

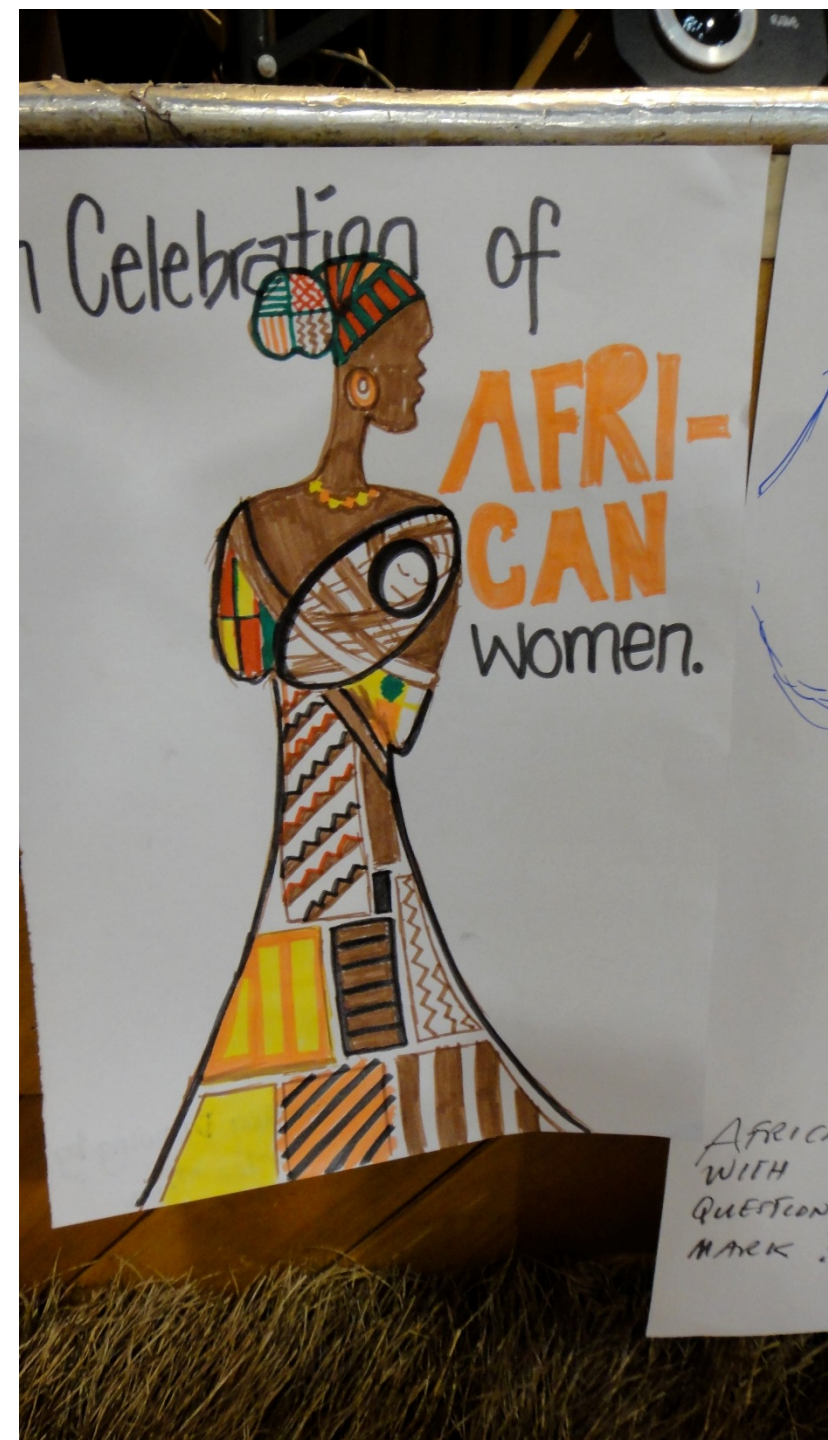


FROM MAMA AFRICA TO
PAPATŪĀNUKU:
African mothers living in Auckland

Helene Connor, Sue Elliott and Irene Ayallo

The women

- research with a group of ten African mothers living in Auckland,
- Arrived in NZ as asylum seekers, Quota refugees, skilled migrants or partners of skilled migrants
- From Eritrea; Ethiopia; Burundi; the Democratic Republic of the Congo; Rwanda; Uganda; and Zimbabwe
- aged between 20 and 45 years.



