



**“I left home for better opportunities elsewhere”: An Autoethnographic Study
of what it means to be an International Student**

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Abstract

Canada is increasingly receiving international students despite the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Informed by the media, friends and family members, many international students are motivated by the prospects of studying in Canadian post-secondary institutions. This is due to factors such as the reputation of education in Canada, scholarship opportunities, and future employment opportunities. Upon arrival, international students become aware of the challenges associated with living in a new country. They become disappointed and stressed, especially during the initial stage of settlement due to various challenges such as financial difficulties, discrimination and racism, environment-related challenges, loneliness and other mental health issues. Their challenging experiences affect their overall satisfaction and success in their studies. Given the cultural, social and economic benefits international students bring to Canada, it is essential to understand their experiences and how to better support them. In this study, I contributed to the existing literature by focusing on my past experiences as an international student from Ghana using evocative ethnography. I shared the challenges, successes and supports that shaped my overall perspective and settlement in Canada. The major challenges were financial problems, environmental and cultural adjustment, discrimination and loneliness, and COVID-19 pandemic-related challenges. Support strategies involved my personal motivation to succeed, institutional supports (i.e., scholarships, food bank, English language centres, international student centre), my peers in Canada, and my family in my home country. I hope that international students who intend to migrate to Canada and those presently in Canada will learn from the experiences that I have had. This is a singular narrative, but has the potential to influence migration decisions and policies to foster quality international students' experiences in Canada.

Keywords: international students, challenges, supports, autoethnography, experiences

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Dedication

I dedicate this paper to my mother (Bertha Asare), grandmother (Agnes Boaduwa) and my brother (Samuel Osei Duah) for their relentless efforts towards my personal growth, vision development and realization. I say thank you for your immense contribution in my life.

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I am deeply indebted to God for His mercies, favour and protection throughout my settlement in Canada. I will forever remain grateful to Him.

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Introduction

Because of the benefits and opportunities offered by studying abroad in a Western country, migration of international students to pursue higher education has tremendously increased over the last few decades (Firang & Mensah, 2022). Migration research has reported that pull factors in the host country and institutions such as academic quality and reputation, safety, employment prospects, immigration policies and scholarship opportunities have contributed enormously to this substantial migration to Western countries for higher education (Kim & Kwak, 2019).

The favourable immigration policies of Canada for post-secondary education international students, the reputation and quality of the education system, and its safe and non-discriminatory approach are noted as strong pull factors influencing international students to move to the country for higher education (Canadian Bureau of International Education [CBIE], 2021). The number of international students in Canada has tripled in the last decade and continues to increase steadily, despite the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education and international migration (Akbar, 2022). As of 2022, Canada welcomed over 551,000 international students, with about 373,599 enrolled in tertiary education (Tustin, 2023).

International students migrating to Canada contribute significantly to the economic development of the country, as they contribute over \$22 billion annually to the Canadian GDP through tuition fees and expenses and by shoring up vacant job positions (Firang & Mensah, 2022). Because of their immense contribution to its economy, Canada has developed policies to first attract and then retain students as permanent residents (PR) and citizens.

Despite the enormous benefits such as quality education, permanent residency and citizenship, and job opportunities that international students obtain through their education and stay in a Western country, international students continue to face challenges integrating into this new environment (Mikkonnen et al., 2016). Expectations and happiness turn into disappointments and stressful situations for students, impacting their total well-being and state of mind. In Canada, international students faced and continue to face challenges related to language and academic difficulties (Martirosyan, 2015; Ozoglu et al., 2015), financial problems (Sullivan & West, 2015), environmental adjustment (Martirosyan, 2015), and discrimination and stereotyping (Erkan & Walker, 2016) among others such as the stresses associated with the COVID-19 pandemic (Firang & Mensah, 2022).

