanting to doing the study with them. After securing the verbal consent of the seven participants, I personally visited each prospective interviewee and delivered the letters of introduction and consent. I read thorough the letters both in English and different Ghanaian dialects to ensure that all participants fully understood

everything that was written in the letters. All the women asked questions about the nature of the interview process and that led me to make the interview guide available to each woman.

The letter of introduction outlined my reasons for doing the study, the time required for the interview, confidentiality and anonymity arrangements as well as how I intended to collect the information (**See Appendix A**). At each meeting participants were encouraged to ask questions or concerns that they might have had. I also advised the women to contact me should any other concerns come up after our meeting.

With commitments to confidentiality and anonymity having been assured, I had the letters of invitation read by the women. Following the acceptance of the invitation, letters of consent, which outlined in detail the agreement contract for the participants who were to be interviewed were signed (**See Appendix B**). It was made clear to the women that the interview would be audio taped but only with their permission. Also, the tapes and transcript could either be returned to them or destroyed after the necessary data was transcribed. To ensure clear understanding of what was written in all the forms and letters signed, I explained the contents to participants in the various Ghanaian dialects (ie. Twi, Ga, Ewe) appropriate to the participants.

Confidentiality And Anonymity

To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, all data collected was coded by the researcher personally. Names and any other identifiable information were deleted from both the transcriptions and the written reports. All tapes were securely kept when not in use before including parts in the final written report. Each participants was given the

opportunity to review the transcription from her interview. This was done to ensure that I was using the precise words of the women and to give them the opportunity to delete any information they were not willing to share or did not want included in the final report. To further ensure anonymity, I did not specify dates, and locations of the interviews. Furthermore, not every woman who was introduced to me participated in the study, and names of actual participants were kept confidential even from those who introduced them to me. Also, all participants were prevented from knowing one another. I strategically interviewed each woman separately at different locations and at different times.

Risk and Safety Concerns

Before beginning with the study I obtained a written commitment from a qualified counselor who agreed to be available to provide counseling services to any one of the women who might need it. She also agreed to refer women to other services and resources if needed. For the safety of counselor her letter has not be include in the final thesis. Each participants was shown a copy of the supporting letter from the counselor and how to get in touch with her, but they were to protect her identity as well as the location of her practice. However, arrangements were made for her availability during and after the interviews.

As I indicated earlier, to ensure the women's safety I met personally with each participant at the time that was appropriate and at a place specified by each woman. I was warned not to include all the expected data such as dates, places and any other information that could expose the identity of the participants. This was a very serious

matter because the community had recently experienced a murder of a wife by her husband (**See Appendix D**).

Deception

To avoid any deception, participants were informed about the reasons for the study and were also given transcribed copies of their interviews for their review at a second meeting before I included them in my study.

I inquired from each participant what they would like me to do with the taped interview. Most of the participants requested me to destroy the tape. Only one participant requested that the tape be returned to her after my transcription. I also consulted and informed all participants of how I intended to distribute the information gathered, and they all agreed with my intent.

STRENGTHS & LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

Hopefully, this study will be the first of other studies and discussion around the issue of domestic violence in the Ghanaian communities in Canada. It is the preparation for the beginning of more intensive studies to be done on the subject of domestic violence and Ghanaian women in Canada. While I gathered first hand information from Ghanaian women who have/are experiencing domestic violence, I simultaneously gave them a voice to speak about their personal experiences. It is hoped that this will encourage other women to participate in similar studies in the future knowing that they are not alone.

This study was limited by lack of adequate literature specifically relevant to Ghanaian women and domestic violence. Insufficient time also created a problem for the

possibility of finding out from Ghanaian sources whether there are materials on the subject of domestic violence per se. This limitation reveals a great need for further studies and thorough investigations to be conducted in this area when more time and resources permit. I was limited to a few women because of the taboo that our culture imposes on open discussion of such issues.

There was also a limitation in my method of data collection. Most women were not willing to participate for fear that I may know who they were. Other methods such as self administered questionnaires or a telephone interviews with potential participants could have been another option in solving the problems of privacy, anonymity, confidentiality, but the free and open voicing of views could have been compromised.

The study was also limited by language since I had to conduct my interviews in Ghanaian dialects and then translate them into English. Some of the stories might have lost some meanings during the translations. At the same time it was also a strength, since the women were given the opportunity to express themselves in their mother tongue instead of English which they are less comfortable with.

Factors That Helped the Study

Initially I was so certain how the respondents were going to perceive my interest in the area of domestic violence. However, I was encouraged when they commended me for taking the time and courage to tackle such a difficult issue. Although I do not have personal experience of domestic violence as a wife, I am a Black Ghanaian immigrant woman with a shared culture and tradition, who speak about five Ghanaian dialects. This helped in creating a relationship and building trust with the women. I was also able to

interpret most of the expressions that the women used to illustrate their experiences.

Therefore, eliciting information around areas of common interest was very easy. I was also able to relate to places, and practices in Ghana. This made the women more comfortable and most of them addressed me as “you are not a stranger so it’s all right.”

In the beginning the women did not want to share their experiences with a member of the community for obvious reasons. However, with time and trust this concern faded away. My social work background also created some comfort level for the participants. They had the confidence in me as a social worker with shared cultural values so they did not hesitate in sharing their experiences with me. My humility and respect for the women and empathy for their pain played a key role in gathering the data for the study. I was culturally sensitive to both the way I asked the questions and elicited the information, as well as how I related to the participants. For example, I did not ask any of the participants their age and the specificity of their experiences since this is not acceptable in our Ghanaian culture.

Chapter IV

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In this chapter I explore some of the common occurrences of women and violence found in the literature. The literature reveals that women universally experience violence from men, especially domestic violence. It is therefore, necessary to ground my study in that knowledge. From this general knowledge I am able to understand some of the cultural and traditional practices in Ghana which contribute to violence against Black Ghanaian women by men in Canada. As mentioned earlier, these practices are linked to some of the domestic violence that Black Ghanaian women in Canada experience regardless of the social class in which they find themselves.

Women and Violence: A Historical Overview

Violence against women is an ancient practice that has unfortunately survived to our modern day. It has become a growing concern for many women universally especially feminist activist, scholars and community workers. It is now seen as a common occurrence in most societies globally. It occurs in every class; race; among the educated or illiterate, whether poor or rich, religious or non-religious, etc. It comes in many forms; physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, financial, verbal as well as spiritual (Davies, 1994; Mama, 1989; Marsh, 1993; Thorne-Finch, 1992; Walker, 1984).

The abuse of women is historically rooted in many cultures and traditions of the world. The violation of women's bodies, minds, emotions, rights and privileges, have been accepted as the "norm" throughout history and still exist in most societies to this

day (Segrave, 1994; Macionis, 1995). There continue to be legal and “cultural support for words and actions that keep women physically, emotionally and economically subordinate to men” (White, 1985: 12). As far as these violent acts are accepted culturally, they are seen as appropriate, justified and normal. This has not only impacted on the way women were/are violently treated, but also on how society as a whole reacts to such acts of violence against women.

Historically, women have suffered violence through mediums such as religion, customs, traditions, culture, literature, arts, etc. Although there has been some improvement, most of these practices continue to impact on women’s oppression. Most ancient religious sects [ie. Roman Catholic male leadership] stoned and burnt women who were suspected of practicing witchcraft (Macionis et. al., 1994). This practice continues to haunt women to this day in some societies. For example, women suspected of witchcraft in Ghana are humiliated and sometimes beaten in public. This is supported by an international news media report about a residential town in Ghana called Gambaga that has traditionally banished women to a ‘witchcraft village’ for allegedly being witches (Deutsche Presse - Agentur, 1997).

Women are mostly portrayed in literature as weak, vulnerable, permissive and are usually victims of violent acts (Dworkin, 1974; Lips 1993; Gould, 1980; Balisidya, 1982). Ghanaian society is no exception, women are portrayed, in most of the folk tales as submissive, subservient and obedient to their male partners (Ofei-Aboagye, 1994).

Different cultures have different ways in which they justify violence committed against women. For instance, in China, the binding of women’s feet is seen as a way

“... to restrain women when they go outdoors” (ibid.). Menstruation, which is a natural and organic symbol of womanhood, is tabooed and seen as unclean in most cultures. For example, among the Hindus in India it is the belief that “the wisdom, energy, strength, right and the vitality of a man utterly perish when he approaches a menstruating woman” (ibid.). Interestingly enough, sometimes these very taboos are used to symbolize protection against evil and render power to men. For example, in Ghana menstruation is viewed as a ‘pollution’ to most sacred places (ie. traditional stools³) and during certain events such as the pouring of libation during traditional festivals. In spite of this belief, menstrual blood is used by Ashanti priests in Ghana to ensure their safety. Rattray notes how this is done when Asante priests manufacture a fetish’s kukuma⁴ whereby “a priest is supposed to be safe without any other protective charm provided he has with him [this] kukuma” (Rattray, 1927: 14). The argument that is being made is that “potent negatively valued substances such as menstrual blood may be manipulated for positive use” (Buckley, 1988: 37).

According to Rattray menstruating Asante women are subjected to numerous taboos some of which are kept under the fear of pain and immediate automatic death if violated (Rattray, 1927: 74-75). Rattray maintained that Ashanti would have been a matriarchy if women were to go to war, but menstrual taboos did not permit (Rattray, 1927: 81). Simply put, things that can be identified as taboos can be manipulated when they benefit men and are seen as culturally legitimate ways of suppressing women. At times these cultural and traditional practices do not only perpetuate violent acts against

³ ‘traditional stool’ It is a special stool kept in a special room where traditional prayers are said whenever the people needs protection or blessings. It is usually brought out once a year during traditional festivals such (ie. Hogbetsutsu festival). The stool represents the ancestors of the people and it is believed to be a protector of the people.

women, but are also physically and mentally destructive and discriminatory practices against women.

From this brief historical overview, we can conclude that violence against women exists in every culture, society and country. It is not a new phenomenon, but something that was practiced and continues to be practiced in most societies in different and similar ways.

Domestic Violence Against Women: A Brief Discussion

It is important to reiterate that there are many forms of domestic violence, ranging from physical, emotional, psychological, sexual, verbal, financial, as well as any form of behaviours that range from harassment, to murder (Ofei-Aboagye, 1994; hooks, 1988). The legal definition of domestic violence is usually the narrowest definition that determines actions of the police, courts, or social services (Adamson, November, 1995: lecture notes:). This definition is used in most western societies such as Canada. However, several dominant feminists disagree with this definition because it omits many experiences of women such as stalking and rape by a spouse. This has led feminist to redefine the act of domestic violence by naming the abusive act and looking at the problem from the roots of gender oppression (Adamson, 1995; Walker, 1984). What is excluded in this definition is the effect of race, class, culture and tradition which are central to Black women's experience of domestic violence.

From my Black African Structural Feminist perspective I define domestic violence to include any act that infringe on the rights and freedom of women in the name of culture and tradition as defined by the women the study. It gives women the voice and

⁴ 'Kukuma' is a broom soaked with menstrual blood which is believed to drive away all evil spirits.

freedom to name and redefine this behaviour for themselves through their own experiences. It empowers women to determine and identify what constitutes domestic violence. Alder & Denmark suggest that it is important to involve the 'naming' of violence in ways that will give voice to women's experiences (Alder & Denmark, 1995: 122). A participant in the study defines domestic violence thus:

Domestic violence is the kind of violence in the home or in the family. I probably will not call it domestic violence in Ghana . . . I know these two words but wouldn't put them together . . . (Interviewee 7, 1999).

The Black African Structural Feminist perspective helps us to understand that this woman is identifying what she sees as constituting domestic violence. It is obvious from her definition that she would have a different interpretation if she were in Ghana. That is why giving women the space and freedom to define for themselves what and how they view domestic violence is central to this study.

Furthermore, from a Black African Structural Feminist perspective the definition of domestic violence is expanded by including the naming of violent experiences committed against Black Ghanaian women in the home through culture and tradition and also by their immediate and extended families. It involves looking at the problem from the roots of structural inequalities revealed through race, gender, class, cultural and traditional oppressions.

Cultural and Traditional Violence in Ghana

The literature supports my contention that violence against women is mainly the problem of male domination and control over women and that the formal and informal practice of violence against women is a global issue sometimes disguised in culture and

traditions (Gakuo, 1985; Gwendolyn, 1997; Ofei-Aboagye, 1994; Hosken, 1976; MacGaffey, 1983). It is my contention that, in Ghana, most of the violence against women is committed in the name of culture and tradition. My own knowledge of a formal cultural and traditional practice known as 'trokoshi'⁵ and an informal practice (lack of a name for rape) of violence committed against women in Ghana are confirmed and revealed in the literature.

It is interesting to note, that unfortunately, the only principal form of traditional violence that is being discussed publicly and in the academic world is female circumcision. Evidence from the media suggests that this is not the only form of violence that women in Africa or Ghana experience. There are other forms of violence rooted in cultural, and traditional practices. However, with a critical analysis such as that offered by Black African Structural Feminist perspective, some of the other forms of cultural and traditional violence are addressed.

Female circumcision is one way in which women experience violence in most African countries. In Ghana, like most African countries, female genital mutilation is performed in the name of religion as well as culture and tradition. This practice is usually among clans within the Muslim faith. At this ceremony "a traditional mid-wife seizes a young girl's clitoris and slices it off" (Ameyibor, 1994: 18). During the process of the circumcision drums are beaten with chants. The drums increase in volume when the girl wails with pain. All young girls are made to believe that it is best for them to be circumcised. It is reported that "women who are circumcised feel superior to those who are not and even boast about it" (Ibid). Parents on the other hand, believe that it is their

⁵ 'trokoshi' is a practice whereby young girls are sent by their family members to a fetish priest to atone for the sins of another family member. The girls are called by this name which means a fetish slave girl.

duty to ensure that their daughters get circumcised so that they could get husbands who would be proud of them.

It implies that a woman who does not experience circumcision is not perceived by her male partner as the ideal woman. The man may treat her with less respect and may subject her to any violent act simply because she is not the 'ideal good woman' of whom he should be proud. The woman may even think that the man did her a favour by marrying her.

