

Forced Migrant Women Confront Institutional Constraints in a Community College

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
under the Executive Committee
of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

Columbia University

2019

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation examines how the formal schooling trajectories of forced migrant women from Africa and the Middle East are shaped by the ongoing confrontation of the women with the policies and practices of the community college they attend. It is based on ethnographic fieldwork done at a community college in the largest metropolitan area in the otherwise predominantly rural state of Maine. This work is motivated by an interest in the validity of the rhetoric of community college as the vehicle for upward social mobility for marginalized populations. The students in the study are constructed as various types of minorities: linguistic, racial, religious, national, depending on the bureaucratic, social or schooling context. Because of the ideology of equal opportunity, often the only documentation by the community college of minority status is their language status that is recognized in the standardized entrance exam. Racial and national origin information is voluntary and commonly left blank on official forms, but, along with religion, are made meaningful both in and outside of the classroom through interactions with white peers and teachers. Forced migrant students experience this construction of otherness, and react through the formation of social support networks made up exclusively of forced migrants where they teach each other ways of adaption and resistance. Because of the conditions that led to their flight, forced migrants have survived traumatic situations, face language barriers and may have interrupted formal schooling, as well as retain familial obligations around the globe that present unique challenges. The community college does not fully recognize these challenges, and maintains a narrow standard that is upheld through teaching practices and the use of standardized exams, which serve to marginalize forced migrant

students. This marginalization translates into low graduation rates for forced migrants, effectively blocking any upward social mobility to be gained from the community college.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I have to thank all the participants. Without the staff at SMCC who welcomed me into their space to do research this dissertation would never have happened. As vital was the generosity of the many forced migrants who let me into their lives, and taught me so much about the incredible tenacity of the human spirit. I am so grateful to all of them.

Secondly, this would not have been possible without the guidance and support from a number of mentors, colleagues and family members. Dr. Hervé Varenne, whose work inspired me to come to Teachers College, has been instrumental since before I was even a student of his. This long process would not have been a success without him. He demonstrated so much patience through it all, and always asked the right questions to guide me in a good direction.

I was also so fortunate to have Dr. Lila Abu-Lughod's feedback and advice along the way. She managed to have just the right book for me to read to get me inspired and focused.

My colleagues in the Anthropology Program at Teachers College were a constant source of inspiration and support. I've been so lucky to had the individuals in my cohort, as well as the years before and behind me.

Lastly, my family, who have been with me since I first hatched this plan of getting a Ph.D. in anthropology. My father is the one who pointed me in this direction, allowing me to find my meaningful work. My sister not only read my draft but also always had the right thing to say. For my mother (and editor), I lack the words to even begin to describe the support I have always received. My husband who picked up all the pieces when I dropped them to go on writing benders, and gave me the space and strength to pursue my dreams. And my Miko, you are my greatest joy.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the people who made it possible, the staff and the forced migrant students who welcomed me and shared their stories with me.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

I don't know where to stand right now, so that's why I'm focusing on my school stuff. To get it done right now, and then ways to bring them [her children] here. Whatever, we'll see. And then if they like it they can stay, and if they don't like it, we can go back. (Angelina, from Eritrea)

Angelina has already lived in Maine for five years. She is trying to get her nursing credentials so that she can practice the occupation she loves, taking care of mothers and babies. She had been forced to flee her native Eritrea for her own safety due to her paternal connections to the political regime that had fallen from power. This flight has already taken her to Ethiopia and Sudan, and now she is trying to get established in Portland, Maine. As demonstrated in her quote above, she has clear goals: getting her degree so she can get back to the work she is passionate about and which would allow more financial stability for herself, and the potential to bring her adult children to join her. However, she simultaneously has some misgivings about staying in Portland in the long term. She has faced many frustrations due to the hurdles in getting her nursing degree, as well as hostilities she perceives from being classified as both an immigrant and a black person.

This study concerns itself with the experiences and stories of women who, like Angelina, come from Africa and the Middle East to the Portland area fleeing violence in their home countries. I have done previous work with Somali refugees looking at how they confront the initial challenges of day-to-day life in Maine: how they navigate bureaucracies and find their first (overwhelmingly) entry level jobs. This made me interested in what would happen if they started to pursue higher education, the supposed route to social mobility. The women I had met were surviving, and had found more safety and stability than had been available where they

came from, but what would happen when they reached for more; when they started pursuing the “American Dream”? This question led me to the community college in the Portland area. The migrants in the study believe in the possibility of “education as the key to a better future” and are looking to find it at Southern Maine Community College (SMCC)¹. This study focuses on migrants who are engaged in this educational process and the potential tensions and outcomes. As the migrants seek to become “success stories” and move up the socio-economic ladder, they must confront the local population and existing social structures.

Educational institutions are a product of their surrounding environment and reflect and participate in the structuring of people along categories of race, religion, gender, migration, culture etc. They are also spheres of social engagement, and the networks built within them shape the experience of the participants. In addition, as public institutions, community colleges are a space where governmental and educational forces come together to shape people into the types of citizens desired. As such, they must confront the “otherness” of the participants of this study as people from outside the US. These institutions work in many ways to assimilate their students, through curriculum both hidden and overt, as well as structuring the use of time and management of bodies, which can result in confusion and resistance at times. Students are deemed successes or failures, depending on a combination of the dictates of the American school system and their own agency, and such designations are important factors in moving forward and leading to upward social mobility.

Questions:

For the purposes of this study, the experience of central interest for the participants is in

1 This type of rhetoric is common around the globe, both locally in the US by politicians, policy makers and education researchers and advocates, and in all countries where the UN is active. According to its website “UNESCO is the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. It seeks to build peace through international cooperation in Education, the Sciences and Culture” (UNESCO 2019).

the community college. The three main questions are:

-As the students attempt to pursue a post-secondary education, how is the community college dealing with and constructing their “otherness”?

-What are the ramifications of this for the way the women build lives and pursue social mobility through their current schooling?

-How do the women resist, accept or adapt to the conditions in place at the community college?

Since I want to know about the actualization of social mobility through schooling, outcomes are key. The outcomes presented here are limited to my time in the field, and are not definitive of the overall educational obtainment of the women and the corresponding total future social mobility they may achieve through it. However, the successes and failures experienced by the women at the step they are at when I meet them are a part of the process of formal education. In thinking about outcomes and the factors that shape them, I developed two subquestions:

-What is the role of past schooling and current employment?

-How do these immigrant women build social support networks within the community college?

-How are these influenced by transnationalism and feelings of belonging?

The staff at the community college attempts to place the immigrant students into American minority categories. These placements of migrant students by the bureaucracy of SMCC are seen by teachers and staff as resulting from their difference and trigger beliefs about the students' need for change in order to be successful in the US education system. At various junctures in their post-secondary schooling many are labeled failures, often through use of

standardized tests. The college uses the standardized tests as supposedly impersonal tests to fit their bureaucratic function. However, the tests and other evaluations place the immigrant students at a disadvantage because of their foreign background, resulting in the students being documented as failing. With the seemingly rational tests doing the work of sorting the others from the white American population, it reinforces the status quo through the reproduction of social benefits through education credentials. The gate-keeping to higher levels of credentials (from post-secondary versus certificate) blocks social mobility for immigrant women beyond the low-skilled employment level. The community college, in keeping with the ideology that any different/minority individuals must be taught the dominant behaviors in order to be successful, also overtly and covertly teach immigrant students “the right way to be” through time management workshops, classroom assignments, group integration, etc. This study documents ways that the participants already have these skills and are successfully using them to hold jobs (many already having gained some social mobility since their arrival in the US) and create support networks, demonstrating how well they already function in an English-speaking world. However, in the community college progress is slow for most of the women; they are burdened with remedial classes, inabilities to take full class loads, examination barriers, and class failures. Teachers are often a source of frustration. Students feel they are not being supported or understood due to their forced migrant status. Cooling out is a major factor for those wanting to pursue nursing, the most prestigious track available. Despite the structures in place at the community college that create barriers for immigrant women, it does not completely circumscribe the trajectories of the women as they persist in making choices to resist, as well as accept, the structures in various ways and areas. Particularly there is resistance to being folded in

the position of marginalized people of color. They react to the othering pressures by predominantly only integrating with other immigrants. It is with other immigrant students that they build support networks, and within the networks that they preserve boundaries and informally educate each other about how to manage their otherness in ways specific to that group.