Support and coping mechanisms such as host post-secondary institution services and resources for international students, community groups (e.g., student unions), and friends in the host country and even afar, are key to the successful integration of post-secondary international students in Western countries, but they are not sufficient in Canada. International students do not qualify for full-suite financial support as domestic students do. The international students centre provides limited services, and international students are not eligible for federally funded newcomer-settlement services to ensure the early transition of newcomers into Canada (Akbar, 2022). In light of their positive contribution to the economy of the country, Canada is expected to not only focus on attracting them, but also in promoting the quality of their experiences in the country, many of whom will want to settle permanently in Canada after their studies.

In this study, I embarked on a journey to explore the challenges, support and triumphs I experienced after I migrated from Ghana to Canada as a post-secondary international student, eventually becoming a (PR). My challenges, as well as the support and coping strategies I used as an international student, will serve as lessons and pathways for other international students wanting to move to Canada as well as those presently in the country. I consider these narratives emotional, personal and intellectual. These experiences led me to present two leading research questions:

- What are the challenges an international student can encounter in a Western country such as Canada?
- What coping and support strategies can an international student use to navigate their challenging situations?

The aim is to contribute to the discourse on fostering international students' experiences in Canada by using autoethnography as my method of study. My experiences are presented to provide greater insight to prospective international students in Canada and those who are here in the country, navigating various difficulties to build a new life. Sharing my story is a gift to readers, potentially offering them companionship when they desperately need it (Mairs, 1993).

Method

An autoethnography approach was used in this study to describe my challenging, coping and supporting experiences as an international student. It is an approach to research and writing that aims to describe and systematically analyze personal experiences to better understand cultural experiences (Ellis, 2004). It is a self-focused, qualitative method and usually receives criticism because of its strong focus on the individual. Additionally, researchers using this method are critiqued for presenting a biased overview of their social world (Ellis et al., 2011).

Despite the limitations and criticisms, autoethnography is increasingly employed by researchers to study social phenomena through which they can share their experiences (Wall, 2012). I chose this approach because it provides deeper insights into the author's experiences, which is not possible through other research methodologies. It also combines autobiography as well as evocative, narrative research and ethnography (Ellis et al., 2011; Ngunjiri et al., 2010). Again, through autoethnography research, I can connect my personal experiences with other international students to help them understand my peculiar challenges and supports and the way these experiences can benefit them during their studies in Canada. Through autoethnography, I will be able to show my struggle, passion and attempt to make sense of my challenging situations.

Autoethnography establishes the researcher's experience and connects to a broader socio-cultural identity, socio-economic condition, political meanings and understanding (Manning & Adams, 2015). In autoethnography, the experiences of the researcher cannot be quickly or definitely separated from social and relational contexts, making it possible for the personal experiences to become a valid, permanent and essential form of the data, which can be used to

make meaning and apply in research (Manning & Adams, 2015). Through this approach, I will be able to demonstrate how my experiences are useful, share what lessons I learnt and offer guidance to international students in Canada and those who want to migrate (Manning & Adams, 2015).

Autoethnographers pursue an honest, self-reflective attempt to discuss the socio-cultural factors and practices through their experience and research process (Grant et al., 2013), and this reflexivity enables researchers to identify, inquire and make specific personal interactions between their personal and cultural experiences (Ellis, 2007). Given the use of reflexivity in autoethnography research, autoethnography stands apart in comparison to other traditional research methods in the sense that it does not use terms such as objectivity, research neutrality and firm meaning (Sohrabi, 2023).

According to Ellis (2007), when an author writes about himself, he also writes about others, thus allowing the researcher to discuss the experiences of others from their own standpoint. Using evocative ethnography, I engaged in a narrative presentation and analysis that opened up conversations and emit emotional responses to share more aesthetic and evocative descriptions of personal and interpersonal experiences as an international student in Canada. Through evocative autoethnography, I can evoke the readers' thoughts, emotions and actions to experience the situational experiences of others (Ellis, 2004). Evocative ethnography focuses on researchers who view themselves as the case and write evocative narratives focusing on one aspect of their lives as connected with a cultural context, and it invites readers to view the researcher's world and learn from their experiences to help them cope with their own lives (Ellis et al., 2011).