Another cultural practice that most women have to go through is puberty rites. Here again the tradition differs between Regions and Clans. It is another cultural way of subjecting women through rituals associated with violence. The Akans (my father side of the family) have a puberty rite known as 'bra' for young girls coming of age. At this ceremony the girl is dressed up in traditional clothes and seated outside with traditional music for about half a day. The individual girl sits in public view beneath an umbrella receiving gifts and congratulations and observes singing and dancing performed in her honor (Rattray, 1927). Although the cultural meaning to this is to proclaim that the girl is now of age, it is also a way of making suitors aware that she is 'ready.' In her vulnerability if she is raped or sexually assaulted there are no sanctions since she is now viewed as an adult. If a girl does not go through this ritual before marriage it is believed that her marriage will not work out. In the eyes of most men she is not clean, does not deserve to be married, and may be looked down upon as inferior. In other words women who do not go through these rites before marriage are prone to be scorned by their male partners and may also experience physical violence. Although this ritual is dying and not done in most urban areas, it is still practiced in rural communities in Ghana..

A strong cultural meaning attached to this practice induces many parents in the rural areas to conform to it. It symbolizes purity but used to be punishable by death in some areas if a woman did not perform it before pregnancy. Thus, Mair states that, "an Ashanti girl in the old days might have been put to death if she bore a child before her puberty ceremony" (Mair, 1969: 120). Other groups such as the Adamgbe people ruled that, "girls who had not passed through the rites of womanhood must not be baptized or sent to school" (Wilson, 1992: 144). Although this traditional penalty has been banned publicly in reality it continues in other forms. A woman who refuses to undergo ' the proper rituals' before marriage, is rejected by most men as an outcast. In some instances she could be subjected to various abuse and violence by her partner on the grounds that she did not go through the cultural rituals to render her an ideal Ghanaian woman.

Other cultural and traditional ways by which women are subjected to violence include widowhood rites. Every clan has its own cultural and traditional ways of performing widowhood rites. The widowhood ritual also varies across the Ghanaian society, with each ethnic group having a special way of performing it. However, among all the groups the ritual is harsher for women than it is for men. For example, among the Ga's there is a double-standard when it comes to how a widow is treated in comparison to a widower. It is a way of expressing male superiority and female subordination. Although both men and women go through widow/widower ritual, the dimension of enforcement is stricter for women than it is for men. For example, when a man dies his wife clasps his feet while his body is prepared for burial. The woman is also confined together with his kinswomen during the 12 week mourning period (Kilson, 1974).

However, when a woman dies her husband observes neither ritual duties nor restrictions (ibid.).

In most cases women are subjected to very horrible things after the death of their spouse. Among the Akans for instance, it is usually assumed immediately after the death of a husband that there was a foul play. So that the woman are put through a ritual of punishment such as "sleeping on the floor for a number of months, using a stone for a pillow, and some put pepper in her eyes so she cannot see" (The Baltimore Sun, October 24, 1994: A 9). The literature, on the issue of violence, reveal that gender plays a significant role in the practice of domestic violence (Lips, 1993; Ofei-Aboagye, 1994; Okwabi, 1993; White, 1985). In the case of Ghanaian women, violence is rooted in culture and tradition contrived to keep them under subjection.

In the Akan area of Ghana if a woman is disowned by her family, her children are rejected too. This is because Akan society is matriarchal in its structure and children belong to their mothers. However, if a man is disowned, his status alone is affected (White, 1985: 18). The question to be asked here is, 'why is there a different standard of punishment for a man for the same punitive situation'? Because this is culturally accepted as the norm, it is not recognized as discrimination and violence against women.

Most violence perpetuated against women in Ghana are done in the name of culture and tradition. All the different ethnic groups in Ghana have different traditions and cultural norms reserved for women only. Widowhood rites, puberty rites and other practices such as 'trokoshi' or fetish serfdom are among the cultural and traditional practices applicable to only women.

A striking example of this can be found in the Times Magazine in 1996. It is reported that in the southeastern part of Ghana there is a tradition which has been around since the 17th century and is still being practiced to this day. The practice is known as '*trokoshi*' and the same name is given to girls/women who are members of the fetish religion. It refers to a practice where a "young girl is given to a fetish priest as his '*trokoshi*' as a way of paying for ancestral sins or improving a run of bad luck" (Puka, 1994: 14). Ghanaians say the practice "stems from a world view that sees justice and punishment in communal rather than individual terms" (French, 1997: A 5). What happens is that "an individual who has no connection to a crime may be punished to spare others" (ibid.). It is interesting to note here that the individual who is used as the living sacrifice is always a girl. This shows the low regards this society has for women. Without any consideration for their welfare it makes them the only victims of such a practice. It is estimated that there are about 76 shrines in southeastern Ghana with about 4,500 girls and women excluding their estimated 16,000 children in bondage (Ameyibor, 1997; t'Sas, 1997). The same practice was done in times of war to ensure success (The Times, 17 September, 1996).

It is reported that "initially the girls were fed to crocodiles or otherwise killed when brought to the shrines" (t'Sas, 1997: 47). Later, this was changed and the priests became the 'human crocodiles.' The priests "... agreed to keep them as slaves, mainly to work the shrine's land, do the priests' housekeeping and share their beds" (ibid.). These girls are the helpless victims of a traditional form of violence over which they have no control, but are expected to endure for no other reason but men's sexual lust, power and control in the name of culture and tradition. Usually the girls are offered as "slaves

in order to appease the gods and to atone for wrongs committed by their relatives, usually male relations” (The Times, 17 Sept. 1996: A 4). Most of the girls who are offered do not even have any idea why they are sent there in the first place since , often they are offered at a very tender age as young as 6 years old (**See Appendix F**)

A report by Deutsche Presse-Agentur stated that an estimated 20,000 women in seven Ghanaian districts are reportedly enslaved under this traditional practice (Deutsche Presse-Agentur, 1995: 1996). Girls as young as 6 years old, are taken to the fetish priest, since “the girls must be virgins, for the gods will not accept girls who are not virgins” (Saunders, 1995: A6). The appropriate name for such a crime is pedophilia. These pedophiles should be jailed for violence against these girls. Instead, they are worshipped as gods in the name of tradition.

Although it is expected that the girls leave at the age of fifteen, “they reportedly tend to stay much longer as the priests accept them as their mistresses”(Deutsche Presse-Agentur, 1996). It is reported that most of these girls have two or more children by their priest masters. They are left to fend for themselves, and deprived of access to education or training. (Ibid). Their existence, after leaving the fetish house, is difficult for “they are unable to fend for themselves, and most of their families disown them after they come back” (The Times, 17 Sept., 1996: A 4).

After the death of a fetish slave “the girl’s family must replace them with another female virgin” (ibid.). Efforts to ban this tradition have reportedly met with resistance from the priests and the practices allegedly “has the blessing of some of Ghana’s most powerful men” (Saunders, 1995: A5). A female lawyer is quoted as saying, “ . . . culture

is often used by men (and some women) to justify violence against women” (Ameyibor, 1993: 9).

Cultural and traditional practices such as those described above are some of the contributory factors that make the “physical (mental and emotional) abuse of women taken for granted universally as part of the natural order of male dominance over women” (White, 1985: 13). Based on all the rituals discussed so far in this study, it is my contention that they are done to benefit men at the expense of women and to make women ‘good partners’ for their husbands to be. Because these practices are accepted and viewed with a strong cultural and traditional significance attached, it has become an accepted norm and viewed as being an important experience for Black Ghanaian women before marriage or after the death of a partner or the atonement of sins.

The cultural beliefs, as well as the traditional socialization of sex role expectations of men and women, make it difficult for women to challenge or even openly discuss the evil of such practices. At the same time, society is encouraged to continue to impose harsh rules and roles on women.

Feminists in both Western and Third World societies and others, are demanding changes to the violence experienced by women globally. By employing a Black African Feminist perspective to the issue of violence in the culture we are able to name and expose some of the cultural and traditional practices of violence against women. This was also demonstrated in the Western society where the society is beginning to respond positively as feminists name and expose forms of violence on women. Although the struggle has not always been easy, feminist movements in the west have been able to bring forth issues such as sexual harassment or rape within marriage, etc. This was not

possible until feminist in western societies began naming and exposing these issues and how they affect the welfare of women in their societies. The more the exposure, awareness of the problem and level of consciousness among women, the greater the challenge for women to break their silence on issues related to violence. Unfortunately, Black Ghanaian women and men are still in the process of dealing with the problem of raising the level of consciousness necessary for action to change the cultural and traditional practices that oppress women in our society.

In response to the seriousness of the problem, Black Third world scholars have begun to challenge the systems of violence and are challenging women to organize for changes (Ofei-Aboagye, 1993; Tunbridge, 1997; Okwabi, 1995). In Ghana for example, and among the Black Ghanaians in particular, there is not even a name for violent sexual abuse committed against women by their partners. Any effective challenge must include opening up a dialogue in the community to discuss the impact of cultural and traditional practices on domestic violence in the community.

Chapter V

‘MOLDING’: EXPERIENCE OF BLACK GHANAIAI WOMEN AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Introduction

This chapter examines the themes that emerged from the interviews as well as the literature, which include: socialization, marriage, the family and inheritance. It explores the links found in some of the Ghanaian social structures. Also, links were then made between these social structures and their contribution to domestic violence against Black Ghanaian women in Ghana and how they impact on the perpetuation of domestic violence against women in Canada. It is hoped that this will not only provide a knowledge of the issues presented, but also create a clearer understanding of the experience of Black Ghanaian women and the issue of domestic violence in Canada.

Ghanaian Family Structure

In my examination of the Ghanaian family structure I have found that some of the Ghanaian social structures (ie. family) are contributory agents to the domestic violence that Black Ghanaian women experience in that society. I examined the family in an effort to understand it's role in the perpetuation of domestic violence. The family is the first social structure that socializes, shapes, and prepares the individual for any future social relation. My investigation of the family as a social agent of violence reveals that socialization and ‘culturalization’ are the primary sources of violence against women from where that behaviour is transmitted to other social agents such as marriage. Macionis et. al. agree with this statement when they stated that “we are affected in at least

Macionis et. al. agree with this statement when they stated that “we are affected in at least some small way by every social experience we have” (Macionis, 1994: 140). Since the family is the first social agent people have before any other, it is important to look at its role in the perpetuation of violence through ‘culturalization’⁶ The thread that links all these social structures to violence is the combination of culture and tradition. Moreover, this chapter focuses on the discussion of these social structures to enable an understanding of the unique situation of Black Ghanaian women and the issue of domestic violence.

Violence may be experienced in any place in many ways. It is important however, to stress that the family is one of the most influential agent of socialization for both children and adults. It is my contention that most of the violence that Black Ghanaian women experience can be traced to the initial family experiences where they were/are ‘culturalized’ to believe and accept certain abusive norms. It is therefore important to trace violence in later life back to the family and how it is perpetuated later through different mediums such as socialization, and inheritance.

The typical Ghanaian family structure is usually traced through blood relations, marriage as well as the community. The family consist of, not only the nuclear blood relations but also, the extended family, which include aunts, uncles, nephews, nieces, grandparents, and marriage relations. Members of this extended family have some influence in the lives of married women. The most significant feature of the family is “the importance of the large kin group beyond the nuclear family” (Kayonga-Male, 1984:

⁶ ‘culturalization’ is used to show how one becomes set in a particular culture. In this case the Ghanaian culture. It is done in a similar way as socialization. It captures the meaning that I want to convey, in that it is also a process which become ingrain in the individual Ghanaian.

6). The socialization of children is done in a community rather than by the nuclear families. Children may be sent to live with distant relatives for schooling or special training, and these relatives then become responsible in decision making processes affecting these children. The practice forges complex but strong links among extended family members which Male states “these family members are also linked in strong reciprocal aid relationships which entail complex rights and responsibilities” (Kayongo-Male, 1984: 6).

Traditionally, the extended family was/is responsible for the welfare of all members, and it is the norm that the members of the family who can assist other members do so without any complaint. It is the responsibility and obligation of family members who are in a comfortable financial position to provide for the other members who are less fortunate. The family reinforces group solidarity and survival and operates as a microcosm of the larger society.

It is within this complex family structure, influenced by culture, customs, traditions, etc. that violence is first experienced by Ghanaian women. This violence is then transcended to the marriage relationship which affects inheritance. For example, Okwabi takes the discussion one step further by informing us that the continuous inequalities between Ghanaian men and women is also “. . . rooted in the cultural, and religious factors, with strong traditional beliefs which discourage questioning attitude on the part of women” (Okwabi, 1995: 708). This behaviour passes into the institution of marriage where a woman is expected to be silent and not question violent tendencies in the relationship. This was evident in the experience of some of the women in the study. One woman summed it all up thus:

... a girl is raised at an early age to be subservient to her husband in the future. If she does not adhere to this then it is believed that she will never get any man who will be willing to marry a woman with such a behaviour. A woman always needs to be humble to her man so that her marriage will also last (Interviewee 2, 1999).

The cultural and traditional beliefs also create an expectation for women as well as inform them of the things that they need to do in order to succeed in their marriage. Therefore, any woman who does not follow these cultural and traditional norms is seen as not adhering to the “proper” Ghanaian way of life. For most women, in order to fulfill society’s expectations they will do whatever it takes not to challenge the status quo. However, I argue that although some women may not challenge this status quo publicly, they do resist in their own way. For example, when I was growing up I was called many names because I was not seen as the quiet kind of Ghanaian girl who will not talk back. This prevented me from getting involved in relationships which might have been abusive for me. I turned off most men because they saw me as a threat not the kind of wife they would have liked - passive, submissive, etc. I was told often that I would never get any man to marry me if I did not change my ‘ways.’ I also attribute my different attitude to the strong socialization that I got from my parents. My parents were very different from most of the parents I knew. I was always allowed to be myself without special reference to my gender. At this point it is important to reiterate that not every Black Ghanaian female follows the status quo. Some girls were socialized like me. Similar to my resistance to the typical Ghanaian girl life became difficult for them when they married partners who wanted them to behave differently from what they were used to. For example, one participant supports this when she states:

I was never socialized that this is a girl's way of doing things. . . My father being a lawyer encouraged me to express myself. If he asked me about something and I seemed not to have anything to say he would say, 'don't sit on the fence you must have an opinion. He hated it anytime I voiced my dislike to how things were going on in the relationship . . . He knew that I had the potential of resisting his orders . . . (Interviewee 1, 1999).

The above attests to my claim that the experience of every woman in Ghana is different. This woman had a different upbringing which was evident in her resistance to the cultural norm that was being imposed on her by her husband. For women like her, it is wrong to assert that her oppression comes directly from the socialization in her immediate family. What is different though is that her oppression is directly related to the general cultural norms by which her partner was socialized and is used to oppress her. Therefore, by giving her the freedom in this study to name, and examine her experience of domestic violence as it relates to the culture she had this to say:

I did not find my husband's attitude typical, this is because I had a different exposure to that side of the culture. Actually it was not unusual for me to see women challenge men or voice their dissatisfactions to situations. . . my father always respected my mother and her views . . . He would also seek advice from my mother for most of his legal cases. Even after they divorced and my mother got married to another man, any time my father won a case the first place he went to was my mother's house . . . No matter how late it was (Interviewee 1, 1999).