Forced Migration

This work looks at women from Africa and the Middle East as they move through a year of their life as students at SMCC in the greater Portland, Maine metropolitan area. All of them fled violence within their countries of origin, and as such can be classified as forced migrants (Colson 2003, Shami 1996). I used this term to highlight the extreme violence and instability of the political, education, social and economic institutions that motivated the women to leave their countries of origin, and the continued role the resulting trauma and other consequences can play in their lives. Some of the participants have official refugee status, others are asylum seekers, while others arrived as immigrants. While they are all seeking refuge, the term refugee will not be used unless the political designation of refugee status is relevant, because it has the connotation of a political, bureaucratic and humanitarian category (Malkki 1995). The term refugee has become a politicized one², and in the US is used to denote people who have been through an intense screening process outside of the US (largely under the auspices of the humanitarian organization of the UNHCR), which lasts 18 months to 2 years, and demonstrated the criteria necessary to grant them this status. The refugee label has increasingly been used by

2 This work is based on fieldwork conducted primarily during 2015-2016. As such, it captures a moment, or year, and the events that occurred are the product of the particular circumstances present. The write-up happened in 2016-2018, when, with the election of Donald Trump as President of the USA, many things changed for people seeking refuge in the US, and there was also a general shift in the attitudes and atmosphere vis-a-vis immigrants. However, the manuscript attempts to stay in the ethnographic moment during which the data was collected.

governments, in this case the US, to create certain types of migrants, and manage this population in the current (geo)political context (Zetter 2007). This designation allows them access to certain relocation services, including financial support and orientation upon arrival through the federal government. In addition, they are able to apply for permanent residency after the first year, and citizenship after five years. This study also includes asylum seekers, who undergo a different, though no less arduous application process once in the US, and who have very different (and much more limited) access to local resources, as well as individuals who have come as official immigrants, sponsored by relatives already living in the US. Borrowing the term from Colson (2003), I call my research subjects forced migrants in order to avoid the baggage of the term refugee, and also to highlight the role that direct violence has played in their immigration histories, making them different from many other immigrant groups (Richmond 1993). While they share characteristics, such as seeking economic and educational opportunities, and a foreign background, one cannot ignore the role that trauma and the inability to return home on a permanent basis without reasonable fear of death has in their lives.

The stories of violence, even in studies that focus on the psychological effects are largely missing in the discipline of Refugee Studies. Forced migrants seeking refuge or asylum are required to perform their narratives depicting such experiences for the authorities who make the decisions whether or not to grant such statuses on the migrants (Ticktin 2011, US Immigration). Once outside of that realm, the violence is not given any space to exist in their day-to-day lives. This has resulted in an erasure, at least in the public sphere, of circumstances that go beyond the possible imaginings of those who have not lived through such things, yet need to be taken seriously. “If these experiences did not have spiritual or psychological effects on people, that

would be something to be explained” (Malkki 1995:510). However, Malkki and others who write about forced migrants participate in the erasure of these experiences in their work by mentioning violence in general and passing terms. I make no claims to do much better in the following manuscript. My participants report their own traumatic events in the same way, and it is difficult to say whether this is because of the reception their stories have received (as being inappropriate or not relevant beyond the general), or whether they are simply too painful. However, this is something that warrants further research. In an attempt to bear witness to the horrific acts my participants have survived, I offer this account of a seven year old girl fleeing Somalia. It was told to me when she was in her late twenties, and she still reported having some PTSD as a result.

Right before morning, our neighbor knocked and said “we have to go, I have a truck.” He sat with his wife in the front, in the back sat the maid, their kids and my siblings and my mom. Dad closed the door, I was right behind the truck, my parents knew what to take (food, gold, cash), from war [first Ogaden war], my sister, and the baby were in the truck when a sniper shot the driver and the door man. The truck took off, I started running behind the truck yelling “Mommy!” Running! Through fog, dew, up this hill, I couldn’t breathe. Then I turned to see dad running behind, the whole county running, but then I couldn’t see dad. I kept running. The sun came up, still running, I look up and all I see is the mouth of the tank above, then it fires. I can’t hear anything and feel blood running down my neck, my ear drums had burst.

Fartun told me her story not looking for pity. The criticism often leveled at those who focus on the violence is that by reporting it, it does not allow the individuals to move past it and become more than victims. Fartun is a survivor; she had traveled from Somalia to Ethiopia, then to San Diego, Atlanta, and finally to Maine, where she lives with her husband and two sons, working at a community-based organization devoted to helping other Somali women transition to life in Maine. She is a community college student with dreams of opening her own dress shop. Her

story is her own, and she bears no responsibility in representing all forced migrants, not even all Somali women who are forced migrants, but in sharing her story it allows the readers, most of whom, like myself, lack any comparable experience to begin to understand the gap between themselves and those who have been through it.

The women in the study, even as individuals who can be classified as forced migrants, cannot be considered a group with any unifying characteristics beyond fitting criteria that I created and taking part in this study. They come from many different backgrounds and respond to their current conditions in unique ways that highlight the fallacy of treating them as a unified group based on their forced migrant status. Despite the diversity within this category of people with this classification, it is often perceived as a group and thus treated as such by American institutions such as the community college. For example, because they do not speak English at home, they are required to take an additional section of a standardized test during the enrollment process.

The Forced Migrants

The participants in my study come from eleven different countries: Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Burundi, Rwanda, Angola, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Some are single women, some are raising children on their own, others are married with husbands and children. Many of the younger ones live with their parents and siblings. Official refugees from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia and Iraq are the most likely to live with at least some family members in the greater Portland area, though not all the women from these countries entered the US this way. Asylum-seekers from the African countries are more commonly on their own. The women from the Middle East and Somalia are all practicing

Muslims. The other African participants follow Christianity (mostly Protestant, though a few are Catholics). In age the women range from 18 to late forties, with the majority being late teens to early thirties. They all currently live in the outskirts of Portland or the surrounding towns, all commute to the community college, many driving nearly an hour to get to their classes. Nearly all have some form of employment.

Table of Participants

Country of Origin	Number of Participants	Age 18-23	24-29	30-35	36 and older	Arrival before age 16	Arrival after 16	Christian	Muslim	With family
Rwanda	14	9	3	2		1	13	14		5
Burundi	17	12	4	1		2	15	17		6
Congo	10	6	4			2	8	10		2
Somalia	40	31	1	4	4	32	8		40	40
Iraq	12	9	2		1		12		12	10
Afghanistan	4	3	1				4		4	3
Ethiopia	3		1	2		1	3	2	1	3
Eritrea	3	1			2	1	2	1	2	3
Angola	3	2		1			3	3		1
Pakistan	5	4	1				5		5	4

There is a lot of diversity within the population of this study, which makes it even more challenging than usual to represent them in the following pages without essentializing them beyond recognition and reality. I seek to demonstrate both their multi-vocality and the various ways they confront, conform, reject and adapt to the people and structures they encounter as students at the community college. At the same time as I attempt to de-essentialize these women, I also want to demonstrate how they are essentialized and conflated into a much less nuanced group by the people and institutions around them. Despite the many differences between them,

all the individuals are seen as and reacted to by the white American population largely as being of lower socio-economic backgrounds, foreigners, non-native English speakers and women.

Theoretical Framework

Anthropologists have always been interested in the movement of people and how they adapt to their new surroundings. Subsequently, many have written about assimilation and acculturation, but here I seek to incorporate a transnational approach. This takes seriously the role that structures and influences from more than one nation-state that the forced migrant women I came to know engage with and respond to. I call into question ideas about straight-forward assimilation resulting in the end goal of being “American”. Becoming a US citizen and residing here does not separate these women from the places they came from completely. They still retain social, emotional, cultural, economic, and even political ties to their countries of origin (Glick Schiller and Levitt 2004). “I want to study political science when I transfer. I want to go back and help my country” Jeanette from Burundi tells me while she is in the process of getting her asylum granted.

Unlike the white American students, all of the students are engaging in transnational processes in their daily lives, which “can be defined as political, economical, social and cultural processes that extend beyond the borders of a particular state and include actors that are not states but are shaped by the policies and institutional practices of particular states” (Glick Schiller 2003:104). This means that they are utilizing knowledge based not only locally, but also taking into account cultural practices and beliefs grounded elsewhere, as well as political, social and economic realities that extend beyond the borders of the US.