In this study, the main empirical sources of data were my personal memories and diary entries, as I recorded some experiences to share with my family, friends and other international students who have already migrated or will migrate to Canada. I combined my personal narrative with research, reports and concepts in international students' migration and experiences globally and in Canada. I used the narrative analysis technique to examine my personal experiences, focusing on my own storytelling, and paying attention to both the "told" and the "telling" (content and structure) of my story when I was an international post-graduate student at the University of Manitoba in Canada between 2018 September and 2021 June, eventually becoming a permanent Canadian resident in 2021 December. I opened a Word document and began to type in all my personal challenges and coping strategies from my memory and my journal. I carefully examined what I captured and read it multiple times to make certain I included all of my relevant experiences. After this, I rearranged my personal experiences based on my research questions and developed three main themes: (a) migrating from Ghana to Canada; (b) arriving in Canada and the challenges that followed (including financial, discrimination, loneliness, environmental, cultural and COVID-19-related challenges); and (c) coping strategies and supports.

I also described my journey of becoming a (PR) and shined a light on how unfavourable and stressful the process of becoming a (PR) in Canada can be, but managed to achieve a (PR) status in a few months due to a favourable temporary immigration policy. This study stated that since international students in Canada largely aspire to become (PRs) after completing their studies, it will be very helpful if the Canadian government makes the process of (PR) status achievement easier for them.

Migrating from Ghana to Canada

I will begin with my country of birth and citizenship. I was born in Ghana, a West African country, the last born of three and brought up by my maternal family. My single mother, grandmother and elder brother were primarily responsible for my upbringing and providers of my basic needs. I come from a very low-income family, and the community we live in has limited resources for social and economic mobility. My mother worked as a secretary for the Ministry of Food and Agricultural Department in my community, but has since retired. My grandmother was into trading, but she is very old now and is always at home. My elder brother is currently involved in trading.

My mother and grandmother encouraged me to study hard, become responsible and support the family. They did their best to invest in my education and, despite the financial challenges, I was able to complete high school. Furthering my education after high school proved very difficult due to the costs of academics and the financial status of my family. My mother, grandmother and elder brother thought it wise that I join my elder brother in trading, saving money and using it for higher education after a couple of years—higher education in Ghana is expensive.

Fortunately for me, immediately after high school completion, I obtained free admission into one of the most well-respected and prestigious universities in my country, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology. This happened as a result of a policy of the university to select a very few needy but brilliant students every academic year from high schools that have limited infrastructural and student support services, such as the one I attended. I performed very well in my final exams, which propelled me into benefiting from this policy.

Even though it was a free admission—meaning I did not have to go through the hassle of preparing application documents and paying for application fees—I had to pay for tuition fees for my entire studies or else I would forfeit the admission. I was admitted into the Bachelor of Sociology program with political studies as my minor. At this time of uncertainty, a philanthropist in my community was approached for support, and he willingly decided to pay for my tuition fees and care for all my basic needs until I completed my studies. This came as a great relief for my family because they would not be able to fund my university studies. I benefitted from some internal funding programs and awards during my four-year bachelor's studies.

I always had a passion for education. After university completion, I applied to several graduate programs outside the country, including Canada and UK Commonwealth-shared scholarships. The limited employment and funding opportunities in Ghana, availability of funding programs in Western countries, good immigration policies in Canada and employment opportunities motivated me to apply for further education outside my home country. I had no suitable offer from the UK, and I received only one offer from Canada, which is the University of Manitoba to study for a Master's in Sociology for two years.

I and my family were rather happy for my obtaining admission into a Western country such as Canada. My admission came with partial tuition funding for the first year only. After reading this in the admission letter and knowing that I was paying about \$12,000 and would have no support from my family while I was in Canada, I decided to forgo the admission. After further conversations with my mother, grandmother and elder brother, I decided to seek additional funding from the university to enable me to pursue my studies. I learned from my department that I was

recommended for one of the university funds for graduate students known as the University of Manitoba Graduate Fellowship (UMGF), worth \$14,000 per year for master's students. However, receiving the funding was not automatic, as it had to be reviewed by the graduate studies office. I thought to myself, "I am certain I will secure this funding," and so I prepared, said my last goodbyes to my mother, grandmother, elder brother and friends and travelled to Manitoba, Canada. Before I arrived in Canada, another philanthropist met my grandmother and offered money to pay for my rent for two months while I settled in Canada, and also for food and clothing. My mother also withdrew all her final pension funds and supported me by paying for my first-year tuition fees. I was then on my own with no family in Canada.