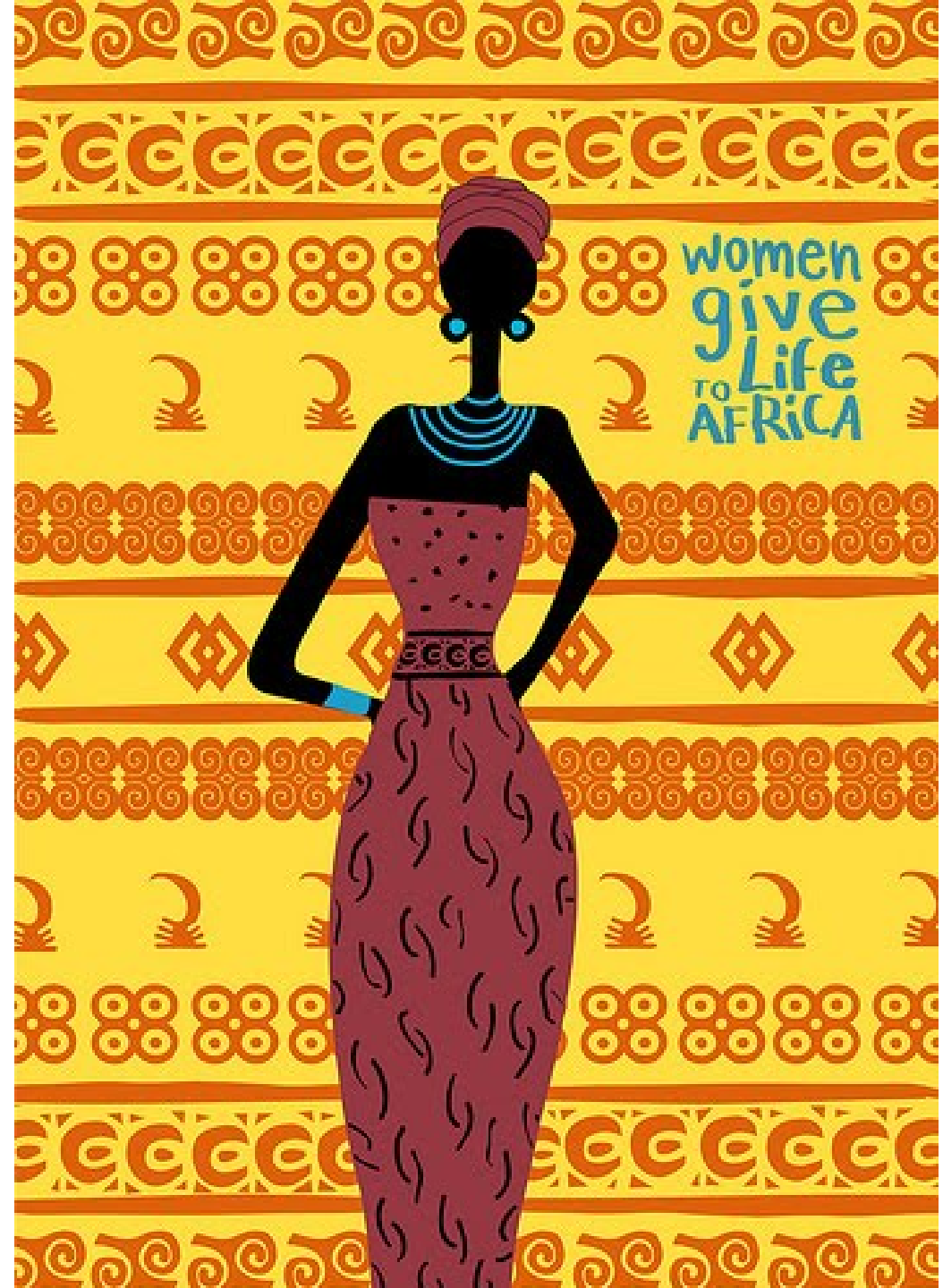
The women

- biological children, adopted or fostered children or step-children and carers for their nieces or nephews
- Children aged between
- social workers, community development workers, nursing, care-givers and early childhood workers.
- Several studying at tertiary level, others were graduates.
- married women, women living with partners, separated, divorced or widowed women raising children on their own