In order to properly look at the lives of immigrants of all kinds, forced migrants included,

it is necessary to take a transnational approach, taking seriously the roles relationships to the countries and people they have known in the past play in various context. Looking beyond the boundaries of the nation-state still recognizes the importance of the role local and national social structures play (Suarez-Orozco 2003, Glick Schiller 2003). Immigrants move within and through them throughout their lives, and they are constrained by them in various ways. In the US, immigrants enter a “melting pot”, within which they become a part of, and indistinguishable from, the larger whole. “The metaphor [of the melting pot] was also a conceit as it developed into various discourses, policies, and social-psychological theories about the constitution of the self through participation. Optimistically, full participation, perhaps helped by public institutions such as schools or settlement houses, would happen almost automatically” (Samaddar Corrado and Varenne f.c.). However, the melting implies an application of heat, an uncomfortable process if you are in the pot. Social life and institutions “apply heat” in various ways that migrants either accept or try to escape. While I challenge assimilation theory, I recognize that many of the institutions are assimilative in nature, and often the immigrants and refugees must demonstrate compliance in order to benefit, though this can be done strategically and does not have to lead to internalization. The institutions assume straight-forward assimilation, as does the general public (ibid.). The women are forced to confront these assumptions.

For the purposes of this study, the most central of these institutions is the community college, which is a part of “the school America builds” (Varenne and McDermott 1998). This school requires certain students to be labeled success, while others are failure, in order to support meritocracy. “They [American schools] have made individual learning and school performance the institutional site where members of each new generation are measured and then assigned a

place in the social structure based on this measurement” (Varenne and McDermott 1998:xi).

Following Varenne and McDermott's (1998) approach, I look at how forced migrant students become “failures,” and are thus restricted from social mobility. In doing so I turn away from the assumption that the problem of failure lies with the individual to take a systemic approach. Their critique of past anthropology of education shows how by focusing on the difference between students who fail and those who succeed (who not coincidentally look a lot like the people who built the school system), creates an environment where teachers who are looking to help become assimilators, which can result in more alienation and failure labeling for minority students.

Lave and Wenger (1991) use the term “communities of practice” to describe where learning takes place. Within these communities, individuals enter and engage in “legitimate peripheral participation,” during which they acquire “the skill to perform by actually engaging in the process … [though initially] only to a limited degree and with limited responsibility” (14). As mastery is gained, the participants move to “full participation.” This is only possible when they are granted legitimacy, and some individuals are prevented from entering by gatekeepers. SMCC and its faculty act as gatekeepers as they sort students into successes and failures. Thinking about learning in this way, as something that happens through participation with others and that participation can be blocked by “old timers” or authority figures, is not only relevant to this study as it deal with an educational institution, but because “learning is an integral part of generative social practice” (35). For migrants, this learning centers around how they can find spaces for themselves in context that are new to them.

A large component of immigrants' learning how to fit into their new context is the process of acquiring what Ong (1996) calls “cultural citizenship”, the

cultural practices and beliefs produced out of negotiating the often ambivalent and contested relations with the state and its hegemonic forms that establish the criteria of belonging ... Cultural citizenship is a dual process of self-making and being made within webs of power linked to a nation-state and civil society (738).

Institutions, such as the community college, do the “work of instilling proper normative behavior and identity in newcomers” (*ibid*). That is not to say that newcomers do not resist some of these normative measures, but it highlights the assimilative assumptions and pressures of such institutions, with which the forced migrants of this study must contend. Ong (1996) largely focuses on how such institutions racialize newcomers into the black/white dichotomy of the US mainstream, and looks at the criteria and processes that “whiten” or subordinate a population to blackness, depending on the “economic and cultural assessment of their potential as good citizens” (742). This racialization links to the legitimacy of their participation in the schooling communities of practice. In this study of the community college, “whitening” and “blackening” has to do with whether success or failure labels are applied, resulting in upward or downward assimilation and mobility. This happens differently for each individual as they bring their own resources to bear, but within the same social structure of the American school.

Overview of Research

As I spend a year among forced migrant women in the Portland area in 2015-2016, I am able to observe how they mobilize different networks, tapping into cultural and social capital, and call upon various modes of behavior as they moved through daily life. The communities where they live and the community college they attend include various institutions and organizations that seek to shape behaviors to follow local patterns, influencing their formation of cultural citizenship, related to their “success” or “failure”. The community college for example, as a public institution, embodies US legal separation of church and state by only having a non-

denominational chapel on campus, and no established prayer room despite the number of Muslim students³. In response, many such students would find creative spaces to use for prayers or put off prayer until they were in their own homes.

Before the immigrant women are able to start at the community college, they must first confront the nation-state. The US has a difficult relationship with immigration. On the one hand, the nation-state was founded by immigrants and many still adhere to the ethos of benevolent welcome. It prides itself on being a liberal democracy that welcomes diversity and protects the rights and freedoms of all (Shweder 2003). On the other hand, it also has a long history of treating newcomers poorly. Even those who participate in a welcoming discourse largely also participate in discourses about how fortunate these newcomers are to have made it to the US. The new arrivals are asked to jump into the melting pot, and emerge as Americans like everyone else. This idea of equality is rooted in sameness, though some types of difference are tolerated. This rhetoric of tolerance is in itself problematic, as it creates groups of people who must be the object of our benevolent tolerance (Brown 2009). Equals do not need to be tolerated, they are respected, but the discourse on immigrants is not one of respect. It is one of difference and foreignness, and migrants are asked to change many aspects of themselves to be truly welcomed.

Though happening in a school in the US, this is not that different from what is happening in developing worlds. Schooling is being used the world over as an engine of development, and particularly for women and girls, in a way that sets them apart from their families and existing support networks. This type of education takes as its object the “undeveloped woman”, and seeks to make them like the ideal “autonomous Western woman” (Adely 2012). Despite the fact

³ This shows the pervasive hollowness in practice of the US separation of church and state. While it is enshrined in law, Christian underpinnings are present throughout government, on currency, in court rooms, in political speeches, etc. and in the non-denominational *chapel* present on campus, yet the rhetoric remains that a Muslim prayer room would violate the policy.

that these women no longer live in developing countries, as former inhabitants they are included in the population in need of educational developing. The development discourse, as well as the “War on Terror” fought to liberate women from the circumstances from which the students came, means that the students are also the intended objects of the assimilative nature of such education projects. As many of the justifications for these conflicts involve the narrative of saving women from their local oppressors, this further reifies the notion that these migrant women are the lucky beneficiaries of US intervention (Abu-Lughod 2015). SMCC continues the work of the nation-state, as the students are again the beneficiaries of a US education. Well-meaning teachers get caught acting in xenophobic ways, all in the name of helping the students perform in the ways the teachers see as correct, and enforcing the vision of the “proper” way to be modern. This vision requires having goals of financial independence, adherence to values of tolerance and secularity, time management, and delaying marriage and childbearing, which is seen as a threat to the women's civic and economic engagement (Adely 2012). These goals involve prioritizing outside economic activity over the private family life and are all found within the practices of the community college.

The community college attempts to assimilate through its materials on the importance of retention and completion of degree requirements, as well as through its required coursework and use of space. The economic benefits of degree holders versus high school graduates is prominently placed in such discussions, pushing the importance of economic independence. The local high schools also play a part by directing students to think about what job they may want in the future, and what schooling they would need to become qualified.

High schools face a lot of pressure to publish the post-secondary education attendance of

their graduates from everyone to (potential) residents to the federal government, leading guidance departments to pressure students to apply. Community colleges are seen as viable options for immigrant and minority students, because of their affordability and high acceptance rates (Shaw and Coleman 2000). Immigrant students are often guided through applications by their high schools. The Portland area high schools have high rates of post-secondary attendance, as a large number of their students attend the local community college with the hopes that it will afford them a better life.

Forced migrants have limited employment opportunities when they first arrive, due to language and credentialing barriers. This is a motivating factor to gain degrees locally. Often their educational and employment backgrounds are of no help in gaining steady work because they are not recognized in the same way they would be if they were from the “West”. Audette, from Rwanda, has a bachelors degree in hospitality from a university back home, but the only hospitality work she has done in the US is housekeeping. Her degree is not recognized by the institutions that evaluate migrant students' background for transfer credits. The only schooling in her history that is recognized is her high school graduation. She is now going in a new career direction, looking to start a pre-dental program with the hopes of someday becoming a dentist. She has had to start nearly completely over.