Arriving in Canada and the Challenges

Travelling to Canada on September 7, 2018, meant leaving not only my home country physically but also the cherished experiences and realities, family members and friends. Words cannot describe the emotional feeling at that time when my elder brother escorted me to the airport and said a few last words to me. I wished that my country was similar or better in terms of developmental opportunities for students and youth such as myself, and that I was not compelled to leave, but I had to for a better life for myself and my family.

When I first moved to Canada, I lived close to the University of Manitoba and completed all school registration services such as getting a social insurance number, bank account and other preliminary preparations, so that I was ready to participate in this new environment. Most of these services were new to me and so was meeting new people; specifically, the Ghanaian community helped me navigate them efficiently.

Financial Challenge

One of the major initial challenges I faced in Canada was finance. Financial challenge is reported to be one of the greatest difficulties many international students encounter during their early years of study (Ozoglu et al., 2015). Higher tuition fees, limited or no student funding opportunities, employment acquisition challenges and the like substantially burden international students (Sullivan, 2015).

I paid the rent for my first two months with the initial money from Ghana and started classes immediately without needing to complete fee payments as soon as possible because the partial funding already covered about a quarter of it, and the remainder had to be paid by October 2018. I needed to save money because my settlement funds were not sufficient. I got employed with my department, Sociology and Criminology, as a teaching assistant. I did not have enough hours to earn more income, so I searched for jobs online and submitted application documents in person but received no positive feedback between September and October 2018. While I expected to receive the UMGF, I received news from my department that, unfortunately, I was not selected.

This was very sad news to me, and I wanted to return to Ghana because it would be difficult

to complete the payment of my tuition fees, rental bill (which I paid for only two months), food, and phone bill among others. Around the October deadline to finish paying tuition fees, I had to borrow money from friends, and I reached out to the financial office of the university to extend my deadline. Due to financial distress, they did extend it, which was a great relief. I struggled and finally paid the fees for the first semester, but the second semester of 2019 remained.

I found a job in February 2019 as a healthcare support worker and, while it helped, it was not enough due to the 20 hours off-campus immigration work policy for international students in Canada while class is in session (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada [IRCC], 2023a). It was difficult for me to accept the condition that I could not work more than 20 hours even if I could still manage work and classes. I had to abide by this policy to avoid future immigration complications. It was not easy for me with a single off-campus job with a 20-hour work limit and very low pay at \$13 an hour and fewer available hours with the University of Manitoba. I continued to seek financial help from friends in Canada, and my family could not help me due to their low income. I did not qualify for most university, federal and provincial funding because I was an international student, and I was really stressed. My mental health was impacted, and I almost gave up.

I became very sick in October, 2020 and had to stay home for a month before resuming work and full schooling activities. Because I did not have enough funds in my bank account, I reached out to Service Canada for employment insurance support. I was told I was not eligible because of my status as an international student, and whichever way I could survive during that time, I was on my own. I was very shocked to hear this from another human being. I felt that despite the great economic contribution immigrants offer to the country, we are treated heartlessly. I did not appeal the decision, instead reaching out to friends who generously provided me with food while I was at home.

Environmental and Cultural Challenges

Higher education in a country with climatic, cultural and living conditions different from the home country of the international student can be very challenging. Some international students may even experience feelings of disorientation and spiritual displacement (Martirosyan et al., 2015). The struggle with the cold Canada weather was by itself an almost sufficient factor to send me back home. Financial distress in addition to extreme cold weather conditions felt like punishment for leaving my home country.