Birthing new lives

- birthing new lives both metaphorical and literally.
- Leaving Mama Africa for the unknown of Papatuanuku not only involved crossing international borders but also crossing emotional and cultural boundaries
- new identities had to be forged within an unfamiliar society and communities



The value of motherhood

- “Being a mother is a blessing from God”
- “I don’t even have a word that describes how much I love them and again”
- “Knowing that you are responsible for a person - a part of you is outside of you”
- “they give me sense of life”



“but being an African mother is challenging...”

- “You have to prove yourself. My kids also feel it...”
- “A lot of people think we’re vulnerable, we’re living under the bush. Yeah, they think we don’t know nothing, we lived in a tree and have little of understanding, generally, but an African mother comes with a lot of knowledge; and they're good parents”
- “It is hard being a mother and working at the same time and because it is my choice, I have to harden up and do it”
- “I’m failing my children a bit because I’m not talking to them in my mother tongue or making an effort for them to learn”



Dealing with racism

- “being a mother is emotionally stressful. There are times people make negative comments (being racist) to the kids – and this is really hurts me as mother.”
- “...just being told that you’re not good enough go back home. It’s just like all those little things that now we call them little because we learn how to brush it off; when somebody calls you a name or anything”.
- “me and my son have experienced racism. Some parents at play group don’t want my son to play with their children. I told them off.”



Supporting children to deal with racism

- “It’s sad that I ended up saying, “Just let it go,” because then it’s like brushing it off. Just let it go if they say that. I guess we realise sometimes we need to educate people to be able to learn how to face those challenges.”
- “being a mother is emotionally stressful. There are times people make racist comments to the kids – and this is really hurts me as mother. You are always on a rollercoaster assuring my children that they are okay as they are.”



Schools perpetuating stereotypes.

My 13 year old son at school they are learning about the whole of refugee thing and he came home and he was like, "Mum guess what?" and I was like, "What?"

He was like, "Guess what my teacher said that since I am a refugee I should know more about this and that."

And then I'm like, "You're not a refugee, your mum was refugee because she came here as a refugee but you are not, you were born here."

And he was like, "So I'm not a refugee?" and I was like, "Do you even know what a refugee is?"

So I had to explain that and **then I did call the school and asked them why, was it because of his skin colour?**

Schools attitudes to African children

the first time when he went to Intermediate they put him into a ESOL class and I was like, “Okay why do you need to be in ESOL if actually English is your first language, because we mostly speak English at home and they don’t speak any other language. When I went to ask them it was like, “**Because he’s African and straight up we assumed that he needed that.**”



Differences in the education system

- “it’s like your parents sign off their rights to the principal teacher”
- “parents give the whole responsibility to the school it’s like the teachers have to look after you and make sure that you’re doing well at school and that this is being done”



Schools' relationships with parents in New Zealand

- “children are taught to think for themselves, critical thinking happened right at the beginning and parents have a greater relationship with school, so you feel like you are part of that community, you can go and talk to teacher”.
- “I think here is better because it’s a two way communication; you go to school and find out what’s happening with your child and if something is happening that is good or bad actually they let you know.”
- “I find it very good because they value parents”

Different approaches to discipline

- “in NZ I have to worry about the law...but in Africa we discipline our children. We understand that if you discipline your child, then the message will sink in...and I don't have to repeat this.”
- “For us when we grow up, everyone is a parent, you know your neighbour is a parent, your aunt and your uncles is a parent; you're not the only one who's responsible, the whole community's environment support there existed”.
- “...disciplining is also hard here because there are rules. Not back home where emphasis is more on respect for elders.”



Isolation when children go through difficult times

- “I think it’s different because I will be supported more back home. I will have people supporting me so then I can support my child as well. When they say it takes a village to raise a child, it’s really true back home because you have input from different people. But here, it’s your sole responsibility and sometime you don’t have that support.”