Institutional policies, teachers and white American peers all act as gatekeepers. Students may start with dreams of becoming medical doctors, but if they cannot pass the requisite classes, there is great potential for a “cooling out” to occur, where they set their sights lower. For example, students starting out in a pre-nursing program may switch to a medical assisting program, and possibly eventually drop out and work in a nursing assistant position requiring

only a certificate and not a degree.

The expectation is that students who belong to a linguistic minority will struggle in school. When students are struggling, the support available to them is crucial. I inserted myself into the field at the academic support center at the community college. This allowed me to meet forced migrant women who are accessing this type of support (as well as those who just used the space to work and socialize⁴), and offered a way to give back through tutoring. In addition, this is another space where institutional forces exerted influences on migrant students. Participants give accounts of instructors and peers who also play a role in recreating political dynamics within the classroom. The relationships the immigrant students have with teachers and peers could potentially be supportive as they navigate the educational system, or disruptive if they are marginalizing.

Past Research

Maine, as a somewhat out-of-the-way corner of the US, may not be the most obvious place to do fieldwork, but it is the place that I have always called home and done research. Over the course of my lifetime there has been a noticeable shift in the population from approximately 99% white to 95% white, due largely to the immigration of individuals from Africa. As someone with a very different immigration background (my mother is Finnish and my father is German-speaking Swiss), this contested influx made me curious about how such migrants (particularly women) come to establish themselves in Maine, and how they confront the hostilities and challenges. Mainers can be very warm and welcoming, yet there is also a tendency towards suspicion and rejection of people and ideas “from away,” as “real Mainers” say. While I’ve never

⁴ While this gave me access, it narrowed my research population because I did not interact with students who do not use the support center in some fashion.

considered home to be anywhere else, I know that I'm actually considered "from away," like my participants. However, relative to my participants, I occupy a relative place of privilege and power, given my race, education, as well as my religious and class background. This relative privilege has resulted in inequality of economic, social, political and educational opportunities. This inequality is deeply troubling to me, and this informs my political life. While this is primarily an academic work relying on documenting what people are doing as they confront various individuals and institutions, the consequences of the schooling system that are structured to deny certain types of individuals in terms of their participation in the political economy make it impossible to ignore the political nature of the whole project.

This research builds off of earlier work I did in Lewiston, about a half an hour north of Portland. There I worked with Somali forced migrant women, looking at how they used social networks, both formal and informal, to navigate the barriers presented by their circumstances as forced migrants. This research looked at how the women managed day-to-day challenges in a context that was so different from where they had come from. They also now needed to deal with an established population, factions of which were not happy about the presence of Somalis. These women confronted language challenges that made it difficult to perform daily tasks like shopping or sorting their mail, as well as interacting with various local institutions when necessary (to sign their children up for school or get assistance, for example). These difficulties were compounded by pervasive low educational backgrounds due to the protracted failed state from which they came. As a result, many of the women had limited literacy that complicated their English learning abilities. In addition, the differences in institutional culture lead to confusion about expectations at the Adult Learning Center where they attended English classes.

The institutional difficulties also existed when they attempted to navigate other support systems, such as housing assistance, education, and healthcare, or tried to pay bills. During my fieldwork in 2012, the Lewiston area, already struggling from decades of job losses due to the erosion of the manufacturing base, was also still reeling from the economic recession of 2008, from which Maine as a whole (though Portland less so) has still not recovered.

Despite all of the above challenges, the Somali population is growing. It is growing not because of mass resettlement of refugees by government agencies, but because of secondary migration of resettled forced migrants from other areas in the US. This means the struggles listed above were not enough to detract the Somali women from following recommendations from friends and family (fellow Somalis) to settle in the area and in turn invite others to join them. The available housing, suitable for their large families (made available by the economic decline), smaller scale community that made it walkable, relative low crime and good schools, along with potential for social support networks made up of compatriots made this city attractive to Somalis. In just over 15 years since the first arrivals they make up over one sixth of the population. While some have left, largely citing difficulties finding jobs, and the population growth has slowed in recent years, the Somali community has grown to a strong presence. This indicates that they are overcoming the multitude of hurdles and making lives for themselves.

Social networks were the key to navigating the challenges of living in Lewiston for the Somali women, according to my research. Because they were all secondary migrants, they always had a family member or friend who had already been through a similar situation and to whom they could go for advice. They would inform them about what aid they were entitled to, and how they could fulfill the English class requirements that went along with it. They helped

each other enroll their children in school, go to doctors appointment and grocery shopping etc. They described a practice of dropping by the neighbors for any reason – to borrow some flour, socialize or get a ride – as a cultural one from Somalia that they had brought with them, and expanded and adapted to the current climate. Neighbors would help each other decipher their mail: sorting bills from junk mail is not an easy task when you lack the language skills. As the younger generation attended school and learned English, the women took advantage of their children's language skills to help themselves and their family and neighbors. Youths would interpret for more than just their immediate families. For example, one eighteen year old told me about his “aunties”, not all biological relations, who were liable to call him at any time to ask for English translation or interpreting help.

I worked with a Somali women-run agency which formalized the social networking and combined it with Somali practices so that its workers could successfully act as advocates for other Somali women. The women were all of Somali origin, but had the language and institutional navigation skills to make them more able to access and use the local institutional and organizational structures successfully, not only for their clients but also to get grants to fund their agency. They offered interpreter services, but from talking to both the providers and clients, it was clear that what was happening was much more than interpreting. The women from the agency were engaging in cultural brokering so that the clients were really able to make sense of the foreign practices they were encountering. The providers also helped organize other women to advocate for important causes to the Somali community, getting changes implemented at schools (for example the dress requirements for girls during gym classes) and acting as communication liaisons between the different parties (the community and police or mayor's office).

Many of the students in the current study share the country of origin of Somali with my past participants. However, in addition to looking at a more diverse forced migrant population, this work looks at what may be the next step for many immigrants. Once they have found ways to access shelter, food, healthcare and other basics, there are many individuals who look to pursue the “American Dream” through post-secondary schooling. The most accessible path is often found at the community college. Social networks were instrumental for the Somali women in Lewiston, and so I was also curious whether this strong social networking would continue and be used to confront the challenges of community college attendance, and would it also exist among other forced migrant groups with different backgrounds.

Outline of Following Chapters

In Chapter 2, I start by discussing theories of immigration. I will outline some of the views on assimilation, as well as cover how transnationalism departs from and offers a more nuanced and accurate picture of immigrant adaptation than standard assimilation. As many of the participants of my study are classified in the US as people of color, I discuss race and blackness as factors affecting social incorporation. I also include the role of Islam in the US, which must be considered in a post-9/11 context. Next I turn to education and schooling and how immigrant and other minority students have fared in the US. The second half of the chapter covers my research methods. It describes the physical context of the community college, as well as my daily activities as I went about my research (interviews, observations).

A large factor in immigrant incorporation is the local context, which will be explored in Chapter 3. The Portland area is a part of the new trend in immigration to the US that includes smaller, secondary cities. Not all US cities welcome immigrants in the same way (Foner 2007,

Brettell 2003). Their individual history, economic and political policies and situations shape the opportunities afforded to immigrants. Demographics and local attitudes toward immigrant groups are just as important. Such factors came into play for the Somali women in my previous research; some cited conflict with local African-Americans in the cities they had moved from, some were overwhelmed by the scale of larger cities, while others talked about poor schools and lack of affordable housing, all depending on where they had come from. This chapter will cover the resources available to the forced migrants locally: support agencies, employment, housing and schools. It also covers a brief history of immigration to Maine generally.

Chapter 4 begins by looking at the high school experience and outcome of forced migrant students who graduated locally. High school completion of some kind is required for enrollment at SMCC, because this is where students are expected to develop the necessary student skills for success at the next level. High schools are also an important source of information about post-secondary schools, and are instrumental in guiding students to the community college. The second half of the chapter looks at the enrollment process at community college, and how that sets up the rest of the schooling experience for forced migrants.

Outside of the community college, my participants work to take care of themselves and their families. In Chapter 5 I describe how forced migrants are strategic in their working lives to meet their obligations. In balancing their many responsibilities, some that span the globe, the students in this study demonstrate many of the skills SMCC overtly teaches in its required curriculum, such as time management. These overt efforts to structure the migrant students in certain ways demonstrate how their difference is believed by the college and its staff to require assimilation to be successful and form the topic of Chapter 6.