Needless to say this woman's early socialization is different from the others. The rest had varied explanations. The Black African Structural Feminist perspective offers the women the freedom to name and examine their own experiences on a personal level. It puts the women in the study at the center of the discussion and their view-points are very much important in defining the issue of domestic violence in relation to race, gender, class, culture and tradition.

One woman explained that she believes that her husband was being abusive to her because of her class which he feared she could use to resist his oppression. She had this to say:

... in his mind he had an idea of what a marriage should be. He wanted three children, and wanted them as soon as possible ... He always wanted to fix my goose, tell me what to eat, drink etc. ... Infact, he forgot that he was attracted to me because of my assertiveness and self confidence that I had because of my family background. My mother use to say that 'what makes them like you is what makes them hate you.' He liked me for that and at the same time hated me for that ... That is very interesting ... He was aware that I had the potential to resist. (Interviewee 1, 1999).

What is evident in this woman's resistance to her partner's oppression is the way in which she was socialized. Her confident and assertiveness threatened his male authority. It is interesting to note that most of the Ghanaian men like strong women but when it comes to relationships, they would rather have women who will not show their assertiveness. This woman went on to agree with this assertion when she stated:

... a typical Ghanaian man loves women, want them as typical as their mothers and sisters. But when it comes to intimate relationship the whole concept changes ... They no longer want you to be the strong woman who can carry one child at your back, pregnant with another, and still have the energy to carry the firewood on your head and come home to prepare the supper ... (Interviewee 1, 1999).

I do agree with this participant that a woman needs to be strong to be able to do all the things she states. It is interesting that the same Ghanaian man who expects his wife to do excessive work demands that she must still have energy to care for him. I believe that it takes assertiveness and strength to be able to resist and survive.

Black Ghanaian women have historically faced certain inequalities based on their race, gender, class, and the cultural and traditional practices of their families. The most

common form of inequality can be seen in the status and place of women in the family which translated into different cultural, religious, political and societal practices that perpetuate violence against the Black Ghanaian woman. All of these forms of violence are seen as part of the culture and customs of the society, most of which benefit men and disadvantage women in many ways.

The two major forms of family structures (matrilineal and patrilineal systems), as was discussed earlier in the study, are both detrimental to the welfare of women in terms of social status in Ghana. The accepted family structure determines the cultural pattern of relationships in socialization, dating, marriage, inheritance and succession in Ghana. The matrilineal of family system or '*abusua*⁷' which refers to the 'matri-clan' family is traced through the line of the female. Those who are considered part of this family structure are a man, his brothers sisters, sisters children, and his mother. Wives are not considered a part of this family system although they are partial family members through marriage. Therefore, a man's "maternal siblings take precedence over his spouse in many spheres of life" (Oppong, 1981: 40). In both matrilineal and patrilineal family structures, "women have no right to property after the death or divorce of their husbands and should be kept by the respective family of the man" (Shreir, 1988: 26). It also means that in either "matrilineal or patrilineal family systems, traditional systems ensure that allocation of land, income, and other productive resources favour male authority and interests" (Afele, 1994: 7).

It is clear that the family structure is the strongest influence in creating inequalities as well as learned behaviours that are transmitted into later life and

⁷ '*abusua*' refers to family in the Akan dialect.

contributes to domestic violence that most Ghanaian women face in their relationships. This is because family systems are so structured to give men the privilege in many ways with the cultural socialization organized to benefit men and disadvantage women. The result is that men use these privileges to their advantage to control and perpetuate violence in the family. A strong emphasis is drawn on the family blood relations. This group of kinsfolk is held together by a common origin and obligation to its members (Busia, 1962). The individual is brought up to think of himself or herself in relation to this family group and is also expected to always behave in such a way to bring honor and not disgrace to its members (ibid.).

Gender Socialization in Ghana

To understand the experiences of the Black Ghanaian woman and domestic violence it is important to examine the role of early socialization through which socially constructed gender roles are assigned to the sexes. Immediately after birth, gender roles are set and also social relations and interactions are established, to teach and guide the individual what is culturally acceptable and traditionally correct. These cultural and traditional patriarchal socialization processes are common ways of defining what is the appropriate behaviour for women. This gender role socialization contributes to the perpetration of domestic violence in later life.

Differences in socialization of the sexes contribute to females being more passive and “weaker” than men, which make women vulnerable to domestic violence. It also explains why men and women sometimes react differently to social situations. For instance, Ghanaian girls are socialized to be non-aggressive, passive, nurturing and

tolerant, while the boys are socialized to be aggressive, physically active and relatively non caring. This is supported by one woman who states:

A girl is raised at an early age to be subservient to her partner in the future. . . A woman always needs to be humble to her man so that her marriage will also last (Interviewee 3, 1999).

At an early age girls are socialized to believe that the only way to be guaranteed a good marriage is to be submissive to their husbands. A woman who does not fit this norm is assured likely to cause problems in her relationship by not conforming to the norm. Guberman & Wolfe also argue that "as youngsters, the ever-battling He-man , G.I. Joe, and superhero are presented as role models . . ." and "females, too are encouraged to adapt to these perceptions of male-active/female-passive role " (Guberman & Wolfe, 1985: 10). Similarly, Ghanaian boys are encouraged and socialized to be tough, assertive and physically aggressive. When a boy behaves like a girl he is always reminded of his masculinity with this frequent admonition "ye woadie tise oberima."⁸ The reasons given by such admonishment is that "there is a value that a boy should grow to be a strong man since society is led by men" (Azu, 25: 1974). A girl on the other hand, is not encouraged to ascribe to any of these characteristics expected of boys. On the contrary, " . . . she is constantly taught what to do in relation to her future status as a married woman" (ibid.). This view was expressed supportively by one of the women who remembers her mother saying:

Growing up my mother was very concerned about the girls learning how to cook. But all I remember growing up was that I loved to read a lot. I remember my parents were very much upset about that . . . She will say, "you can get all the degrees in this world but as a woman you very much need to learn how to cook."

⁸ 'ye woadie tise oberima' is a saying in Twi meaning act like a man

... I remember she used to tell me that, " we know that your soup will be mailed to us in Ghana ... " This was because I did not like to be in the kitchen at all. (Interviewee 7, 1999)

The socialization given to a girl to be a good wife is also used by her partner in later life to enforce power and control in their relationship. The result is that most of the Ghanaian men expect their wives to behave in a certain 'Ghanaian' way. The slightest shift from this norm is seen as rebellion against the Ghanaian culture and traditional norm punishable by a 'beating'. This punishment manifests itself in the domestic violence that most women find themselves. Women are expected to work outside the home; do all the housework and meet their husband's sexual demands. This is summed up nicely by one participant who says:

... because of the way I was socialized, when I got married I felt that it is my responsibility to do all the house work. But when the kids were born I found that with the stressful life here I was getting tired ... (Interviewee 4, 1999).

In the case that a girl goes against these expected values and norms she is seen as 'deviant' or undisciplined. When women resent this strict sex-role stereotyping they are constrained by cultural taboos not to express their emotions and abilities.

Another aspect of the socialization process is the sexual division of labour which is also a product of culture. The girls are responsible for the household chores while boys are expected to help fathers on the farm (if the family is in a farming community) or go on errands, etc. This is confirmed by all the participants. One woman in sharing her experience as a girl states that:

... growing up as the eldest daughter I did all the house work. My younger sisters were also encouraged to do the same. My brothers did help some times, but not that often. It was a big deal if the girls refuse to do any of the housework.

However, it was not the same for the boys . . . (Interviewee 3, 1999).

In most cases the girls are made responsible for all the housework at an early age. It is sometimes different in cases where the girl happens to be younger than her brothers. But most often even at a young age girls are groomed to be responsible for most of the work done in the family. One woman in the study recalls her experiences in her claim that:

. . . the girls were always responsible for their brothers [little ones] and washing, cooking, sweeping etc. because you are a girl . . . (Interviewee 6, 1999).

Consequently, at an early age boys are taught that girls are responsible for housework simply because they are girls. I was lucky that my parents always advised me never to comply whenever I was told to 'do it because you are the girl', but that advice got me into a lot of troubles outside of the home where culture and tradition expected the opposite.

The cultural practice whereby mothers have to do the housework is so common among parents that children emulate it as they grow into adults. One woman explained the relationship she saw between her parents as follows:

When I was a child I saw that my father just sat there while my mother did all the work. For example, when we were coming from the farm all my father would have was his cutlass and would be following the family. My mother will carry the food stuff, with a little firewood to the house . . . She would then toil with everything in house, cook, clean, and Infact do everything while my father just sat there ate and went back to cross his legs.

. . . although when I got married I don't think I thought about doing this consciously, but sub-consciously I felt like I have to do all the house work, wash my husband's clothes . . . I also have to sleep with him without complaining . . . I believe that it is all because of what I saw as a child which I have kept in my head and used it when I became an adult. It is part of the culture so I tried to carry it into my relationship (Interviewee 2, 1999).

It is evident in this woman's experience that she tried to model how she had been socialized in her family because it had become her way of knowing and doing things. Things can be much more difficult when this way of knowing is also part of the culture. It is clear that she was convinced that she had to do things for her husband because it was part of the culture to do that. Not only is she socialized to believe that that is the way of doing things, but also 'culturalized' into believing that that was 'the' only way.

Usually, men enforce the maintenance of this unequal relationship with women silently accepting it. Some of the participants agree that their role models were mainly their mothers who were abused in various ways. Naturally they accepted some of the experiences of their mothers as the norm. One of the women shared her experience this way:

As a girl I always stayed with my mother in the kitchen doing the cooking. As a woman I am used to doing what I saw my mother do . . . cook and care for the children. I will say you are socialized to do similar things when you marry . . . (Interviewee 5, 1999).

Another woman supported this notion of modeling which she transmitted into her relationship when she stated:

My father liked women a lot and my mother put up with it for so long. My mother even ended up caring for some of the children he [father] fathered with other women. Now he is sick and weak and it is my mother who is caring for him . . . I thought it was the right thing that my mother did by not complaining about the way she felt with how my father treated her. I have also put up with a lot of things . . . now after traveling I have come to see that it is not right but when I complain I am seen as bad . . . (Interviewee 4, 1999).

This woman has obviously modeled some of her marital relationships after her parent's. As children see what their mothers do they are likely to model after them when they become adults. This is also enforced through the culture where young girls believe that

they have to do certain things because they are girls. This was evident in one participant's experience as a girl:

I saw my mother do all the house work I have three brothers and another baby sisters. I did all the house work because my sister was little . . . now as an adult I did not see anything wrong with it even when I know that that is not what I would really like in my relationship . . . (Interviewee 3, 1999).

These 'culturalized' distinctive ways of male and female roles are sometimes viewed as the 'norm' and are then carried on into marital relationships. It becomes a problem when these roles are reversed. For example, one of the women said

" . . . all the problems about marriages here begins with a complain about sharing house work . . . " (Interviewee 2, 1999). Men especially become very resentful when these 'culturalized' role is threatened. Most Ghanaian men insist that house work is in the domain of women. However, this becomes a problem especially in a place like Canada where both husband and wife work outside the home. This is not to say that women in Ghana do not work outside the home, but rather they do have some help from the extended family, an option which is not always available in a foreign country such as Canada. One of the major problems for women in a foreign country is the lack of extended family support systems (ie. child care) which is possible in Ghana. At least in Ghana a woman is likely to get help from friends, neighbors or other family members. The problem begins when women start voicing there concerns about changing the 'cultural gender roles.' One woman supports this with this statement that:

. . . once you say that, hold it I need help they will say 'what do you expect me the man to do. why do you think I married you . . . (Interviewee 2, 1999).

What is evident here is that not only do the men expect the women to maintain their cultural roles as house keepers, they also enforce the cultural expectation of the woman to be responsible for such roles in the relationship. This is also seen in the way the Ghanaian society [especially family members] will view this cultural role if it is reversed. One of the woman summed it up nicely in this way:

... if the man is seen helping you around the house your in-laws will say you have 'juju'⁹ the man. Because you don't want this said about you, you take whatever happens ... You know he takes advantage of this here, so he never like doing anything to help me around the house. He get upset when I ask him to help me do something ... (Interviewee 5, 1999).

This woman's concern is very common among Ghanaian women. Because of the culturally 'set' gender roles, men are not encouraged to help around the house. In-laws on both sides will make sure that men are not seen helping around the house, because it will be perceived as women having too much control over men resulting from a 'spell' that they might have cast on their husbands. Because this accusation creates problems within a relationship, most women do whatever possible to avoid it. Often the woman is accused even though helping the woman may be his own idea. This reminds me of my own experience as a young woman when I began dating my husband.

We went to visit his family and as I was in the kitchen cooking for my husband (then boyfriend) left the family in the living room and came to help me in the kitchen. As he began to grind the pepper on the stone one of his aunts walked into the kitchen to ask him what he was doing there in the kitchen with me. He responded that "this is our way of doing things, and this is the way it is going to be when we get married ... I want you to get used to it so that it will not come as a surprise when we marry." My partner was

⁹ 'juju' is a vernacular expression of putting charms on someone.

trying to prevent his family or any other person from accusing me of casting a spell on him for helping me in the kitchen. Until this Ghanaian traditional notion is challenged, it will continue to create problems for couples who may not fit this norm.

Power and Control: Cultural Links to Violence

As I mentioned earlier in the study, feminism has been in the forefront in challenging many systems of oppressions including patriarchy or male domination which has been the source of male power and control. Gary defines patriarchy as “a culture that is slanted so that men are valued than women, and also men’s prestige are set higher than women’s” (Gary, 1982: 19). The author states further, that the social hierarchy set by society is through male domination which is maintained by providing men with privileges that grant them power and control over women. Most women who are in relations of domestic violence can identify with this phenomenon.

In the case of Black Ghanaian women there is an added component to power and control, - culture and traditions. This makes the situation of these women unique enough to be addressed in a manner that looks beyond the mainstream feminist ideology of patriarchy. Feminist literature strongly informs us that violence is rooted in patriarchy (Dwokin, 1974; White, 1985; Walby, 1990). However, I propose that the uniqueness of the situation for women such as Black Ghanaian women is that patriarchy is just the tip of the iceberg. What is usually not mentioned is the aspect of violence against these women that is embedded within most social structures (ie. marriage, widowhood) of the Ghanaian society. One woman agrees with this assertion and states that:

... he believes that because he is the man he has to be in charge ... when I try to tell him how I feel about the way he is treating me he will say to me ‘where does

this come from, I don't blame you would not be saying the same thing to me in Ghana . . . I am the man and I want you to know that I am in charge here . . . If you want to be the man wear the pants and lets see if you can . . . (Interviewee 4, 1999).