My first winter in Winnipeg, Manitoba was really terrible. I used public transport to move around in the community and travel to school, and standing in this cold weather for hours and sometimes missing the bus can be overwhelming. While I thought I could adjust to the weather as the months elapsed, in the summer it got worse with temperatures over 40 degrees Celsius. I wished I had a car, but securing a car was at the very bottom of my needs list. Summer in 2019 felt like a furnace. Even though I come from the tropics, summer in Winnipeg seemed as though I was closer

to the sun. Adjusting to these changing weather conditions was very difficult for me. I did not bring a lot of winter clothing as I did not inquire more about the climate in Canada and my province. I assumed it was always nice there. Little did I know how unfriendly the weather could be. Friends generously bought clothing to prevent me from freezing outside.

Academic and Language Difficulties

Most international students encounter various academic and language challenges, and these two are closely related (Martirosyan et al., 2015). Lack of familiarity with the host institution or the educational system of the country and of interaction with faculty members, inability to meet lecturers' expectations, and difficulty in articulating ideas for written and oral presentations, among others, are highlighted in research (Gartman, 2016; Martirosyan et al., 2015).

When I moved to Canada, I realized how language, accents and academics intersect in ways I never understood before. The official language spoken in Ghana is English, but I still have difficulty effectively articulating sentences and arguments in English. Obviously, all courses and activities in my program were taught and completed in English, unlike lecturers and teachers who use local dialects to help students understand concepts and topics back home. In Ghana, students are evaluated using written exams, assignments and presentations. In the Canadian program, evaluation was based on presentations, research papers and assignments. I could answer exam questions by preparing from what the lecturer taught me in class, but developing my own research topic, writing about it and presenting it proved extremely difficult.

I was supposed to take one year to complete my coursework and another year to complete my research thesis. Instead, I needed one-and-a-half years to complete my coursework because I had to separate the courses (six courses for the year) and pursue them across four semesters in order to succeed in my program. The majority of my lecturers' comments on my papers were related to English articulation, hence affecting my general arguments and final grades. One of my lecturers even suggested I attend English classes with the academic tutor program at the University of Manitoba. I did well in some papers, but not in others, due to the English-language barrier.

In class seminars, I sometimes found it hard to grasp full words and understand what my lecturers were communicating. So, I often had to go back to my African colleagues, including Ghanaians, for clarification and further explanation.

Discrimination and Loneliness

Moving to a new country with no prior family and friends made me feel lonely even after I befriended some individuals in Winnipeg. During the day, everyone leaves for school or work, and you cannot casually visit people's homes as in Ghana, where you can visit unannounced. I felt lonely. The Ghanaian community organized some events to bring students and other community members together, but I never attended such events due to heavy work pressure and social anxiety.

Non-Western international students are more susceptible to experiencing discrimination and racism in a Western country compared to Western foreigners (Erkan & Walker, 2016; Sato &

Hodge, 2015). While I perceived Canada to be filled with kind and lovely people, I was very surprised when I experienced some instances of discrimination and racism from course mates and community members. The demeanour of some Western course mates while I spoke in class made me feel marginalized and ashamed of my accent and my roots; I felt “othered.” In the community, when I tried to ask some Canadians a question about the location of a place while outside, they would walk away from me while responding, and some did not even respond. They looked at me and increased their walking pace as if I would harm them. During a phone interview screening, the HR person asked me whether I had Canadian work experience and, because I had not yet begun my teaching assistant job, I said no. The interviewer responded that I could not work with them because they only needed applicants with Canadian work experience.

COVID-19 Pandemic Challenge

The pandemic impacted not only the economies of countries but also the mental and physical health of migrants, especially international students who were already experiencing difficulties and also working in essential services. Issues such as anxiety, depression and other mental health problems were on the rise among international students (Firang & Mensah, 2022).

I was just beginning my research thesis when the pandemic started. It did not really impact my education because I had to meet my supervisory team online and submit documents electronically, but it impacted my health as a frontline healthcare worker, as well as having to worry about the safety of my family back home in Ghana. As a healthcare worker, I supported a vulnerable population of elders and youngsters in group homes, and providing household support and peri-care was difficult for me mentally. I was scared and anxious that I might contract the virus, which would negatively affect my education and total well-being. However, I did not stop attending my shifts, because that was my sole funding source for my schooling and bill payment.