Chapter 7 looks at one way the forced migrant students are resisting some of the integrative assimilation efforts. While they reject being marked as the objects of development, they react to this kind of labeling by creating boundaries between themselves and those not similarly identified. The forced migrants create support networks of other forced migrants, and in some ways educate each other about preserving some of their otherness.

Next, in Chapter 8, I turn to the educational outcomes of my participants. Given the limited length of the study, few definitive conclusions can be drawn about the long-term success of the women. However, they did report about their educational trajectory up to that point, and told me about their goals. While no definitive conclusions can be made about their final educational attainments, the success or frustrations they encounter along the way speak to whether or not it is possible, or likely, that they will be able to persevere toward their desired outcomes.

In the concluding chapter, I discuss how the structure of SMCC retains an assimilative orientation towards their forced migrants students, who often display transnational realities. The students conform to some expectations while resisting others through their social practices. Their conformity is not enough, and their otherness is still reacted to by white individuals at SMCC, particularly their non-native use of English. They are largely unable to graduate and reach the higher social mobility they aspire to, rather they are limited to what they have already achieved through certification programs outside of post-secondary school.

This dissertation sheds light on the lived experiences of forced migrant women living in the Portland area. By including a transnational theory of the data, and contrasting it with the statewide assimilationist forces, it seeks to argue that transnationalism needs to be incorporated

into studies of immigrant integration to reflect the lives of many immigrants. Specifically it looks at how forced migrants are classified as others in need of assimilation in order for the community college to be able to recognize them as success. Because of the community college's assumption about the students' otherness, they fail to recognize the many ways that the forced migrants are already demonstrating the skills the college believes them to lack. The forced migrant women at times resist this othering, while also maintaining the boundaries between themselves and the dominant population in order to protect themselves from the subordination that comes along with being an other in need of changing. This manuscript shows the tension created by assimilative practices and assumptions integral to American schooling.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODS

This chapter lays out some of the work that has shaped the fields of immigration and education, and provides insight, comparison and contrast to my explorations. It then describes how I collected my own data.

Literature Review

“The anthropologist sees different things about the home culture from those things which others see who have never had to submit to this special discipline” (Mead 1965:4). Mead (1965) is among the first to turn the anthropologist's eye onto the home country, and begin to ask questions about “what we are ourselves”, which is a fundamental question when considering immigrants and their integration (16). What makes us us and them them? When do the lines begin to blur? If we are us because we are here, can they be here but not be us?

Migration

Ogbu (1987) develops a general theory of immigration in the US. He classifies migrants either as involuntary or voluntary, depending on their history, and argues that this affected their academic success. Voluntary migrants are groups who choose to immigrate in order to provide better lives for themselves and their families, and are therefore more willing to assimilate and accept the status quo allowing for their upward mobility. Involuntary migrants, such as trafficked African Americans and their descendants, are more likely to develop maladaptive behaviors, because they resist the society that has systematically discriminated against them, and do not believe that societal benefits are available to them. However, the immigration experience is much more complex, with immigrants adopting, adapting and contesting various aspects of the

receiving culture. Ogbu's model also leaves no room to take cultural practices and beliefs from the countries of origin into account. He also provides no guidance as to how to classify forced migrants who have selected to resettle.

Sociologists have done work in the United States looking at how newcomers “become Americans” over the course of several generations. This is dominated by what Sandberg (in Gans 1979) calls “straight-line theory,” in which “acculturation and assimilation are viewed as secular trends that culminate in the eventual absorption of the ethnic group into the larger culture and general population” (p. 2). In essence, after a few generations, immigrants cease to be immigrants and become Americans. This is known as assimilation theory, as it describes how immigrants are absorbed into the dominant culture. This theory is complicated by positing two possible paths of assimilation, one an upward trajectory, where immigrant second (and subsequent) generations successfully adopt the practices of the host society and are able to climb the socio-economic ladder, or, in downward assimilation, where future generations bear their immigration status as a mark of stigma and are assimilated into the subjugated lower class (Gans 1992).

Portes and Rumbault (2001) trouble these simple patterns, arguing instead that the process is much more complicated and depends on various other factors such as: history of the first immigrant generation; pace of acculturation and integration of parents and children; the barriers, cultural and economic, faced by immigrants; and the family and community resources in confronting these barriers. In order to accomplish this, they coin a new term *segmented* assimilation and identify three patterns of segmented assimilation: consonant, dissonant and selective acculturation. These three patterns take differences between generations into account:

consonant assimilation meaning that parents and children are moving at the same pace, dissonant meaning that one generation is assimilating at a more rapid pace (generally the younger generation outpaces the older), and selective acculturation is when only certain aspects of the host society are adopted.

With dissonant patterns of assimilation, there is a high risk of inter-generational conflict as they no longer share cultural beliefs and practices. This tension can also contribute to downward assimilation. Portes and colleagues worry about widespread downward assimilation, due largely to the fact that racial minority immigrants feel the discrimination present in US society, and thus have a tendency to assimilate into disenfranchised sub-cultures.

All of the above pathways assume that immigrants will inevitably begin to blend into the host society, with the exception of segmented assimilation, where immigrants will keep certain aspects of home cultures across generations. Some immigration theories differentiate between “functional” and “expressive” culture, where “functional” culture is more institutional and assimilation allows immigrants to perform well in areas like education, the economy and healthcare of their new context, and “expressive” culture like religion, dress and language (mostly in the home setting) is retained from the country of origin. Even such theories assume that immigrants are moving towards acculturation of some kind, and have the host society as a singular point of reference (Alitolppa-Niitamo 2002). This assumes a linear trajectory of assimilation even if it be only in the functional culture with an end point anchored in the current geographic location.

When factors such as race, language, religion, occupation, class and education are taken into account, the assimilation line becomes increasingly not straight. How these factors affect

immigrants depends on the groups involved (Waters and Kasinitz 2013, Hall 2004). “But the construction of immigrant-native boundaries is, in each society, a path-dependent process that hinges on the materials available in the social-structural, cultural, legal, and other institutional domains of the receiving society, as well as on characteristics and histories that the immigrants themselves present” (Alba and Nee 2005:41). Foner (1998, 2007) finds significant differences in the assimilation patterns immigrants follow depending on where they relocated. The size of the community, economic prospects, political orientation, demographics of immigrants among other factors are important when shaping the experience of newcomers (Foner 2007). For example, the presence of native African Americans means that West Indian immigrants are less integrated in the white mainstream, despite their wishes to identify as West Indian, not African American (Foner 1998).

Host Communities

The forced migrant students in this study have a perception that they will be kept from full-participating in or exploiting the exchange value of the education system. This comes from their experience in the Portland area, as local factors such as immigration history, availability of social services, political orientation, and economic situation result in very different receptions. Stepick and Stepick (2003) discuss the role that the host community plays in shaping how immigrants deploy various identities and how it affects educational outcomes. In the center of Miami, Nicaraguans easily take on Hispanic identities within the context of an area dominated by successful Cubans. They report little racial or ethnic discrimination, and are successful in high schools that have large numbers of Hispanic teachers. This contrast markedly to Mexican immigrants on the outskirts of Miami, where they attend white majority schools with white

teachers, and the economy is largely dominated by lower-working class whites. Here high school dropout rates are high, and truancy is common.

Theorists of assimilation each add a number of factors that must be considered in each immigrants' case. With so many factors each with countless variations, the theory has little explanatory value. Instead, it may be more helpful to take a transnational approach, which is more descriptive and methodological, and points to the influences that come from outside of the boundaries of the current nation-state.

Transnationalism

In addition to looking at the important factors of the receiving context, many theorists of immigration are now arguing for the inclusion of relationships to home countries and expanding the imagined assimilation trajectories through transnationalism (Glick Schiller et al 1992; Basch, Glick, Blanc-Szanton 1992; Georges 1990, Glick Schiller 2003, Suarez-Orozco 2003, Foner 2003). “A new kind of migrating population is emerging, composed of those whose networks, activities and patterns of life encompass both their host and home societies. Their lives cut across national boundaries and bring two societies into a single social field” (Glick Schiller et al 1992; Basch, Glick, Blanc-Szanton 1992). This is in part facilitated by modern technology that allows frequent travel and communication across great distances, as well as flows of cash and other goods (Georges 1990; Vertovec 1999). The transnational lives of immigrants and refugees who simultaneously hold many points of reference and future aspirations do not negate the reality of the effects of their physical location, and the influence of the states as actors (Glick-Schiller 2003, Suarez-Orozco 2003). With such an understanding, it becomes possible to see more futures imagined for immigrant and refugee populations, particularly for the host

population. “Attention to transnationalism and globalization entailed important attempts to rethink notions of culture in light of global flows and modes of deterritorialization” (Vertovec 2007:964).