This woman's experience shows that her partner behaves in a particular manner because of the cultural belief about his place in the family - to have power and control over everything. It is these culturally embedded images and expectations that perpetuate most of the violence experienced by women in our communities. These cultural images (ie. women and house work) are invisibly rooted, perceived and organized around the community, these perceptions are then passed on interpersonally and inter-generationally (Condon & Yousef, 1987; Hall, 1983; Prosser, 1978; Singer, 1987). Therefore, patriarchal attitudes are not just male domination, but also cultural perceptions of how a Black Ghanaian woman is expected to behave. These expectations are passed on from the family where children are 'culturalized' into individual social beings to structures such as marriage. I argue that these cultural images originate from a person's social environment (Hofstede, 1991). Patriarchy can be said to be the link between male domination and domestic violence, but in the case of Black Ghanaian women culture becomes the hallmark for the maintenance of male strength, power, masculinity and domination. One woman expresses her concern about the way her partner treats her as:

He believes that the culture does give him some power to tell me what to do. For example, he use to say to me 'marriage begins in the bedroom . . . Why did I marry you?' . . . So that sometimes I think about all these and then believe that I have to adhere to some of his demands because he is my husband . . . (Interviewee 6, 1999).

This is evident that the culture has an influence in the experience of this woman. She is so cultured to accept her responsibility as a wife-slave that although she does not

specifically discuss her disagreement about her bedroom activities it is obvious that she is not always in agreement with what happens.

Some of the cultural and traditional practices (i.e. puberty rites, and female mutilation) are done not only to perpetuate the traditions but to satisfy the power craving of the majority of men in Ghana. Most Ghanaians believe that a woman can only be complete when she undergoes certain violent traditional rituals (ie. widowhood rite). These beliefs are the basis for the violence that society inflict on females in the name of culture and traditions. The belief in the superiority of the masculine vis-à-vis the inferiority of the feminine can be found in all the social structures of the Ghanaian society. I add that the cultural and traditional practices put together becomes “. . . part of the actions which go to make up patriarchal structures” (Walby, 1990: 90).

Although patriarchy is the usual name in describing these ‘culturalized’ male domination found within the Ghanaian society it became obvious that culture and traditions play a central role in male power and control in Ghanaian society. Furthermore, by employing the Black African Structural Feminist perspective that gives the women in the study as well as myself the freedom to name and identity our experiences, it is easier to make the links of culture and traditional practices which influence male domination in Ghanaian social settings (ie. Canada). I argue that culture encourages domestic violence against women in Ghana is supported in part by patriarchy.

In looking at the two types of family systems (matrilineal and patrilineal) discussed earlier in the study, women are disadvantaged under both. This is because they both work to the advantage of men either in terms of inheritance of property or grounds for divorce. In either of the family types, the status of women depends solely on the men

in their lives, either their husbands, partners, fathers or brothers. These social structures in a sense make women more dependent on men and less independent. Ghanaian women have varying degree of experiences because of the social structures that places them under the authority of husbands or father (Hafkin, 1976).

I conclude that most of the time our men use the violence embedded in the cultural and traditional practices as a way of controlling and dominating our women. Pellow supports this notion of power and control embedded in the culture when she states that “ Ghanaian women know that their husbands, boyfriends, and fathers possess special rights by virtue of being men.” (Pellow, 1977: 50) The author continues, to state that “Traditionally, a woman who marries falls under the complete authority of her husband.” (ibid.) This complete authority most of the time means that the man usually has an enormous amount of power and control over most of the decisions that has to be made within a marriage (ie. when to have children).

When one looks back at history one finds that the role of women has been second to men in most aspects. For example, men got the vote before women in most societies. Women did not have the option of remaining childless until feminists challenged this notion of motherhood. It can be very devastating when culture and tradition are added to notions of ‘motherhood.’ It is the dream of every Ghanaian woman to have children. This is because of the importance of being a mother is stressed in society. Barrenness is both a painful and disappointing issue for most Ghanaians. Sometimes childless couple’s marriage do not survive. Family members put pressure on the man to divorce his wife for another who would be able to bear him children. As a result, most women will do whatever it takes to be able to become mothers. Pellow supports this when she states

“ . . .the social stigma associated with being (or having) a barren wife is so great in most traditional areas that Ghanaian women will spend any amount of money to procure native medicines believed to encourage conception” (Pellow, 1974: 48).

Similarly, I argue that most women stay in abusive relationship because their partners are able to make them mothers. The participants asserted they remained in the relationship because, in spite of the abuse, because their partners had given them children. With this cultural acceptance based on children, men are given an unwritten power and control to dominate their wives. This is not to say that every woman in Ghana has children, but that single motherhood or childlessness does not usually occur by choice. As Freedman points out the “ . . . historical context within which [wife] battering has developed is that of male domination over women within and outside of the family” (Freedman, 1984: 45). It is sad to note that, “male violence against women appears to be the norm in all countries ”(Walker, 1984: 12). I do agree with Walker’s reference to male violence against women as having “ . . . the same core: men expect to have power and control over women” (Walker, 1984: 10). I add that the ways in which this power and control is exhibited is different. One of the roots of this difference is the role of culture and tradition.

Sexism is also rooted in patriarchy and vice-versa. Ideas and beliefs about what is appropriate for the sexes are propounded by men and in most cases perpetuated by women. For example, it is women who socialize children to adhere to the culture and traditions of the Ghanaian society. Women are the ones who perform either puberty rites or female circumcision. Culture sets the norms which are usually enforced by men and

perpetuated by women because men are always the ‘abusua pani’¹⁰. Boudreau defines sexism as “beliefs, norms and practices that prevent the members of one gender category from fully and equally participating in all aspects of social life and that hinder the members of that category from developing the resources needed to promote and protect their interest” (Boudreau, 1986: 11). Similarly, the cultural and traditional norms so dictate and set aside certain norms expected of women (ie. house work) that it sometimes stops them from expressing what their feelings are regarding ‘double shift’¹¹. In addition this sexism is culturalized in the sense that it is communicated both verbally and non-verbally within Ghanaian society. This culturalized sexism is expressed by one women when she states:

... they [partner] feel that if there is a misunderstanding and you [woman] raise your voice they need to hit you to shut you down. Even at home if father hits mother, father will say ‘if a woman has a big mouth she needs to be hit ... We are not supported to raise our voices on our husband, or men in general ... You hear Ghanaian men say to women ‘you are a woman, so shut up ... This is men’s thing, so women thing is to keep us in that cage ... (Interviewee 2, 1999).

This woman’s experience clearly show that her partner’s behaviour is something that he has learnt as part of the Ghanaian culture. She continue to say that:

It is in the blood, it is a character ... they see their father, uncles, brothers hit there partners. They have seen it all their lives. It takes only God to change them ... it is in the blood, mixed up with the red hemoglobin ... (Interviewee 2, 1999).

It is interesting to note here that blood is very significant in Ghanaian culture. It is used here to signify a stronger message and understanding than mere patriarchy or sexism. If

¹⁰ ‘abusua pani’ is an a Akan word for the head of the family. This person is always a man, and he become responsible for the enforcement and maintenance of the culture and traditions.

¹¹ ‘double shift’ refers to the double work that women have to do both at home and outside the home.

something is mixed in the blood, as the woman explains, then it is something that is in the gene and then passed on from generation to another. Until the circle of these cultural behaviours (silence about domestic violence) are broken, by both Ghanaian men and women, it will continue to oppress women in the name of cultural and traditional beliefs. One woman sums it up nicely when she states:

... men also need support groups to come and listen to other men and women's experiences ... Even if they don't change their children will. Because this behaviour is learnt from our forefathers, it is difficult to just break it ... We need to start somewhere to break it and then generation to generation things will change ... Once we are dead and gone things will be good for our children ... (Interviewee 3, 1999).

I do agree with this woman that a change for a better tomorrow for our children is desired. I also agree that it is not going to be easy since this is something that has been passed on from generation to generation for centuries. However, we can start somewhere by questioning the very culture and traditions that oppress us as Ghanaian women.

The Institution Of Marriage

Marriage is one of the most important forms of social relations in Ghana. This is because it is viewed as a way of maintaining the family line through procreation as well as the expansion of the kinship. There is also a communal attachment that is added to the institution of marriage in Ghana. Mbiti informs us that "... it is not just an affair of two individuals alone: it brings together families, relations and friends from each side of the partnership" (Mbiti, 1973: 22). So that the individual in a marriage relationship becomes a social actor and the marriage union is viewed as a social act. The marriage union viewed as a social act allows the community to become active members of the union.

There are social sanctions given by the community members to this union including traditional and cultural rules as well as customs and taboos. If these rules are violated those “individuals who break these customs become social out-casts (Mbiti, 1973: 16).

This is also supported by one participant when she states:

... although you know that what is happening to you is bad it is still difficult to pack up and leave ... I know people in the family because they broke away from their marriages have had many shame ... The shame that is associated with divorce is so bad that we are taught to stay and that things are not as bad as we think ... But it gets to a point when you really don't care what others have to say ... This is not an easy decision as well ... (Interviewee 4, 1999).

The shame that is always associated with divorce within the culture can be devastating to women. It is not only the cultural sanctions of keeping marriages together that creates the shame and devastation, but also the players' (family members from both sides) credibility is at stake. Most women stay in relationships so as not to offend or discredit the extended family.

Strict rules govern the choice of marriage partners, one of these rules forbids marriages from the same family line. This is very important in matrilineal systems of kinship. For example, the Akans forbid marriages that could be traced from the same matrilineal decent. This is considered 'mogadie'.¹² This is a serious offense and can lead to serious consequences. Akans traces their family line through the mother's descendants. According to Pellow, “the mother-child tie is the keynote to all social relations” (Pellow, 1977: 48). A child's social relations is defined through the family members on her mother side of the family. For example, a mother's brother can be responsible for the upkeep of his nieces and nephews and sometimes ignore his own

¹² 'mogadie' is an Akan word meaning having sexual relation with a person from the same blood line.

children. This sanction against inter-clan marriage ensures the health of the community as well preserving the culture and tradition. For example, the strong taboo against marriage within the same lineage is a way of maintaining the matrilineal norm whereby brothers care for their sisters children.

Other clans especially those with patrilineal decent (ie. Ewes) encourage cross-cousin marriages. These sanctions are put in place to maintain the social institution of marriage and to ensure that individual group members act accordingly. Once again cross-cousin marriages are maintained so as to carry on the cultural and traditional practices of the clan (ie. the use of fetish girls to atonement for the sins of other family members).

Another sanction is the contract that legitimizes a marriage contract. In Ghana there are two main marriage contracts or customary rites regarding marriage, namely civil or customary marriage contracts. The civil marriage is done mainly for religious and legal purposes and secondly for security after the death of a spouse, usually a male spouse. A customary marriage contract is one that is more acceptable to the society regardless of class, religion or ethnic background. A traditional ceremony is performed at home (Ghana) after a civil contract for a 'proper recognition' of the marriage by the extended family. This is evident in all the seven participants discussions of marriage contracts. They all attest to being married under the customary marriage since that was the acceptable marriage contract. One participant explains:

... we had to do the customary rites, if not the family will not recognize our union as legitimate. He can do whatever he likes and my family may not be able to hold him responsible because we are not legally married in their eyes ... (Interviewee 5, 1999).

In a similar way another woman explains the importance of the customary marriage contract and the reason why it is done in addition to the civil rites. She explains thus:

We had all three levels of marriage. First the customary rite, followed by the civil signing and then the church wedding . . . The customary rite is a given. We had to do that even before anything could be legal before the family. The civil rite was just for him to be able to file for my immigration documents to be able to join him here. Because we were Christians(Catholics) the church wedding was also important (Interviewee 7, 1999).

As evident from the women's words, there is some importance attached to the customary rites for it is the only way that marriage unions are regarded as legal in the eyes of the family, community and the society. Marriage partners still have to undergo that ritual even if they met and get married outside of Ghana. One of the women did not meet her husband in Ghana, but they still had to marry home to make the marriage legitimate. A participant explained her experience as follows:

I met him here, and after 3 months we decided to get married. He had to formally ask of my hand in marriage from my family back home. His family met with mine and they performed all the necessary things . . . After that we were seen as man and wife . . . (Interviewee 4, 1999).

The above statement is an example of how important the customary marriage is in Ghana. This is done for recognition as well as cultural and traditional expectations of individuals in the marriage union. Most often the expectations can lead to abusive relationships, making it difficult sometimes for most women to actually separate their own perceived responsibility from what is imposed on them in the relationship by their partners and society. Whatever the system, when a marriage is contracted "it sets up a new unit in the society . . ." (Price, 1956: 24). This union is then come under the control of the extended family.

Customary marriage, contributes to the oppression of women. It labels or sets out expectations for members of the union. For example, within the Akan ethnic group marriage is known as 'aware',¹³ during the customary rites ceremony there is an expected presentation of items including alcoholic drinks which the Akans call 'tiri nsa'¹⁴ and 'aseda'¹⁵ meaning thanks-money. These are the items that finally make a marriage legal. This varies for every ethnic group in Ghana, but the basic things expected during this ceremony include a bottle of imported or the locally made gin.

The 'tiri-nsa' is a way of publicly proclaiming legal responsibility and acceptance of the woman into the man's family and the man into her family. This payment usually consists of two bottles of gin and other gifts. It is seen as a loan to the wife's lineage, from her husband's family. Upon divorce or separation it is refundable (Ofei-Aboagye, 1994; Mair, 1969; Fortes, 1963). It ensures and represents "a pledge of the wife's fidelity and gives her kinsmen an interest in this union" (Mair, 1969: 130).

The notion of fidelity is another contributory factor to the perpetuation of domestic violence against women. In Ghanaian culture it is an accepted norm that women be subordinate to men (ie. fathers, husbands, etc.). Pellow reminds us that "... traditional subordination continues . . . Because of the social necessity to marry, and the correlation of male sex with seniority, women are particularly affected." (Pellow, 1974: 56). This is transmitted into the different roles and status assigned to men and women. The author continues by saying that " Ghanaian women know that their husbands, boyfriends and fathers possess special rights by virtue of being men" (Pellow, 1974: 50).

¹³ 'aware' this is the term for marriage in the Akan dialect. it means that marriage is a long journey.