At the thought of the healthcare services deficiency in the Global South and the poor ability of my home country’s government to develop measures to curb the social and economic impacts of the virus, I was really worried for the survival of my family. The business of my elder brother, who continuously cared for my mother and grandmother, was affected. He was working shorter hours and earning a lesser income; but with regular check-ins and encouraging words, we were able to make it through.

Coping Strategies and Supports

Supporting and coping strategies are necessary for thriving in a new environment. Partial funding on entrance, non-receipt of the UMGF and inability to apply for student loans made me search for other alternatives to pay my fees and bills. Applying for jobs on and off campus became my regular task besides studying. Working as a support worker in the group home beginning February 2019 helped massively. Even though I was not earning much, I was able to pay off most bills. I was personally motivated to succeed at all costs in my program and hence was very hardworking and diligent with my work. I worked part-time due to the 20-hour work limit policy

when school is in session, which as a graduate student means throughout the whole academic year. I did not engage in extracurricular activities, visits to tourist places and the like, because I did not want to waste money.

Among the support mechanisms used by international students to circumvent their challenging situations, social support is an essential contributor (Martirosyan et al., 2019). Scholars report that successful adjustment to a new environment is contingent on how well international students can create and/or join social networks in the form of peer groups and community organizations (Martirosyan et al., 2019). I used the support of my friends in Winnipeg many times. I borrowed and accepted offers of money, clothing and food. I used English a lot in most of my conversations with Ghanaian friends to help improve and address my English language errors.

In addition to social support, universities in Canada support international students through scholarships, relief funds and academic learning centres (Wu et al., 2015), which help improve the life satisfaction of international students and reduce their psychological stress (Cho & Yu, 2015). In addition to working as a teaching assistant with my department and earning some income, I reached out to my department for any financial support available, because I was really stressed due to the prospect that I might not be able to complete my studies. The department offered me \$5,000 to cover the tuition and basic needs for the first year, based on my academic average. I also visited the university website to search for more funding opportunities, and I realized that I qualified for limited internal funding. I applied and got approved for some of them. These include the St. John's award and the Graduate student bursary offered to continuing graduate students, based on need at the time of application. My thesis advisor offered me approximately \$1,000 as a one-time research funding to complete my MA thesis. This was also a great help to me.

COVID-19 pandemic funding was offered to all students at the University of Manitoba during the initial stage, and I used this support to defray the tuition fee, rent, food and credit card bills.

I saved money on food by visiting the food bank centre at the University of Manitoba every two weeks. I used the academic learning centre on several occasions. I would meet with a tutor to review my research papers and assignments. They were really useful in helping me write quality English language papers and improve my English language skills. The University of Manitoba has an international student centre to support international students. I had the opportunity to participate in their career counselling sessions to improve my knowledge of the job market and learn how to become successful in my future career.

Moreover, the Manitoba government offered front-line healthcare workers additional money to compensate for our commitment towards working with the vulnerable population in group homes and at the healthcare centres. In April 2020, the government of Canada allowed international students to work unlimited hours (from April to August 2020), provided they were working in essential services or functions such as healthcare (IRCC, 2020). I grabbed this opportunity and worked around the clock to save money for tuition and non-academic bills. This policy helped me to raise money for a few months.

Becoming a Permanent Resident

The majority of international students in Canada desire to stay on permanently after school, establish themselves and even start a family. I completed my entire studies and finalized my thesis in June 2021. I wanted to live in Canada and, in the near future, have my family back home here with me as well. I was still working as a healthcare support worker after my master's degree, and I desired to begin my career by working with the government or in the not-for-profit sector.