“Transnational migration studies focus on the nature and impact of relationships – economic, religious, political and social – that embed people in two or more societies” (Glick Schiller 2003:102). Glick Schiller (with Basch and Blanc Szanton 1992) is one of the leaders in the development of this new approach, and seeks to develop its theory and methodology (2003). She argues that *methodological nationalism*, which takes for granted the nation-state as the natural social and political form in the modern world, has led to the proliferation of assimilation theories, as migration being seen as deviant making swift assimilation in the host society desirable (Glick Schiller 2003:113). This position of methodological nationalism in academia has reified such beliefs for the nation-state which hold onto the most simplistic model of assimilation, assuming gradual erasure of any difference over a few generations (Suarez-Orozco 2003).

For all immigrants seeking naturalization, it is required (with a few exceptions) that they speak basic English and understand the history and government of the US. In addition, the Office of Refugee Resettlement “provides technical assistance in domestic cultural orientation to promote and enhance community orientation and supports English language training by funding ESL programs and/or referral activities” (Government of USA in UNHCR 2013:9). From the start, there are programs to integrate and assimilate. This official immigration ideology stands in opposition to what many anthropologists have documented, even for forced migrant populations, for whom return to their countries of origin is potentially problematic (e.g. Bernal 2004; Kleist

2008; Horst 2006; Lindley 2008).

It is not necessary to physically travel regularly across border to be transnational; social, economic, and political forces cross borders along with the migrants, hence those who study migrants should take them into account. Those who do cross borders make up the first category of transmigrants Glick Schiller (2003:119) identifies as emerging from the body of work in the area. Secondly, she enumerates “transmigrants who maintain multiple connections across borders and who may or may not travel, (3) immigrants and their descendants who may maintain only one or two types of transnational connections, such as family and friendship, (4) immigrants and their descendants who do not maintain their transnational connections but participate in networks with people who do maintain such ties, and (5) circulating migrants, transmigrants, and immigrants and their descendants who utilize various forms of media, including the Internet, to obtain information about the homeland and utilize this information in their day-to-day interactions and decision making” (*ibid.*).

Migration and Gender

While this work is not concerned with gender per se, it is concerned with women, and their particular circumstances, which to a large extent are a function of their gender. Risman (2004) argues that gender is a fundamental organizing principle of society, and hence, it must be taken into account when looking at the lives of individuals. The specifics of how it functions as an organizing principle changes as immigrant women cross borders, but the fact remains that their womanhood matters. “Gender is one of the fundamental social relations anchoring and shaping immigration patterns, and immigration is one of the most powerful forces disrupting and realigning everyday life” (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2006:3).

Many studies of immigration focus on gender in relation to the household, relying on paradigms relegating women to the private sphere (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2006, Pessar 2003). New studies of gender and immigration must take the “variety of practices, identities, and institutions implicated in immigration into account” (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2006:9). This must include the roles women play within the home, but theories of households need to be complicated (Pessar 2003). Gendered and generational hierarchies of power within households may inform individual actions and choices, as households cannot be considered homogeneous units in terms of interests and as having consensus about strategies to pursue (Pessar 2003:80, Mahler and Pessar 2006:34). Changes in household dynamics in post-immigration settings, such as when women start to become significant financial contributors cause renegotiations between members, leading to new ways of being that can either continue to uphold gendered hierarchies despite changes, or constitute new power relationships (Foner 1998, Mahler and Pessar 2006:35, Pedraza 1991).

Wider social networks beyond the household and local borders are crucial to immigrant adaption. These networks are both gendered and reinforce gendered roles (Pessar 2003:84). Of course it is also crucial to take into consideration class, race and country of origin, as these intersect in how the “other” is reciprocally constituted (Mahler and Pessar 2006:39). This consideration comes into play as immigrants navigate structures and markers of difference in social, political and economic contexts. In a political context, particularly in relation to movement and rights to protection, gender plays a significant role in relation to nation-states (Mahler and Pessar 2006).

Classes of Identification

Gender is one way people are identified, as are race and religion. However, these

categories of identification are not universal, but rather are made meaningful in a specific context. Holland and colleagues (1998) call these contexts “figured worlds.” Figured worlds set parameters and “take shape within and grant shape to the *coproduction* of activities, discourses, performances, and artifacts. A figured world is peopled by the figures, characters, and types who carry out its tasks and, who also have styles of interacting within, distinguishable perspectives on, and orientations toward it” (Holland et al 1998:51, emphasis mine). Figured worlds do not determine how an individual should act, rather they set the limits to ensure behaviors that are “mutually predictable and equivalent” (Wallace 2003:223). In this way “the author works within, or at least against, a set of constraints that are also a set of possibilities for utterance”, how they chose to articulate their identity in that moment (Holland et al 1998:171). This cannot be assumed with forced migrants as people who come from different figured worlds, there may be confusion as they learn the constraints of their new spheres. Of particular consequence are the ways that figured worlds lead people to make identifications about others, attempting to place them within certain categories that those identified may or may not accept.

Blackness in the US

How they are perceived racially is beyond the control of the forced migrants. Many of them have dark complexions leading them to be classified as black by mainstream individuals and institutions, which results in them being subject to the structural racism of the US⁵. According to Bonilla Silva (2006), many whites now operate in a color-blind racial ideology, wherein race is no longer overtly used in a derogatory manner, but is recoded to perpetuate the systems of inequality. By talking around race, they are able to claim this color-blind label and claim to have moved past racism, while keeping their privilege, which delegitimizes any claims

⁵ I will use the term phenotypically black to denote skin tone, as opposed to the social fact of blackness in the US.

of racist treatment on the part of minorities. Bonilla-Silva (2006) identified four dominant but overlapping frames of how people bring out racist results without being overtly racist: abstract liberalism, cultural racism, naturalization and minimization. Abstract liberalism relies on values of liberalism and meritocracy, leading to individuals arguing for lack of interference (allowing consequences of the past and current racist system to go unremedied), placing all onus for failure on the individual. It is the most relevant to this study because of the focus on the schooling experience. Schools hold and profess to teach the same values abstract liberalism relies on. Particularly of interest here is how equality is used to ignore relevant differences (language skills, educational opportunities, economic resources, etc.), and how by treating everyone the same the forced migrants are marginalized. Despite many claims otherwise, “from the very inception of the Republic to the present moment, race has been a profound determinant of one's political rights, one's location in the labor market, and indeed one's sense of 'identity'" (Omi and Winant 2014:1). Omi and Winant (2014) concur with Bonilla-Silva on both the rise of color-blind racial ideology, and the structural nature of racism in the US. They trace the role of views on race in the US, based in part on ethnicity and class, which help occlude the far reaching institutional nature of racial discrimination in this country.

Islam and Islamophobia

Another factor contributing to othering involves Islam, because the narrative pervasive in the US that it is fundamentally opposed to the West and democratic freedoms (Mamdani 2002). Huntington (1993) traces this back as far as the Arab and North African incursion into Europe ending in the Eighth Century. He points to the origins of these conflicts as fundamental differences between two civilizations, and sees such conflicts as becoming more numerous in the

future. In the case of the West, the Islamic civilization, as he terms it, is linked with violence against women and anti-modernity. Despite the presence of American Muslims for well over a century, the Islamophobia heightened by 9/11 has caused extreme portrayals of “otherness”, which threaten “the American way of life”. Such narratives are employed by politicians and various other actors, creating the perception of this difference being rooted in an inalienable deterministic culture, and hiding the US contribution to the political and economic tensions which exist between the West and many Muslim majority countries (Abu-Lughod 2015).

