

The Ghanaian diaspora and return visits to their homeland: Ghanaian Canadians' articulations of home, place attachment and sense of belonging

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Abstract

Asking the questions “Where is home?” and “What does home mean to you?” to research participants produced various answers, including: Home is where I was born; Home is where I currently live; Home is where my family is; Home is where I feel comfortable; Home is where I feel safe and have peace of mind; Home is where one’s heart is; Home is where I grew up with family and friends; Home is where I have a great social network. Fond memories, recollections and nostalgia have been part of Ghanaian immigrants in their host society and their ultimate longing for undertaking return visits to their homeland for holidays, visiting friends and relatives, reconnecting and participating in other activities including tourism. Adopting a cultural-geographical perspective, this study draws on theories from the geographies of home, the geographies of identity and sense of belonging, and place attachment theory. Drawing on ongoing research based on qualitative semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with first-generation Ghanaian immigrants living in Canada and their second-generation adult children, this paper discusses the meanings these Ghanaian-Canadians attach to home, how they construct and negotiate home, sense of belonging and place attachment on their return visits to the homeland. It also examines some differences and similarities in perspectives according to different generational cohorts and gender identities. The research aims to address these questions: 1. How do immigrants’ construction and meaning of home influence their motives, behaviors and travel experiences towards their homeland return visits? 2. To what extent do immigrants’ sense of belonging and place attachment to their homeland influence their return visits? 3. What are the interrelations between the first-generation and second-generation immigrants’ sense of belonging and place attachment, and their socioeconomic and demographic characteristics? This study will contribute to the understanding of the Visiting Friends and Relatives phenomenon in tourism discussions and contribute to the literature on homeland visits, place attachment and ethnocultural identity in the tourism-migration nexus.

Biography

Vivien Bediako is a PhD candidate in the Graduate program in Geography, Faculty of Environmental and Urban Change, at York University in Toronto, Canada. Her research interests span across migration and transnationalism, and extend to Black diaspora issues and African development studies. Her current research borders on the intersections between tourism and migration.