¹⁴ 'tiri nsa' refers to the drinks that are provided by the family of the male as payment for the union during marriage ceremony.

This sometimes makes it difficult for some women to talk back to their partners because it is viewed as disrespect. One participant supported this view when she said:

Despite all that he was doing to me I always felt bad even saying something insulting to him. I could not even insult him . . . I always felt bad about it any time I say things like 'you are being foolish or stupid . . . (Interviewee 7, 1999).

For example, in Ghana a traditional marital ritual in which drinks and other valuable items are given by the man to the woman's family signifies that "the marriage gives to the husband exclusive sexual rights and claims to the domestic services of his wife . . ." (Oppong, 1981: 29). It is viewed by some men as purchasing their wives which give them some self acquired power and authority to discipline them by whatever means men deem fit. It therefore, increases the possibility of domestic violence toward wives. In an editorial Ameyibor warns us that "culture is the scapegoat often used by men to justify wife beating" (Ameyibor, 1993: 54). One respondent views her husband's behaviour as follows:

. . . he thinks he owns me . . . Is it because of the stupid drinks that he gave to my family? Well he can have that back because my life is worth more than that . . . (Interviewee 6, 1999).

Although no conscious decision is made about the traditional marriage ceremony and its significance, there is some sub-conscious attitude towards it which can be devastating to women in the marriage.

Another significance of marriage is the responsibilities that are expected of members of the union. For example, in most Ghanaian families "the husband is given the undisputed title as head of the household . . ." (Toungara, 1997: 58). The result of this is

¹⁵ 'aseda' is an Akan dialect which literally means thanks. This is usually done in most situations to

that husbands usually exercise this power and control either in a positive or negative ways. An example is the insistence that he is in charge of decision making in the relationship. This is confirmed by one of the women when she stated:

... a typical Ghanaian man is one that needs to cross his legs and let the women do everything ... On top of that he needs to order her around and she is not supposed to say a word. This is the good woman that every Ghanaian man would like to have as a wife ... It's like he sees his wife as a slave even if she works outside of the home (Interviewee 4, 1999).

Men, on the other hand, are given the responsibility to care for their wives and children. After marriage husbands are expected to provide for their wives, care for them when they are sick, and give them gifts occasionally such as Christmas or the traditional festivals (Azu, 1974; Oppong, 1973). However, husbands do not have control over their wives' property. Women are allowed to own properties separate from that of their husbands. But wives are compelled to provide sexual satisfaction as well as domestic chores for their husbands (Azu, 1974). This adds to the pressures that women have to deal with in the case of domestic violence.

Divorce as Violence: a Culture Norm

Universally, separation is painful regardless of race, class, culture or tradition. However, in Ghana divorce can be used as a tool of violence against women by men. As mentioned earlier, divorce is seen as shameful and humiliating to families. Most families will do whatever it takes to prevent divorce. However, sometimes men use that as a way of humiliating women for it is usually the woman who is blamed. Although this is not

complete negotiations.

always the case, because polygamy is common divorce is not seen as a stigma for men. It can be seen as a rejection of a one woman for another, usually because the former must have done 'something bad.'

Most of the participants were/are emotionally divorced from their partners but were physically still married for fear of the hardships they have to encounter during an actual divorce process. This is not to say that men do not experience some form of emotions during divorce, but emphasizes the point that the stigma and blame is usually associated with divorce is more upon women, and encourages men to perpetuate violence against their partners.

Within each of the marriage types, divorce is legal. However, under the customary law, it is only women who can be divorced for adultery and witchcraft. Other grounds for divorce, such as violence, are not available to women (Shreir, 1988). Customary divorce can be very difficult because of the union of the more than the nuclear family members during the marriage process.

Before divorce is granted, the couple must present their reasons for such an action in the presence of elders from both sides of the family (the husband and wife). The family heads of both families who are always men decides if there is grounds for divorce. Sometimes couples may be divorced in terms of the civil marriage, but can still be regarded traditionally as married. The traditional family may refuse to recognize separation under the civil divorce. The problem is compounded by the fact that a woman who is seeking the divorce may not say what exactly is driving her to seek the divorce, especially if it involves abuse.

Most women may just say they want to leave because they are unhappy. I have spoken to other Ghanaian women in the past who expressed this concern. Women are culturalized to not to wash the dirty linen outside the home for strangers to see. One respondent had this to say when I asked her about why she did not talk to her family about her experience:

We are socialized that if you have marital problems work it out with your husband . . . It is bad to tell others about what is going on in your marriage. You see this with your own family and so you keep it up when you become a married woman too . . . (Interviewee 6, 1999).

Similarly, all the seven participants advanced the same reasons for not telling other people about their experiences. This silence about private domestic violence is something that is passed on from one generation to another. The civil divorce is equally challenging for couples during divorce. However, it can be helpful to many women because it provides some security for alimony or some sort of entitlement after divorce. As one of the women puts it:

In either customary or civil divorce it is the man who stands to gain. This is because he can still go on to have other women and have children without any body looking at him as a failure. But as a woman you have to still care for the children and sometimes other men find it difficult to marry you because you have been divorced . . . (Interviewee 5, 1999).

The interesting thing about divorce is that it is always seen as a failure on the part of the woman, even though it may have happened because of the man's abusive behaviour. It is necessary to reiterate that most of the participants acknowledged that they were emotionally divorced, but physically remained in the relationships because of cultural and

traditional pressures. One participant made a similar comment about her relationship when she stated that:

There were warning signs all over the place before we got married. I almost called off the marriage . . . But you know, you read about these things in books, but never believe it can happen in real life. I will say I went ahead with the marriage due to pressures . . . (Interviewee 7, 1999).

I can understand this woman's comment about getting married due to pressures. As explained earlier marriage is very important to every Ghanaian family. Every girl/woman is expected to get married in her life. This can be a source of pressure on women to marry a suitor whenever the opportunity arises. This woman probably married her partner under such social pressure that insist that women 'must' marry at a certain age or opportunity, if not they might never have that chance again. Most women fall into this sort of social pressure and end up in abusive relationships similar to the experiences of this participant.

It can be difficult for Ghanaian women to draw the line between what are their responsibilities as a wife and that of doing things against their will. Most of the participants acknowledged that this has been a struggle for them, although they can feel that something is wrong. This is because of there is a thin line between cultural expectation as a wife (ie. providing husband with sexual satisfactions) and complaining about that same expectation outside of this cultural norm. Cultural expectations make it difficult to link violence of any kind to the cultural expectations that make it possible for these violence to occur in the first place (ie. physical abuse). During my interview with the women most of them expressed this concern. There were times when some of the

women said they did not know how to separate abuses such as physical, emotional or sexual from their 'cultural roles' as wives. One woman summed it up this way:

When I was growing up I saw a couple of our neighbors beat their wives. It was seen only as the man beating his wife. I never paid any attention to it. It was like the woman has done something wrong and that is why she is being beaten . . . It's no big deal in Ghana to beat your wife . . . I'm not even sure if people got divorced over that . . . I think the first year of the marriage he smacked me but I did not make a big deal about it. After that any little thing he will beat me up so badly (Interviewee 7, 1999).

As the above statement indicates the woman did not pay much attention to the abuse she received from her husband during the first year of their marriage simply because she accepted she might have done something wrong. She associated her experience to what she was used to in Ghana, and did not take it all that serious. A second participant mentioned a similar experience:

When it happened to me I will say that maybe I did something wrong and he got mad then hit me. I never used the same words to describe it. . . I think it is part of our culture and I think we have not come to that level of acceptance that it is not something that the woman did . . . (Interviewee 6, 1999).

Once again this woman did not make anything out of her experience of abuse because she believed in what she knew as a child that it was her fault that her husband hit her. A third participant describes her experience thus:

Growing up, verbal abuse and physical abuse were very normal for me. All I knew was that these things happened to you because you had done something wrong. . . He will hit me whenever he feels like it. It's like I needed his permission to breathe . . . I did not make a big deal out of it until something changed . . . (Interviewee 2, 1999).

These women's voices are living examples of how culture is expressed in socialization. Women are usually caught between these two worlds of culture and traditions and are not able to differentiate between their expectations as individuals in the relationship, and the cultural expectations. This is one of the reasons why most Ghanaian women are hesitant to talk about their experiences to others outside of the culture, who may not have an understanding of what goes on in the cultural setting and within the institution of marriage as a whole. Most women usually take these social sanctions into account before making the decision to leave an abusive relationship. A participant stated:

I never called home because I was worried about what people will be saying, and I don't want my marriage to be interfered with such a thing and make my family members angry or something like that . . . I managed to call home on two occasions but every time I was told that the two of us should try and work thing out. But it is difficult to even get a Ghanaian man to admit that there is a problem about his marriage, let alone sit down with him to solve the problem . . . (Interviewee 5, 1999).

Women worry not only about their families but also about the societal sanctions as a whole. As indicated by the above woman, she did not want others to talk about her or say things about her marriage to other people. Another woman also explains her situation as resulting from the cultural socialization about marriages and domestic violence. She explained it in these words:

. . . the way our fathers treat our mothers, the way they talk to them with authority, cheat on them, do all sorts of things while mothers are supposed to be quiet about the whole thing is part and parcel of marriage . . . If you complain, it is seen as a very unusual thing to do since most women are in similar situations but are not talking about it . . .
 . . . who are you to start talking about it to others? If you are not careful, you will become the talk of the town and you know that you don't want to be perceived in that manner. Sometimes the very people you will be talking to wished they were married to your husband . . . (Interviewee 2, 1999).

The reality and influence of cultural socialization of marriage was shared in different ways by the women. One participant mentioned a local highlife music and how similar message is insinuated in the music. Highlife or folk music is one way that Ghanaians express themselves about social issues affecting their lives. The participant discusses some of the content of the song as follows:

I remember a song by Nana Ampadu about a married woman whose husband slapped her and who told her best friend about her experience. The next time she noticed that the friend was married to her husband after she left him . . . This implies that if your husband slaps you once or twice you don't have to leave him because if you do someone else would marry him . . . (Interviewee 7, 1999).

The song writer is reminding women that the cultural expectations about abuse such as slapping should not be taken seriously because the keeping of a marriage is more important than just complaining about what one suffers in the relationship. Other culturally socialized aspects of marriages were also shared by another participant:

I can't just pack my things and leave. . . You have to let the family know about why you are leaving and all that. We have respect for our parents and other family members. Most of the times that I have thought of leaving I worry about what my father and her [husband] family will be saying . . . It is not just right for me to make a decision on my own. I am not the only person needed in order to make such a decision, the whole family have a big influence on us (Interviewee 2, 1999).

She continues by expressing her strong belief about the influence of the traditional and cultural practices by saying:

You see when we are born the way our umbilical cord was cut and buried in the ground, means a lot to me. This has a great effect on us and the decisions we make in life. Also the libation that was poured during all these event and the prayers that were said at birth and marriage ceremonies can be very powerful . . . No matter where we go we still want to go back home. This is because of the rituals that we experience and they can be very powerful I believe , for example the umbilical cord thing . . . (Interviewee 2, 1999).

Here, this woman's understanding of the cultural influence on every aspects of her life prevents her from leaving the abusive relationship. It is worth reiterating that it only takes an understanding of some cultural influences such as the one described above to understand why most Ghanaian women do not leave an abusive situation. Women are made to believe that it is no big deal to be beaten by a partner. One woman shares this experience when she states that:

If he hits you they [family members] will say to you, oh he just hit you a little and you are packing your things to move? . . . Because of all these things we settle for whatever is given to us . . . Knowledge is power, it works on you like crazy. (Interviewee 3, 1999).

What this participant is referring to here is the amount of respect that is given to parents and elders in Ghanaian society. When it comes to parents their words are viewed like the 'ten commandment'. Most Ghanaians strongly believe parents are the link between the ancestors and the living, therefore their words are like the word of God. One woman commented on this when she stated that "you must listen to your parents because they are like gods and their words can be powerful" (Interview, 1999). Similarly, Pellow supports this strong belief about parents when she states that ". . . parents are like gods and it important to follow their advice . . ." (Pellow, 1977: 54).

Another common problem for women is to get divorce is rooted in marriage being seen as a union between two families. It is not very easy for a woman to receive divorce, although divorce is legal. The grounds for granting a divorce can be very complicated and difficult. In most cases divorce is seen as a rejection of the woman and, as such, the woman's family will try to encourage their daughter to stay in the relationship even when

it is violent and destructive to her health. A lot of pressure is put on women to help keep the families together so as not to bring shame and disgrace to the extended family. Therefore, in times of dispute, it is the wife who is usually encouraged by both families to ask for forgiveness even when she is not at fault.

This is common in our cultural and traditional ways of solving marital problems. “In situations where there have been marital problems between couples, often the equivalent of group counseling was practiced . . . The wife went to her parents or brothers in the absence of a parent and reported her marital problem. Often she was calmed down and told to go back to her husband” (Kayongo-Male, 1984: 43). It was also reported by some of the participants that when they had problems some of them did consult with their parents and they were always encouraged to go back to their partners and try to solve the problem by themselves. However, the problem is complicated when the men do not feel that there are any problems in the marriage to be resolved. This can be devastating for women in such situations as domestic violence who are also in a foreign place such as Canada. The result is women trying to survive under every condition possible and enduring violent relations.

In the Ghanaian community when a man beats his wife or partner, it is usually not challenged. This is an attitude that sanctions violence against women, as a necessary instrument for imposing discipline and obedience in women. In the same vein women are not expected to hit their male partners. Most women do not hit back because “. . . they feel it is not just right for a woman to hit back” (Gelles, 1972: 81).

There are certain responsibilities expected in marriage within the Ghanaian culture that are common in most societies. It is expected of the woman to cook, and wash

her husband's clothes in addition to providing sexual satisfaction and bear children. Men on the other hand are obliged " . . . to provide their wives with money for trading [or other economic security]" (Azu, 1974: 65). It then assigns women's economic dependence on their partners which then becomes a social construction within the institution of marriage. These socially constructed sex roles that are assigned to men as breadwinners and women as homemakers give men more power over women. Being breadwinners, men tend to possess greater economic power and higher occupational status than their wives or partners (Parson & Bales, 1955; Scanzoni, 1979). Alder & Denmark, note that " . . . this gives men legitimized right to exercise power over their wives [and partners] and to manifest the positive gender traits that are expected of them" (Alder & Denmark, 1995: 150). In many instances some women accept the status, roles, cultural norms and traditional practices that decide that it is right for them to be submissive to their husbands' or to accept male domination. The above authors further supported this acceptance of role and status by adding that " . . . a wife can comfortably accept her husband's authority and defer to his wishes, thereby manifesting the positive communal characteristics expected of her" (ibid.).