The politicization of Islamophobia has deep roots in supposedly liberal, secular, democracy. The media is rife with portrayals of Muslims as antithetical to the West. Honor killings, forced marriages, veiling have all been described as anti-modern in mainstream discourse. This has been taken up in national and human rights discourses about the need to “save Muslim women” (Abu-Lughod 2015, Akbar and Oza 2013). This rhetoric has been reified by the rise of popular testimonials from alleged insider informants. One such woman, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a Somali woman who has written a number of books on the supposed barbaric nature of Islam has risen to political power in the Netherlands, largely on her condemnation of Islam. These “native” accounts are used as further justification of the need to bring Western values to the Islamic world. What is hidden by the focus on these individual (often fabricated) stories, is the particular circumstances, and the conditions, often brought on by Western incursions, that gave rise to them (Mahmood 2009). This obfuscation serves to bolster the role the US has cast itself in, as the savior of women from their barbaric religion. The Muslim women, once “saved” by their arrival in the West are expected to be apolitical, or only speak out as “good Muslims” against the US understanding of militant Islamic fundamentalism (Akbar and Oza 2013; Ticktin

2011). Unless actively projecting the identity of a “good Muslim,” their way of life is seen as being incompatible, and they themselves potentially incapable of taking on the ways of being and knowing required by US educational institutions (Harklau 1998). This ties back to the idea that Muslims are bound by their culture (in itself a problematic idea as Muslims come from a variety of countries and have many different cultures), and thus do not welcome any challenges to their way of thinking about the world, as they would encounter in American schools.

With the increased visibility of Muslims in the US post-9/11, scholars are increasingly discussing the racialization of Islam (Selod 2015). This has occurred through new racial meanings being ascribed to individuals, based not only on physical appearance but also language, clothing and beliefs. These meanings have resulted in Arabs in every day life practically being “denied access to whiteness,” which is their official racial category according to the US Census (Selod 2015:79). While they are white according to government documents, Arabs and others from the Middle East “are denied privileges associated with social citizenship by continuously being questioned and challenged about their nationality, allegiance and standing in American society” (ibid. p.78). Kromidas (2004) studies how this is evident in fourth grade students. “What emerged again and again in discussions with students was their racialization of a far-away and ill-defined enemy. My observations of the children’s social interactions reveal how this racialization was also evident in their interactional patterns and friendship networks (2004:16).” While religion and race are separate categories, they are both subject to how people use them to make meaning, in this case, how they create categories of people who are denied full social and cultural citizenship.

Education--Schooling

Formal/Informal Learning

In addition to formal learning, which leads to credentialing and shaping the possibilities open to forced migrant students, there is a large amount of informal learning taking place in schools. This study aims to take all forms of learning and education into account, recognizing that they are all culturally mediated processes. Students learn a lot from the host communities, but the local context is not the only cultural sphere that migrants interact with. As places where skills, behaviors, and goals are learned cultural spheres relate to Lave and Wenger's (1991) communities of practice. Schools are one such community of practice, where students participate, first as newcomers and then progress to old-timers. It is within these communities of practice that gate-keeping mechanisms prevent some participants from achieving more full participation, such as by restricting access to information or opportunities necessary to progress in post-secondary institutions. What the migrants may and may not learn from their cultural spheres impacts the options they see for themselves moving forward.

While anthropology recognizes learning as culturally situated, this does not ensure that the educational institutions that the forced migrant women engage with do so as well. This can shape their informal and formal learning if they perceive the education system to be biased against them. Students recognize the stages of advancement they are afforded, in the newcomer to old-timers spectrum, and this affects their sense of belonging, and how they negotiate the community (Lave and Wenger 1991).

If schools are too centered on the process, and not that students arrive at the outcome, they are forcing an internalization of the steps, and can act as further gate-keeping for students. As bureaucracies, schools have protocols for student progression. In order for students to enter a

school they must be enrolled, take a series of classes, receive grades, etc. In turn, each one of the previous processes have steps that must be followed in order to be deemed legitimate. If, for example, a student is unable to attend a requisite number of class meetings due to other obligations, but demonstrates comprehension as measured in the classroom, a school overly concerned with attendance rates for the sake of the numbers, not the outcome, could prevent the student from gaining credit for the class. This again can affect the students' motivation in the outcome, undermining their investment in the process. In this kind of situation, teachers begin "acting upon the person-to-be-changed" (Lave and Wenger 1991:112). Furthermore, school learning often takes the form of "commoditization of learning [which] engenders a fundamental contradiction between the use and exchange value of the outcome of learning, which manifests itself in conflicts between learning to know and learning to display knowledge for evaluation" (ibid.) Students will further lack the motivation for belonging necessary for legitimate participation if they do not believe that they will be able to capitalize even on the exchange value of education because of structural barriers within the system (ibid.). This can lead to students either cooling out, or dropping out completely.

Schooling in the US and Immigrant Students

Schooling is about shaping students into certain types of people, people who act in certain ways and are credentialed (Ranciere 1991, Bourdieu and Passeron 1977, Bowles and Gintis 1976). Immigrant and other minority students have long been classified as underperforming in formal schooling, which many attribute to a disconnect between their language, attitude, behaviors and values and those of the mainstream educational institution (e.g. Lareau 2000, Bartolome 1994). However, some immigrant groups are outperforming native-born

students, especially when controlling for race and economic background, while others are falling behind (Kasinitz 2008). Ogbu takes his work on voluntary and involuntary immigrants beyond general integration to concern himself with why certain immigrant groups do better than others. He argues that involuntary immigrants do not actively participate in the education system, because they do not see instances of people similarly identified reaping the rewards. This is not the case for voluntary immigrants who have higher levels of success. This also points to the diversity of experiences, and the inability to make generalizations about a group as diverse as immigrants to the US. What can be said for all of these students is that their immigrant background is seen as a hindrance, though “it is likely that there are benefits to minority and immigrant group membership” (Kao and Thompson 2003:436). This can be seen, for example, in the high achievement of Punjabis in Northern California, whose tight-knit, conservative and potentially controlling communities keep youths from engaging in behaviors that detract from their schooling (Gibson 1987, 1997).

Schools in the US operate under the assumption that minorities must be taught mainstream ways of communicating and thinking in order to become successful, or else their cultural and communicative practices will continue to prevent them from learning (Bartolome 1994). This is part of what Varenne and McDermott (1998) call the “difference theory”, contrasting it with the deprivation approach initially used to explain why minority students failed. The deprivation approach posits that because either their culture or personal failing, the students are incapable of performing in what the schools see as their best interest. The difference theory sees the students as capable, only currently failing because of miscommunication, but if the students first put aside what makes them different, then they will succeed. McDermott and

Gospodinoff (1981) point out that individuals cross cultural and linguistic boundaries all the time, and point to larger political, economic and social forces that are reproduced in schools to maintain the marginalized status of minority students (Lukose 2007, Ngo 2008, Gibson 1997, Bartolome 1994). However, within schools, the discourse remains that the problem lies with the individuals, not the system (Bartolome 1994). Varenne and McDermott (1998) critique the difference approach for its well-intentioned but debilitating effects (those who are different and in need of changing, and if they do not then they fail, instead of the system failing them), to look at how students become known as failures in the first place. In this way they show how the system produces failure in some cases, while ignoring it in others, and how once an individual is known as a failure within schools, it becomes very difficult for them to be recognized as being able, despite succeeding in a number of tasks. Wortham (2004) looks at how students become known as failures within their classroom. Over the course of the year, a good student becomes known within her classroom as a failure. In a series of multiple instances her identity as an outcast and a bad student are thickened, to the point that any action she takes is understood as being disruptive to the schooling process.

For immigrant students, low performance by students of color is often attributed to a cultural distance, which is problematic as it reifies the East-West dichotomy, stagnates “culture” in traditional practice and “absolves institutions of education, labor and government of responsibility and deflects attention from the exclusionary historical practices as well as discrimination immigrants continue to face” (Ngo 2008:5). Schools often use language classes to separate immigrant students from the mainstream, and effectively bar them from academic tracks beyond the remedial that could lead to higher achievement and future social mobility (Suarez-

Orozco 2001, Gitlin 2003). Instead of an asset, their other language capabilities are seen as a hindrance requiring intense intervention. The pressure to assimilate to mainstream norms of English language usage can be detrimental to their first language(s), and cut them off from accessing the knowledge they have in their home language (Bartlett and Garcia 2011). This is part of the focus on discipline and management for immigrant students in the process of (forced downward) assimilation (Suarez-Orozco 2001:356).