To work in Canada after studies as an international student, you have to apply for a work permit (IRCC, 2023b). I applied, got approved and searched for better-paying jobs. As a work permit holder, I could work unlimited hours (IRCC, 2023b). This was a great relief to me. I envisaged transitioning to (PR) and then becoming a Canadian citizen. The process involved in becoming a (PR) is longer and has a financial portion that most applicants may not meet—the amount of funds to submit as a bank statement during (PR) application as of now is about \$13,757 (IRCC, 2023c) for a single person, and I did not have that amount in my account. This meant I had to work more hours to get this amount, which was another hurdle to overcome.

In April 2021, the government of Canada announced a temporary policy allowing international students and essential workers to apply for permanent residence without submitting any financial statement (IRCC, 2021). This policy was effective from April to November 2021. Through this pathway, I was able to obtain my permanent residence status within 5 months after I submitted my permanent residence application in June, 2021. Regular permanent residence processing times can take about one to two years.

Canadian immigration policies serve as one of the major pull factors attracting most international students for studies over the years. The fact that international students can stay and work permanently in Canada makes our lives easier, especially coming from poverty-stricken families and backgrounds with limited opportunities.

Conclusion and Limitations

The initial and ongoing challenges and barriers I encountered as an international student in Canada not only caused me disappointment, stress and confusion, but also strengthened my resolve to succeed even without my family here in Canada. I have always had the plan and urge to succeed in my studies, stay in Canada, work and even further my education as a Ph.D. student, which I will pursue in a few years. Sometimes, it seemed as if these desires would remain a dream. I feared returning home and being disgraced in my community, but I set targets and always encouraged myself to succeed no matter what happened, and indeed I made progress. I will forever remain grateful to my mother, grandmother and elder brother for their encouragement. They were not in a capacity to assist me financially when I was in Canada, but their attention and words pushed me towards making my dream a reality. My friends and the Ghanaian community here in Winnipeg were of great support to me as well.

In this study, I engaged in an intellectual and emotional exercise to explore my past experiences and feelings about being an international student in Canada by focusing on the chal-

lenges I faced, as well as the coping and support strategies I used while studying at the University of Manitoba. My story depicts a deep self-reflective process, which helps me to understand my challenges, coping strategies and sharing experiences, and allowing space to voice concerns helps in the healing of wounded selves (Hooks, 2003). I am closely connected to our traditions and customs as a Ghanaian, which is evident in my food choices, clothing and continued communication in the Ghanaian dialect. Immigration to Canada exposed me to more knowledge and different cultures and helped me develop my personality, abilities and ideas. Therefore, I urge international students and immigrant readers to not limit their identities to the stereotypical perspective of a foreigner with an accent or other constraining categories.

I understand that while this narrative cannot be used to generalize the experiences of international students in Canada, it stands a chance of contributing to the discourse on international students' migration and experiences. It will enlighten and offer hope to international students and potentially inform policies in Canada and globally on improving the settlement experiences of international students. Reflections from this autoethnography show the need for revising the financial support norms in Canada. The inability of international students to apply for loans from post-secondary institutions and even from the government, and the ineligibility for full-suite funding, unlike domestic students, is a great impediment to many. Additionally, Canada is regarded as a friendly multicultural country, yet discrimination pervades services and relationships. Hopefully, this study has added to educational research that addresses discrimination and racism in the country against migrants and international students. This will in turn help create a diverse, inclusive and welcoming space and continue to make Canada a great place to live.

Despite the usefulness of this study to migration research on international students, it has some limitations, mainly with the use of autoethnography as my research method. The readers of this paper may not be international students or migrants, and even if they were, the feelings evoked in them might not be pleasant as their connections to my narrative cannot be predicted (Ellis & Bochner, 1996). Readers may experience feelings different from how I felt while developing this paper and describing my experiences. I also want to acknowledge my subjective biases, due to which some portion of my experiences as an international student in Canada were not disclosed. This was because these experiences are personal and I do not want to disclose them. These experiences can be relevant for further research, but I have not shared them based on my personal perspectives and privacy needs. My social position as an African student and my experiences may differ from those of international students from other continents, and hence they may not relate well to my challenges and the support systems I used to manage those challenging situations.

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