There is no exception when it comes to Ghanaians. Both women and men accept this demonstration of male authority that gives men the legitimacy to dominate their female partners. As such, whenever the roles are reversed and women have some form of economic stability, men view that as failure threat to cultural norms, communal characteristics and male egos. That attitude contributes to domestic violence.

Marriage And Inheritance

There are two basic forms of family lineage in Ghana as mentioned earlier on in the study, matrilineal and patrilineal. With this lineage comes the question of inheritance, which are often very oppressive to women. The two forms of family structures are both detrimental to women's equal access to property especially after divorce or death of their husbands. As indicated earlier women are denied equal access to resources because of the extended family's ideas of what constitute a marriage/family. This family line is usually traced through 'mogyia'¹⁶. So that for the Akans who ascribe to the matrilineal type of lineage, trace their blood line through the female often the mother and her brothers. Fortes reminds us that "In Ghana, unlike the West, kinship bonds are emphasized at the expense of conjugal bonds . . ." (Fortes, 1962: 87). This becomes even stronger after the death of a spouse because his 'mogyia' siblings have the right to inherit his property at the expense of the wife. This is where the civil marriage laws help in protecting the wife's right to inherit some portion of her husband's property. Other cultural ethnic groups such as the Ga's and Ewe with a patrilineal kind of lineage, trace the blood line through their fathers.

In the case of inheritance, the man as the head of family, even in a 'matri-clan', has the right to all the property of the spouse even when the property was acquired by both parties (husband and wife). For example, after the death of the husband his family can claim all 'his' properties regardless of the woman's contribution to the property. In both matrilineal and patrilineal systems of descent wives are not members of their husbands families and have no inheritance rights to husbands property (Manuh, 1997:

¹⁶ 'mogyia' refers to the Akan word for blood and it is this line of blood that families are often traced.

79). The complexity of this 'patri-clan' system, cannot be fully discussed in this study. However, no matter what type of lineage neither is helpful to wives. For instance, if a man is married to more than one wife (which is the most common form of marriage in the patri-clan system), the children get to share the property but not his wife/wives. The disposing of inheritance become even more complex when both the husband and wife come from different lineage and inheritance systems. All these practices are informed and guided by cultural and traditional norms in the Ghanaian society.

Although several attempts have been made to change some of the previously mentioned Ordinances and Acts on marriage and interstate succession, they have all failed. Some of the reasons for failure are that either the changes are not in favour of women or due to resistance, it is men, who benefit the most from the revised arrangements. An example of one such failure, which does not benefit women in any way, is the new proposed Matrimonial Causes Act of 1977 which "requires the spouse to show evidence of substantial contribution in the cause of marriage" (Okwabi, 1995: 708). This system has failed most women because "they are not able to produce such evidence even when they have directly or indirectly made a substantial contribution" (ibid.).

For example, in 1961 the Akan tribe rejected a proposal for monogamy as the only form of legal marriage on the grounds that "it would lower the status of women, create jealousy, and disrupt the peace of many" (West Africa, June 23, 1986: 1328). The article continue to argue that "the chiefs were obviously defending the system to which they owed their position rather than the welfare of women" (West Africa, June 23, 1986:

13-14). This is because polygamy permits men to marry as many women as they want while polyandry is forbidden in the case of women.

The irony here is that there is a practice where chiefs (who are always men) are given brides as young as possible as part of their harem. An example of such a practice was documented in the *Ottawa Citizen* where a white Professor from England who was made the chief of one of the tribal villages in Ghana and was given an eleven year old bride and a spear as part of the customs and traditions of the chieftaincy (Ward, 1998: A 8). The article goes on to say that "John Knapton 'the chief' kept the spear and sent the little girl to school shattering an ancient tribal custom"(ibid.). It was no surprise that the men did not like the idea " . . . causing some unrest among males of the tribe . . ." (ibid). However, due to the high regard in which chiefs are held, this British white chief's orders were obeyed and his decision became the final word on the matter. It is sometimes argued that women benefit from the matrilineal societies because the blood line is traced from women. However, Ogundipe reminds us that " even in matrilineal societies, women are still subordinate to men, considered as second in place to men; the only difference being that inheritance and authority pass through the women to the male of the line" (Ogundipe, 1994: 34). In other words although the line of blood is traced from women it does not give them any special powers over men when it comes to inheritance. Women are still given lesser inheritance as compared to men in a matrilineal society (Fortes, 1969; Manuh, 1997; Pellow, 1986).

Immigration: A Cultural Influence

There is no dispute about the fact that the Canadian immigration policies contribute to some extent to the violence that is perpetuated by immigrant and non-immigrant men on their partners. The policy which makes it possible for only men to be the legitimate person in sponsoring a spouse creates some of the power and control men think they have over their partners. Because the women in this study are viewed by the Canadian system as 'immigrants' (although they have all acquired Canadian citizenship) this link cannot be ignored. Some of the women agreed they are rendered powerless because their citizenship depended on their partners who were responsible for sponsoring them to Canada. One woman explains her situation as:

... I was terrified about everything ... I left home and did not know where to go, I ended up staying with friends for a week ... he promised me he was not going to do it again, but three days later the hitting started again ... I could not say or do anything because he was doing my immigration papers for me and I was scared if I complained he might cancel the sponsorship ... In such a case where do you turn to but stay in that situation ... (Interviewee 2, 1999).

This woman's experience was strictly related to the fact that her husband was solely responsible for her stay in Canada. Leaving or complaining might mean the cancellation of this process which is not something that most women will sacrifice. Other participants agreed to this and reported they have been quiet over a lot of the abuses for fear that their sponsorship might be canceled. Consequently, men use this power as a tool to oppress and abuse their partners.

Despite the above argument which is often made about 'immigrant' women, such as the women in this study, I argue that this is not always the case. I strongly believe that the immigration dilemma goes deeper than it is assumed. In the case of Ghanaian

families I add that culture plays an important role in this oppression and suppression. For example, not all the women met their partners in Ghana but yet the cultural and traditional beliefs are used by the men to oppress the women. One of the women summed up her experience thus:

... I met him here but he still wanted to control my life. If he had sponsored me I would have been much more miserable ... But he use to tell me that my mother did everything for my father without complaining. ... Beside you are a Ghanaian woman no matter where you are ... (Interviewee 4, 1999).

Something in his message tells me that this man was less concerned about the woman's status in Canada and that it does not matter whether he sponsored her or not, she still remains a Ghanaian woman. She is expected to behave like one by taking his orders and doing whatever he wants just like his mother did for his father. Another implication is that if she considers herself still as a Ghanaian woman, she has to relate to her own experience with the Ghanaian culture and behave accordingly.

Economic dependence is also often associated with immigrant women and male bias in immigration policies. I am of the view that this is not the case for all immigrant women. For example, all the women in the study did contribute in some way financially to the family income but they were still being abused by their partners. Another woman supports this notion when she says:

... he always felt that he was in control over me and that I was nobody ... meanwhile I was the one supporting the family. But because he wanted me to feel inferior he was all the time feeling superior ... So he will say things like 'you are nobody and you think you are more of a human being than other people. This came across in the way he even called me, 'hey come here' ... (Interviewee 7, 1999).

The statement supports the view that not all immigrant women fit the belief that they are abused because they depend economically on their partners. I again argue that the case of

the woman above is a familiar attitude that some Ghanaian men have about their partners. It does not matter who is providing financially for the family they still remain the head of the family with all the power and control. This behaviour can be traced back in the culture where men are usually given the undisputed control over women. Often when a woman defends her rights, she is told that a woman need not have a big mouth. One consequence of such dominant male attitude is the perpetuation of the type of domestic violence where Ghanaian men do not tolerate their Ghanaian women expressing their oppressive experiences.

Transported Culture

The Ghanaian community in Canada is a sub-culture within the Canadian dominant culture. The sub-culture is transported over from the country of origin (Ghana) into the dominant culture where it perpetuate social relations that leads to domestic violence. I am not in any way condemning the Ghanaian culture totally, but looking at some to the cultural and traditional attitudes that are transported to Canada and superimposed upon the existing oppressive situations that immigrant women find themselves. Racist attitudes are compounded with sexist and cultural oppression making the experience of the Black Ghanaian woman more complicated to deal with. On one hand, women have to deal with the racist attitudes which prevents them from acquiring equal opportunity within the larger Canadian system, and on the other hand, they have to deal with cultural and traditional practices which their partner use to oppress them.

Some of the transported cultural practices arise from the fact that most Ghanaian men do not want to give up the power and control accorded them in Ghanaian cultural

and traditional norms (ie. assisting their wives in the kitchen). One participant agrees with this when she states:

My husband is the kind of man with the Ghanaian mentality . . . He believes that as a woman, I have to be responsible for all the house work, even if I am tired I have to do it. Although he has traveled he does not want to change. He does not want to balance the new Canadian ways with the 'Ghanaian' ways. . . All he knows is that he is a Ghanaian man, and he has to be in charge of me here and everywhere . . . (Interviewee 4, 1999).

The above is a striking example of transported culture where the man does not want to change by giving up his 'culturalized' ways of doing things. Most Ghanaian men say things like, "why did I marry you? What is your responsibility as a Ghanaian woman?" This and other cultural ways of doing things which most of the time are not seen by men as abusive impact on women's experience of domestic violence. Another participant also shared her experience with her husband who tried to maintain the cultural norm of women in the kitchen. She has this to say:

My husband would come from work and won't even serve himself the food that I have prepared. Sometimes he will get home before me but would wait for me to come home from work before cooking . . . Although the soup is ready and all he needs to do is to cook the fufu¹⁷, he believes that men are not supposed to go anywhere near the kitchen . . . (Interviewee 3, 1999).

Other areas of the culture which is hard to let go is the idea of having more than one wife. Although it is not practiced openly as they would have in Ghana, most men use this as a tool to date other women and when a wife complains she is often told " . . . you must be happy that I am not married to three other women." (Interviewee 4, 1999). This is to stop

¹⁷ 'fufu' is a Ghanaian dish made out of cassava, plantain, yam or cocoyam. Potato flour is substitute for these crops in Canada.

her from complaining and be even thankful that her husband is not involved in polygamous relationship.

Taboos about divorce and separation are other tools that encourages most women to remain in abusive situations. Some participants expressed the fear that they will be chastised by the community for leaving. For example, one women shares what was said about her when she reported her abusive partner to the police:

Because I went to the authorities for help they [community] went against me. They said things like 'she is a Ghanaian, she is a Fanti and she did this to you? got the police to get you out of the house? . . . So many people were very upset with me and still are . . . Some people still do not speak with me until this day . . . (Interviewee 7, 1999).

The fear of being cast outside of the community is another reason why most women do not speak about their experiences either to other people or report them to the authorities. This is one aspect of change that needs to happen in the community in order to address the issue of domestic violence. Racism is another form of social control which makes it easier for women to hide their experiences and oppressions from the dominant Canadian community.

The Demise of A True Ghanaian Culture Through Migration

It is worth emphasizing here that there are some 'true'¹⁸ Ghanaian cultural practices among the many cultures which get lost in the process of migration. The 'true' Ghanaian culture is one that is filled with love and affection regardless of all its shortcomings. There is also always a sense of community which can be felt throughout the Ghanaian cultures as a whole irrespective of race, gender, class, culture, tradition,

¹⁸ 'true' is used here to capture some of the unique values of every Ghanaian person. These are helpfulness, respect for elders, and a sense of community in times of need (ie. death).

age, economic background, etc. This sense of community and mutual respect is instilled in every Ghanaian, and is something that can not be missed about most Ghanaians. My mother use to say, "you can never be alone in Ghana, because you will always have brothers, sisters cousins, grandparents and all the extended families." All these connections get lost through migration to new countries (e.g. Canada). Most Ghanaian Immigrants become very isolated when they migrate to Canada. The mere fact that one is away from one's own society (ie. Ghana) creates isolation and despair, therefore, increasing the possibility of domestic violence in a nuclear family situation. At least, in Ghana, in times of need for support women can be supported by their extended family, some of which may not necessarily be relatives. In Canada women are caught in their own little world and sometimes that can be dangerous. One woman stated this nicely when she said:

... things would have been different for me if it were home [Ghana], at least I will be able to sit outside and chat with other people walking around the community. Here you are caught up in your apartment with this person [abuser] without any one to talk to ... (Interviewee 1, 1999).

The sense of community and belonging in Ghana can be seen through this woman's expression of desperation and despair. Although she may have experienced abuse in Ghana she would have had other people around to help and support her. Similarly, another woman expressed her frustration about the loneliness she experienced here as follows:

Things would have been different home ... It would have been easier to get out of the marriage ... At least you will have friends and family members to talk to. I would have felt comfortable talking to my mum about my experience. I also think, here, I looked very vulnerable ... While I was experiencing this when I looked around there was no help from any where. Everyone is busy and has problems of their own, therefore when you talk to people you have to apologize

for telling them about your problems . . . People don't have time here for each other . . . Even the family does not have time to talk and do things together . . . (Interviewee 7, 1999).

The loneliness and isolation make women feel trapped within the system with no other help. The frustration would not have been the same in Ghana. The lost Ghanaian culture of community and caring leads to the perpetuation of domestic violence. The cultural ways of peaceful settlement of family dispute which involves the whole extended family is also missing here. Usually, the social structures in Ghana allow couples the time and ability to at least talk about their problems at dawn before heading out for work. In Canada with the different working schedule for couples, limited family contact can create stress leading to the perpetuation of domestic violence.

The Voice of Change

Out of all the oppression of Black Ghanaian women lies a strong message of change which most women in the community are advocating. It was expressed by all the seven women interviewed. They all agreed on the need for change in the way children are socialized if the circle of violence resulting from culture and tradition is to be stopped. One participant stressed this point when she said:

I have been using my mother's marriage in comparison to mine. My mother was also a fool for my father in many ways. But I will never socialize my daughter to play the fool for her husband. If I don't break this circle it will be difficult for my daughter just as it was for my mother and now me. (Interviewee 4, 1999).

The voice of resistance is clear in this woman's words. As a mother who is usually in charge of the socialization process of her children, she is determined to change some of

the ways that she was socialized to be as a girl to enable her daughters behave differently.

A second woman has this to say along the same lines:

... we have to come to terms and face what we've learnt back home [Ghana], because life here is different and we don't want our children to also follow those foot steps ... It will be difficult for them if this happens ... (Interviewee 2, 1999).

She, like the first woman, wants to change things about her cultural upbringing. She also stresses the need for change in the way her children should be socialized. A third woman has this to say on the issue of change:

... when my child was little I used to play it safe, but as soon as I realized he was able to understand things, I told him everything ... I always tell him things anytime his father does something wrong, and I will say to him that is not the right way of treating women ... And that he needs to treat women with respect so that he will not be like the father ... I really want to break the circle and I have to start at this tender age ... (Interviewee 1, 1999).

This woman is also doing her best by socializing her male child at a young age to understand and to break the circle of violence against women. She hopes that the child will not repeat what happened to her. This is positively reinforced by her telling the child not to follow his father's foot steps. I view the participation of these women in this study as a voice of change and resistance in itself. They have taken the risk of possible backlash from their partners and the community for participating. On a personal note, this work is also a form of resistance for me for taken to courage to tackle a tabooed subject such as domestic violence. This may pave the way for other studies to be done on a larger scale in the Ghanaian community in Canada.

There is a strong sense of silence, shame and secrecy within the Ghanaian community when it comes to issues of this nature. We are taught to be quiet about issues

of domestic violence, because they are seen as a way of exposing one's private affair to strangers. Although there is a sense of community about other issues (ie. death, birth, etc.) there is an unspoken 'oath of silence' when it comes to the issue of violence. Most women are experiencing violence in their daily lives, but so not discuss it for fear that other community members will be angry with them for exposing the violence, the shame, and secrecy associated with it. It is my hope that this will change with the courage and strength from other women in the community who are speaking out about this social problem - domestic violence, the future may be brighter.

Chapter VI

A SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

Introduction

In this thesis I have attempted to address the issue of domestic violence against Black Ghanaian in Canada. It is my contention that cultural and traditional practices influence this violence which is perpetuated in Ghanaian Canadian families. I have found that domestic violence is a serious problem in most of these families and that it occurs in various forms.

By using a Black African Structural Feminist approach which, employs a qualitative methodological approach, I was able to gather relevant data from an in-dept interviews, written materials available on the issue, my own experience as a Black Ghanaian Canadian woman and the observations of other Ghanaian Canadians in the community.

The study began by questioning the cultural and traditional family practices that continue to oppress Ghanaian women in Canada. I have found from the data very interesting links between the Ghanaian culture and traditions and domestic violence against Black Ghanaian Canadian women.

Socialization

My research found that socialization is one of the major avenues through which the individual Ghanaian is 'culturalized' to be violent or to accept violence. As children, there are set rules and expectations for both girls and boys. Most of these expectations are displayed in future relationships (ie. marriage). Men are usually socialized to have

authority over women in different ways. For example, women are socialized to respect their husbands, boyfriends, fathers, because they are men (Pellow, 1974). This gender socialization which begin in childhood are displayed later on in life (ie. marriage). Other social structures such as religious rites (ie. female circumcision); cultural rites (ie. puberty rites and 'trokoshi') are examples of gender inequality. These inequalities do not change with marriage, or motherhood. The socialization process continue to be perpetuated in various ways (ie. unequal education for boys and girls).

For example, all the participants agreed that they were socialized in one way or the other to believe that it is their duty as women to do all the house work. Not only were they told to believe that, but also saw it happening in their own families. Violence against women was another practice women were socialized to accept as the 'norm.' Most of the participants said in the beginning they did not make any thing out of their experience because they viewed it as a normal part of the marriage relationship. Most of them accepted blame because they had been taught to believe that women got hit only for wrong-doing. Even when a woman was socialized differently, her partner who was socialized into the gender role expectations used that to oppress his partner. It was evident that most of the cultural and traditional norms perpetuated through socialization. There was a definite link between how children are socialized in the Ghanaian culture and tradition and the domestic violence that Black Ghanaian women experience in Canada.

Marriage

Another interesting link found between domestic violence and some Ghanaian culture and traditions was the process of marriage. It was evident that the process of the marriage union which bring two families together can also be an avenue for oppression against women in violent marriage relationships. The emotional attachment by both families create pressure on couples (especially women) to stay in abusive relationships. For example, when there is a problem in a marriage relationship, it is usually the woman who is encouraged to try and work things out with her partner. Most men are not usually worried because there is less blame and shame associated with their behaviours during divorce or separation processes.

Because children are so important in Ghanaian culture it is the dream of every woman to be a mother. This I found also contributes to most women staying in abusive relationships for it is appreciated that the same abusers have made mothers. Five of the women interviewed acknowledged that although their experiences with their partners were/are abusive, they still believed that it was worth it because they become mothers. The literature reveals that most Ghanaians view motherhood like the natural process of menstruation in women (Pellow, 1974). Therefore, there is a strong sense of pride and thankfulness in becoming a mother. The eagerness and pride of motherhood is sometimes used by some Ghanaian men as a medium of oppression, especially since they are also socialized in the same culture and are aware of such beliefs.

Community

I found that there are different meanings of 'community' in a Canadian setting and that of Ghanaian setting. The Canadian community is not a physical one so that Ghanaians who are used to a physical and sharing community can be very isolated, lonely and desperate in a Canadian type of community. This isolation and desperation can still be felt even when other Ghanaians are around, and may increase the possibility of domestic violence. The community in Canada is mainly a telephone network, whereas the 'true' Ghanaian community is usually that of a physical or people networking. In Ghana people form part of the community by just being a good neighbor. This is not the case in Canada. For example, in Ghana, the elders in the community teach the younger generation about the Ghanaian culture and tradition of respect and love for all people. The absence of this in Canada can also be a source of challenge and stress for Ghanaian families in Canada, thereby increasing the possibility of domestic violence.

Transported Culture

This study reveals that in spite of those undesirable ones there are many positive Ghanaian cultural and traditional practices. For example, women can own their own properties without any interference from their husbands; older women are very respected in most important decision making process (ie. kinship); In some instances women are given political powers (ie. Queen mothers). All these are important places and status that women are given in the Ghanaian society. Unfortunately, it is only the negative ones that are usually transported into foreign countries like Canada.

In my study I found that most of the traditional and cultural authority given to men in the Ghanaian society continue to shape everyday experience of Black Ghanaian women in Canada. For example, all the ethnic groups have representatives with one person selected to represent the head of the 'family'¹⁹. This family head is always a man - something which is similar in Ghanaian culture. Another is the gender role expectations (ie. women doing house work) is also carried over, although the life style here is different with little or no other help with children while couples work outside of the home.

In tracing some of the structural oppressions faced by a Black Ghanaian woman, I have found that all the cultural and traditional social structures examined were found to be fundamental sources of oppression. The process of socialization, marriage, and inheritance were all found to be transported into Canada where they contribute to the oppression of Black Ghanaian women in Canada. Other issues such as immigration, racism, patriarchy and sexism were also sources of this oppression in Canada. These sources are separate but interlocking in the perpetuation of domestic violence against Ghanaian women in Canada. The common links are the cultural and traditional practices in Ghana have been transported into Canada where it becomes a sub-culture within the dominant Canada culture. It is important to note here that the pain of domestic violence is common for every woman universally, but the sources are different. This study reveals one source of domestic violence which is usually forgotten - cultural and traditional practices that are embedded in societies like Ghana.

¹⁹ 'family' here refers to a group of people brought together because they come from similar linguistic or cultural background (ie Kwahu).

Naming

The lack of language or a name for certain violent behaviour is another source of oppression that became obvious in this study. It was clear in the research that because most of these practices are viewed as part of the culture and traditions in Ghana, it is not seen by many as violating the rights of the people who experience it. The other revelation was about language and 'naming'. There were many actions or behaviours which are not expressed in any of the dialects in Ghana. For example, I asked many people about a word in any of the dialects for 'domestic violence' and all the explanation given was a fight within the family setting. Others said it is something that happens to a woman when she has a 'big mouth.' Women are beaten as a way to discipline them or keep them quiet. The most interesting finding was how when a woman is beaten by her husband it is accepted that the man only disciplined her. This is very important in explaining why domestic violence is not seen as violent act perpetrated against a wife. The lack of name for such actions contribute to the down playing of the whole action. Until names are given to these actions for what they are - violence, it will be difficult to put a stop to it.

As I spoke to different members of the Ghanaian community with different educational and social background and they all agreed that there is no specific name for acts such as rape, abuse, or sexual harassment in Ghana. I therefore, concluded that if there is no specific word for such acts it will not be possible to identify them as wrong and punish offenders. Everyone agreed that it does not mean that they do not occur in the Ghanaian society, but then there is no word for it in our languages. Three of the women

made this specific remarks about their experiences: “... it is in the blood²⁰...” One of my colleges sums it all up nicely in a special poem that captures the essence of the study in a nutshell:

It is in the Blood

Screams of hatred, liquid smiles
weigh your hands inflicting pain
his sweetness in excess leaves me imprisoned
defenseless, unprotected, exposed and withdrawn
No safe haven for me to approach
transplanted in a new world
under a new controlling regime
Culturalized and socialized by Ghana
it is in the blood

Walking a solitary road
No options present in the path chosen
I suffer in silence
The essence of my existence
retained in traditions and culture I practice
My bartered worth, rites of passage
and marriage vows I have partaken
My value measured by ancient ideas
I must be quite, subservient and obedient
to keep my life
Culturalized and socialized by Ghana
it is in the blood

I stay bounded by kinship ties
My community my adversarial foes
No longer respected as the daughter of the Queen Mother
I can see my reflection in other Ghanaians eyes

No name to call it, No way to define it
You call it violence, I know it as discipline
You say it is a crime
where I come from it is a right
to punish me, to prevent me from
committing recurring mistakes
I stand corrected
You say it is a result of patriarchy
To you I say it is in the blood.

By: Michelle Walker
June, 1999.

²⁰ ‘it is in the blood’ see above poem.

A Closing Thought

From the beginning of this project I was very much aware of the scarcity of available material in North America on Ghanaian women's specific experiences of domestic violence. However, it was my dream to try and see what I can do to answer some of the questions I had about why Ghanaian women experience domestic violence in Canada.

It is my hope that this research will begin a dialogue on this social issue that plague the Ghanaian community. With cooperation and commitment the secrecy and silence about the issue that contributes to the oppression to women in the community can also be broken. It is my intent that this work will be the beginning of a process of healing and ignite discussions on the issue of domestic violence, with the hope of encouraging others to attempt further research.

It is important to note here that this has been a very difficult research in many ways. As a member of the Ghanaian community most women did not find it safe to share their experiences with me. Some of the participants were also people that I got to know on a personal level. It was very difficult separating myself as a researcher for being a member of this community. However, I found it was necessary to pursue this research both as a way of resistance and for all the women who are experiencing domestic violence in silence, and to encourage other women to resist being silenced by what other people will say about them.

I argue that culture should not be static but should change with time. Out-dated practices which were acceptable in the past, have to be reviewed to correspond with

present day thinking. The rigidly defined sex-roles combined with historical traditions that oppress women contribute to the social acceptance of abusive and violent behaviours in our society. We must make Ghanaian women aware that it is not any thing that they have done, but rather cultural, sexist traditions, and out-dated attitudes that perpetuate domestic violence.

If conditions for Black Ghanaian women in Canada and the Third World as a whole are to be improved, more should be done by governments and citizens in providing all members of the community the same opportunity that are accorded their male citizens in terms of education, protection, jobs and security. Also the problems of women in Ghana must be viewed as an interwoven structural oppressions as the bird cage analogy described by Marilyn Frye. She argues that if one looks at a bird in a cage and does not take into account all the wires that are preventing it from flying, it is difficult to understand why it is not flying (Frye, 1983). In the same vein, until the oppression of Ghanaian women are seen resulting from an interwoven structural strands of cultural and traditional oppressions, it will be difficult to really solve the problem. It is important that all these structures are taken into account when addressing the issues about women's oppressions in the society.

Conclusion

My investigation of the violence experienced by Black Ghanaian women from their male partners in Canada revealed some interesting findings mentioned earlier. I came to the conclusion that some of the most destructive elements of the Ghanaian culture is transported from Ghana where it becomes a sub-culture within the dominant Canadian culture. The data revealed that the negative elements of Ghanaian cultures and

traditions were identified by all the participants as contributing to their experience of domestic violence. In most instances Ghanaian men used culture and traditions to oppress their partners. Although there are laws that protect both men and women in Ghana, the rights of women continue to be violated (**Appendix G**). This in part is due to cultural and traditional practices which condone these violations.

Similarly, the laws that protect all persons in Canada are again ignored and domestic violence continue to violate the rights of Black Ghanaian women in Canada. I explored different Black feminist approaches that discuss the oppression of Black women in society. I used Black Feminist Thought and African Feminism as a starting point for analysis. Although they were both helpful in my search for the links, they also lacked something which I identified as not speaking to the reality of the Ghanaian women. Therefore, I used a Black African Structural Feminist framework which developed from the literature, my interviews and my experiences. This framework allowed participants the freedom to identify which structures of the Ghanaian society impacted on their experience of domestic violence.

Implications For Service Providers

As service providers it is important for us to be informed about the different cultural groups that we serve. Therefore, a critical examination of the different cultural structures of the people we serve should be considered when dealing with women from different cultural backgrounds. In the case of Black Ghanaian women who have experienced domestic violence an attempt to locate some of the cultural and traditional practices will be of help. It is important for service providers to be informed and to

understand how some of the violent cultural and traditional practices inform domestic violence in the lives of these women. This means that service providers must be sensitized and aware of some of the cultural and traditional issues surrounding women in this community. A critical examination of this nature will inform service providers of some of these cultural and traditional oppressions that women in this community have to deal with in addition to their race, gender and class problems.

One important finding of my study is that the only services that women in the Ghanaian community assess is housing. What is surprising is that there are a lot of women who are experiencing violence but will not talk about their experience. I believe that studies of this nature will help encourage as well as inform the Canadian community, services providers (ie. doctors, social workers, lawyers) about some of the cultural influences that do not allow women to share their experiences. For example, all the participants reported that they never told any authority about their experience of violence. One participant reported that when she went to see her lawyer she could not tell her in details about her violent experiences. All she told her was that she was unhappy and needed some protection from her partner. This is a very cultural way for a Ghanaian woman to deal with domestic dispute.

Most women have to deal with pressures from other family members at home and the shame and fear that they have to encounter once they leave the abusive relationship. Unlike other women, Ghanaian women are very much bounded by cultural and traditional obligations as women. Any decision regarding the family has to be taken with this in mind. It is our duty as service providers to do all we can with their approval, so that we can assist them in finding services that are available and suitable for their needs.

We will also have to build a trusting relationship with them, making them know that we understand what they are going through, and that we will do any thing to help them. Cultural sensitivity is required in helping women who experience domestic violence. As Social Workers, we must be aware of the fact that we will not always be able to help these women, but we can help them to be empowered and support them as they deal with their problems in ways that are most comfortable for them. Most women faced with spousal abuse have no other way of accessing resources other than depending on friends and family because of the mistrust that they have about social services. To break this mistrust requires working with community members to find culturally sensitive and appropriate ways of helping women facing domestic violence. There is also the need to advocate for service providers who are familiar with some of the Ghanaian culture and traditions.

Lack of information about specific groups (ie. Ghanaian women) is a source of problem for most service providers. The problem is that all the research done about immigrant women lump every 'immigrant' woman into one category. Unique and specific cultural and traditional practices are usually not available to service providers. This makes it difficult to shed light on specific communities and their special need such as the Ghanaian community. Most women are not seeking help because of the fear of exposing what is going on in their marriages. This is something that service providers must understand. Most women do seek help in housing and child care but not counseling and shelter for abused women. It is therefore important that service providers find out more about the situations of these women when they come for these services. Trusting

and non intrusive ways should be used in inquiring from women so that they willingly share their experiences.

There is also the need for a shelter and other safe haven for Ghanaian women experiencing domestic violence. I found out from this study that women are more willing to share and open up to people when they feel they are safe and not being judged.

This study has helped me to clearly understand some of the problems that Black Ghanaian women experiencing domestic violence in Canada has to deal with. It has been an eye opener to some of the difficulty that women in this community have in sharing their experiences with service providers. It also gave me an opportunity to reflect on some of the cultural and traditional practices in Ghana that can be linked to domestic violence. There was also a confirmation that although there are a diverse of cultures in Ghana, domestic violence takes place in each of them because of the cultural and traditional practices which sanctions women to be subservient and submissive to men.

Summary of Findings

CULTURE & TRADITIONS

SOCIALIZATION

MARRIAGE

GENDER ROLES	NAMING	NORMS & VALUES	FAMILY ROLES	CULTURAL ROLE EXPECTATIONS	DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
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Further Research

- ✱ There is an immediate need for further investigation in the area of domestic violence within the Ghanaian community in Canada on a national level with a bigger sample.
- ✱ There is quite a large Ghanaian population in Canada, as such I believe that there is an urgency to find out more about their needs as a community so as to develop interventions and policies that will be beneficial to that community. The information will help services providers make informed decisions when dealing with women from the community.
- ✱ Another research that begs attention is finding out from Ghanaian men about what they think about the issue of domestic violence in the community. This will help service providers understand men abusers of this community.
- ✱ Finally, it will also be interesting to look at some specific cultural and traditional practices in Ghana (ie. 'trokoshi') to see the link between that and domestic violence.

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Appendix A

School of Social Work
 Carleton University
 1125 Colonel By Drive
 Ottawa, Ont.
 K1S 5B6

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION FOR PERSONS TO BE INTERVIEWED

Dear Participant:

I am currently enrolled in the Master of Social Work (MSW) Program at Carleton University School of Social Work in Ottawa, Ontario. As a partial requirement to obtain this degree, I am required to complete a thesis.

For my thesis, I wish to interview Ghanaian women living in Canada to get their understanding and experience of issues of domestic violence in the Ghanaian community. With my personal and diverse experiences of working with abused women in Canada, together with the difficulties that most Ghanaian women encounter in accessing services for such experience, this study will help to inform service providers, as well as members of the Ghanaian community, about some of the problems women face in the community.

Through this study I hope to identify some barriers and issues affecting members of this community. I also hope that the new knowledge created through this research will raise awareness and lay the foundation for future studies in this area.

Participation in this study involves an interview that will last between one and two hours. I will ask for your permission to tape the interview to facilitate accuracy in my analysis. Participants will have a choice of where the interview will take place. While I will be using your words and ideas, any aspect that will make you identifiable will be eliminated. I will also ensure confidentiality, and you can stop the interview or withdraw from study whenever you want. At the end of the research all tapes will be destroyed in your presence or returned to you.

I will ask that you sign a letter of consent that outlines the process of the interview session. There are no anticipated risks to participants in this study, and support systems are available whenever you need one. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me or my thesis supervisor at your convenience.

I appreciate you taking the time to read this letter and look forward to your participation in the study. I believe the richness of your experience will greatly enhance this study, and the field of Social work, as well as the community.

Yours Faithfully,
(Student)
 Patience Togo
 School of Social Work
 Carleton University
 (613) 731-7483

(Thesis Supervisor)
 Dr. Bernice Moreau
 School of Social Work
 Carleton University
 (613) 520-2600 ext. 4498

Appendix B

School of Social Work
 Carleton University
 1125 Colonel By Drive
 Ottawa, Ont.
 K1S 5B6

LETTER OF CONSENT FOR INTERVIEWEES

I _____, agree to participate in the study being conducted by Patience Togo of Carleton University School of Social Work.

The purpose of this study is to will examine my experiences with respect to Domestic violence. I understand that participation in this study will involve:

- * one interview of approximately one to two hours.
- * Audio-Taping of this interview if permissible, and that these tapes will either be returned to me or destroyed.
- * There are no anticipated risks involved in this study. Participation is voluntary, and I may withdraw at any time.
- * I understand that my name and any identifying detail will be kept confidential.
- * I can have counseling services should I require them.
- * I will have access to a draft of the paper and can ask for removal of any information which I find is inaccurate or harmful to me.

Signed (interviewee) _____

(Interviewer) _____

Dated _____

Dated _____

(Student)
 Patience Togo
 Social of Social Work
 Carleton University
 (613) 731-7483

(Thesis Supervisor)
 Dr. Bernice Moreau
 Social of Social Work
 Carleton University
 (613) 520-2600 ext. 4498

Appendix C

INTERVIEW GUIDE

It is my assumption that although all my participants come from Ghana there are differences of experiences in terms of the different cultural and traditional oppressions. To acknowledge this all questions will be tailored to suit the women's background in a way which is morally, ethically, and culturally sensitive. Possible questions that may be asked (but not limited to) will be in three parts. They will include: A) general information about women's background; B) experiences of domestic violence; C) experiences with Canadian systems such as shelter, police etc.

General information

- i) Mother tongue; Religion; Birth Place; Level of education/training; # of child(ren) ages, and gender; # of years in Canada; Immigration status; Employment status; # of years in relationship; whether or not she is still in the relationship.
- ii) What kind of inheritance does your family have?
- iii) What are some of the expectations of you growing up as a girl?
- iv) Were there similar expectation for your brother/s ?
- v) What were some of your experiences and responsibilities as a girl?

Women's experience of domestic violence

I) What is your definition of domestic violence?

- Would you define similar acts as domestic violence in Ghana? why or why not?
- How did you meet your partners?
- How long they dated before marrying?;
- What type of marriage did you have? (traditional, church etc.)

-Why this particular arrangement?;

-How did you come to Canada?

II) Can you share with me some of your experiences of domestic violence?

-How often this happen/ed?

-Is /was other family members aware of this experience?; if yes specify, if no why not?

-Did the violence occur in Ghana?

-What forms did the violence take?

-Did family members ever intervened in Ghana?

-Did family members intervened in Canada?

-What support systems did you have in Ghana?

- What support systems do you have here in Canada?;

-If not who/where do they turn to for help?; Why this particular source?

-Have they ever taken any action? Specify what kind?

-If yes how many times, if no why not?

- what impact do/did this experience have/had on you and /or your children.

-some suggestions/ recommendations about what can be done to address this issue here in Canada?.

Man charged after his wife found dead

Third slaying
in Peel Region
over past month

BY CAL MILLAR
STAFF REPORTER

A Mississauga man has been charged with second-degree murder after his wife was found dead.

Charles "Stanley" Gray, 45, was arrested by Peel Region homicide detectives after police discovered the lifeless body of a woman Monday in a second-floor Westminster Place apartment in the Cawthra and Rathburn Rds. area.

The victim was identified as Abigail Manu-Acheampong, 31, who came to Canada in 1996 from Ghana.

An autopsy was performed yesterday, but investigators said they are keeping the cause of death secret until it's made public in court proceedings.

Police forensic investigators spent several hours combing through the apartment and then checked a garbage storage area adjacent to the parking lot at the rear of the four-storey building.

They wouldn't indicate whether any evidence had been turned up, but did confirm they were looking for some type of weapon which may have been used in the killing.

Detective Lee Weare said the couple married after meeting at a factory where they both worked and there is no evidence of previous arguments.

The couple lived together in

the apartment and had a 10-year-old son, he said.

Weare said Manu-Acheampong died sometime between 4 p.m. and 5 p.m., when police received the 911 emergency call.

The slaying is still under investigation and Weare said detectives would like to hear from anyone who saw the couple on Monday.

Gray was remanded in custody until May 18 after making a brief appearance at Brampton court yesterday.

Manu-Acheampong's death was the fourth slaying in the Region this year. Three of the killings occurred in the past month.

Halina Deborah Abraham, 30, was shot to death April 23 in an underground garage in Mississauga by her common-law

partner, who was charged with second-degree murder.

Alfred Jachmielewski, 71, a renowned psychic, known professionally as Yogi Alfred Narayana, died after being shot several times April 11 at his Alexandra Ave. home in south Mississauga. The killer is still being sought.

Nancy Edd, 11, an employee of the Toronto Dominion Bank, was killed Jan. 11 during a robbery at the Sandhurst and Hurontario branches in Brampton.

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THE DAILY TELEGRAPH

When John Knapton was made chief of a village in Ghana, he broke tradition by sending his bride to school.

White chief shatters ancient African customs

Public relations move works in women's favour.
Bruce Ward reports.

When a white professor from England who knows everything about cement was made chief of a village in central Ghana, he was given a ceremonial spear — and an 11-year-old bride.

So John Knapton kept the spear and sent the little girl to school, shattering an ancient tribal custom.

Thanks to Mr. Knapton and his former student, Kwesi Andam, life in the village has improved dramatically — especially for girls.

Advised by Mr. Andam, who grew up in the village, Mr. Knapton promptly issued the following decree: "I, Nana Okupagyan Ekumfi the First hereby forbid the marrying of any girl until her education is complete."

Mr. Knapton's pronouncement about child brides caused some unrest among males of the 520-member Ekumfi Atakwa tribe. But in the village, the Nana's word is final.

Since last September, girls have been permitted to continue their schooling past puberty, which — as happened with Mr. Andam — gives them a chance to escape grinding poverty.

The girls have had a terrible time of it. Mr. Knapton is saying in a telephone interview from the University of Newcastle.

As child brides, they're sent to work in the fields from morning 'til night. Their babies often die of malaria because they're malnourished.

Now all that is changing.

"As chief — and I'm a minor chief on the district council — I don't have much power but I do have a lot of influence to bring about change," says Mr. Knapton, a brilliant structural engineer.

When Mr. Andam appealed to his former professor for help about three years ago, Mr. Knapton promptly raised several hundred dollars — enough to pay for the education of all village children. Mr. Andam then set his sights on something even grander — a library/clinic to promote education and improve sanitation.

He figured making Mr. Knapton chief would show the villagers' appreciation — and attract a lot of media attention in England. That's what happened.

In his new role as chief, Mr. Knapton was able to raise about \$50,000 in northeast England, enough for materials to construct an erosion-proof library/clinic in the village from plans devised by his students. (It's made of cement, naturally, given that Mr. Knapton is a world authority on its use.)

And there was money enough left over for a shipment of clockwork radios — a recent invention tailor-made for the village, which has no electricity or running water.

There's a small crank attached to these radios which you simply wind up, Mr. Knapton explains.

A spring inside powers a small generator, and the radio plays as the spring uncoils. After about half an hour, you wind it up again. And they work without batteries, which are very expensive in Africa.

Once the villagers had the radios, Mr. Knapton got the area radio station to

broadcast one simple message over and over, like the latest Spice Girls video plays on the BBC.

The message was "Boil all drinking water" and "it worked a treat," Mr. Knapton says.

"The water supply is a stinking slimy green pool infested with guinea worms, which cause a really horrible disease that culminates with the worms boring out of the victim's legs."

Now that villagers routinely boil drinking water, gastro-intestinal diseases had declined markedly. And thanks to the clinic, deaths among children under five from malaria have been reduced by 25 per cent.

As chief, Mr. Knapton's number one priority is education.

"It's the way Kwesi Andam escaped poverty, and it's the best hope for other villagers."

Does Mr. Knapton's campaign smack of cultural imperialism? Nonsense, he says. "We've brought a lot of attention to one small village, even the BBC is doing a documentary about what we've been able to accomplish there."

Look, he adds, the West only gets interested in Africa when there's a war or famine.

"We've shown that Africa needs help and our concern all the time."

And it's not like Mr. Knapton intends to import any quaint English customs — like thoroughly drying the toast in those little silver racks before eating it. "We just want to give people a better chance at a good life," he says.

There's a tribal custom in Newcastle that's observed whenever Mr. Knapton's good works are mentioned.

"Cheers, mate," the locals say, raising a pint of brown ale.

APPENDIX I

Kotina - Akorli, a Ghanaian priest, says young Abba Kotor must atone for the rape that led to her birth.

APPENDIX G

GHA 15503

(4)

The Constitution

CHAPTER FIVE

FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

SECTION
FUNDAMENTAL
RIGHTS AND
FREEDOMS.

12. (1) The fundamental human rights and freedoms enshrined in this Chapter shall be respected and upheld by the Executive, Legislature and Judiciary and all other organs of government and its agencies and, where applicable to them, by all natural and legal persons in Ghana, and shall be enforceable by the Courts as provided for in this Constitution.

(2) Every person in Ghana, whatever his race, place of origin, political opinion, colour, religion, creed or gender shall be entitled to the fundamental human rights and freedoms of the individual contained in this Chapter but subject to respect for the rights and freedoms of others and for the public interest.

SECTION
RIGHT TO

13. (1) No person shall be deprived of his life intentionally except in the exercise of the execution of a sentence of a court in respect of a criminal offence under the laws of Ghana of which he has been convicted.

(2) A person shall not be held to have deprived another person of his life in contravention of clause (1) of this article if that other person dies as the result of a lawful act of war or if that other person dies as the result of the use of force to such an extent as is reasonably justifiable in the particular circumstances —

- (a) for the defence of any person from violence or for the defence of property; or
- (b) in order to effect a lawful arrest or to prevent the escape of a person lawfully detained; or
- (c) for the purposes of suppressing a riot, insurrection or mutiny; or
- (d) in order to prevent the commission of a crime by that person.

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