Different immigrant populations respond to such pressures in unique ways. “There is evidence that involuntary minority students experience the pressure placed on them in school to conform to the dominant culture as a threat to their identity” (Gibson 1997:441). The perceived threat to their identity shows how identifications of class, race and migration history, and their place in the social hierarchies of the receiving society, shape the schooling experience of immigrant students. However, being classified as different does not always lead to poor performance in school. Gibson (1987, 1997) has shown how “accommodation and acculturation without assimilation” has led to improved outcomes for Punjabi immigrants in California. This happens through family and community support and pressure, which have allowed students to resist the assault on their othering identities. Rather than being a negative factor, maintaining strong identities of difference can support academic achievement. Thus “transnationalism need not be viewed as a form of separatism and a threat,” but rather a “authoritative source of value, legitimacy and identity” (Lukose 2007:408 & 409).

Methods

For a little over a year (2015-2016), I did fieldwork in the greater Portland area. Mostly, my days were spent in the academic support center at SMCC in South Portland, which shares a

floor with the library, and is located centrally in the student center. The student center is a busy place, with the campus bookstore, cafe, the “social” lounge and offices of many student services (financial aid for example). I also attended campus events, some specifically designed for forced migrant students, and others for the entire campus community. During my time in the field, I put in regular hours as a writing tutor, in addition to the time I spent at the center doing observations and interviews.

I entered into the field by contacting the assistant director of the academic center, Sarah⁶. I emailed her about my interest in doing a project with forced migrants in the Portland area. She told me they had such a population of students. We exchanged emails and organized a time for me to visit. I went to the site and saw that there were a number of students who would fit my criteria. I met Sarah, and she put me in touch with the requisite people to get clearance to begin research. She also gave me an overview of the academic center. At this time I expressed an interest in doing some writing tutoring, as an entry and to offer something in return to my research subjects.

I presented myself as a tutor, and if a student who fit the parameters of my study approached me for help, I would explain the scope of my research, and ask if they were interested in participating. Students also came to the center to work on their homework or just pass the time independently in some of the study areas, so I later expanded my invitations to friends of students I had already recruited, when I engaged with them outside of tutoring activities. Once I had established consent, I would interact with the students when they came to the center, and ask questions about their experience living in the Portland area. I largely focused on their schooling experience, and how it played into what they envisioned for themselves in the

⁶ All individual names are pseudonyms while all place names are real.

future. With time they came to expect me, and became accustomed to my sitting down with them and asking questions. These conversations also included discussions about their families, whom they lived with, their education, and how they supported their studies. During the tutoring sessions I was able to see what kind of academic challenges they had, and we would discuss how the class that the assignment was for was going: what was difficult, how they related with other students and the teacher, and how this class fit in with what they were interested in studying. During such times I would sometimes ask for more formal interviews.

In my time in the field I was given consent by just over 60 students, and conducted informal interviews on their educational histories, support systems, responsibilities, challenges and plans. Some participants came around more regularly than others and so I had more opportunities to interact with them. I became especially close with seventeen individuals who are listed as key informants on the following page. The remaining 44 were also interviewed, but less frequently, making up a second tier of engagement.

In addition to the approximately 60 students whom I interviewed informally, there were another 50 with whom I interacted with less. These were students who used the center to work independently, and only infrequently used tutoring services. I did not develop the same level of rapport with these students. However, these students played an important role in the observations I made of students interacting with each other and form a third tier of participants. In total, my fieldwork covered over 160 individuals with forced migrant backgrounds: this includes interview subjects and observed students (key informants, and the second and third tier), plus what they reported about their families (the remaining 50+ individuals in the study).

I am unable to say what percentage of the total population of forced migrants at SMCC

the students in my study are because the college does not collect country of birth or immigration status information. Total enrollment in Fall 2015 was 6,045, of which only 25 students are considered foreign (these are F1 visa holders). Forced migrants are already living in the Portland area before they enroll, so they are counted in the 5,772 students from Maine. Racial and ethnic information is voluntary, and 4% of students decline to give this information. 4,907 self-identify as white, and 382 as black/African American. The majority of black students are forced migrants, as there is only a small population of African Americans at SMCC. My 90 African participants make up 23.5% of the black/African American population.

TABLE OF KEY INFORMANTS

Informant Name	Country of Origin	Age	Past Education	Length of time in the US	Education goal	Past socio-economic status
Angelina	Eritrea	36	Bachelors in Nursing, Bachelors in Environmental Science (Ethiopia)	5 years	Nursing credentials to work in Maternal nursing	Daughter of wealthy former politician. Attended private school.
Amina	Somalia	33	High School (Portland)	18 years	Nursing	Family involved with international trade.
Hila	Afghanistan	24	2 years adult education (Portland)	4 years	In transition, nursing, legal work, social science	Family business. Access to schooling not barred by finances.
Jeanette	Burundi	24	High School (Burundi)	3 years	Political Science (4 year degree)	Orphan with two younger siblings.
Zaineb	Somalia	21	High School (Portland)	9 years	Medical Assisting	Long-term refugee
Audette	Rwanda	26	Bachelors (Hospitality) (Rwanda)	4 years	Dentistry	Orphan, uncle paid for high school and university.
Asfana	Afghanistan	22	High School (Iraq), 2 years adult	2 years	Rheumatology	Father had a professional job.

			education (Portland)			
Halifa	Ethiopia	30	High School (Ethiopia)	10 years	Nursing	Unknown
Fatuma	Somalia	20	High School (Portland)	8 years	Nursing	Parents involved in trade in Somaliland.
Sadia	Afghanistan	20	High School (Iraq), 2 years adult education (Portland)	2 years	Undecided	Same as Asfana (sisters).
Halima	Somalia	42	Nursing degree (while refugee in Afghanistan)	4 years	Nursing	Long-term refugee
Aisha	Kuwait/Iraq	20	High School (Portland)	8 years	Medical	Long-term refugee
Aman	Iraq	21	High School (Iraq), adult ed (Portland)	2 years	Medical	Father was a regional governor.
Dahabo	Somalia	21	High School (Portland)	9 years	Medical	Long-term refugee
Ayaan	Somalia	22	High School (Portland)	12 years	Business	Long-term refugee
Nadine	Rwanda	20	High School (Portland)	5 years	Nursing/MD	Family owned business
Safa	Iraq	22	High School (Iraq)	3 years	Business	Family owned business

As this study focused on the experience of forced migrant women, the majority of the participants are women. However, for comparative purposes, some men are included in the research. I was interested cross-gender interactions and expectations, which required involving men. Naturally, I also tutored men.

The Field

I usually arrived at the academic support center around 9:00. I would sit near the tutoring tables so I would have a good overview of what was going on. I moved around a bit from day to day, but I was mostly in the same general area. I would observe the tutors, tutees, and other

students who passed through the space, taking notes on who interacted with whom and what they spoke about. If there was a student with whom I had built some rapport working in the area, but did not look engrossed in their work, I would approach them and ask them about what they were working on, and engage them in conversation, guiding the conversation towards my themes of interest. From 10:00-2:00 I would be available as a tutor. I would take notes on the conversations I had, and possibly schedule more formal interviews. Generally I conducted interviews in the late afternoon, after tutoring.

Interviews

All formal interviews were conducted in individual study rooms adjacent to the tutoring area. I recorded the interviews, and took notes as well. I used a list of questions to guide the interview, though I tried to encourage the informants to speak freely and broadly on the topics at hand, mostly using the guide to ensure that I touched upon all the relevant subjects I was interested in⁷.

In order to understand what educational resources the students brought to their current situation, I asked them how long they had been in the US, where they had gone to school before SMCC, and what those experiences had been like. I was interested in what languages they spoke, what kinds of schools they had attended (public, private, refugee camp), what subjects they had studied, as well as the educational levels of their parents and siblings. I asked them why they were going to school at SMCC, what they hoped to gain from the experience and what their future goals were. I asked how marriage and family fit into these goals, if they did not already have children, whether it was something they were interested in in the future. In order to look at their educational and potential vocation trajectory, I asked students how they chose classes, and

⁷ Interview protocol in Appendix A

where they went for advising. How long they had been in the US, either Maine or elsewhere, was another important factor. I encouraged discussions of issues of racism, gender discrimination, religion, and general harassment due to their forced migrant status. I wanted to know the level of acceptance they felt from the mainstream population.

Their home situations were also of interest. I asked about what languages they spoke at home, who they lived with, and what kind of relationship they had with them. I asked about how much support they felt they had in pursuing their education, and whether they felt they were given enough time for their studies. This could lead to complaints about burdens of housework and parents reminding students to do their homework, which provided a more organic picture of the kinds of support and responsibilities the students had at home.

Tutor Sessions

Some students came to the support center very regularly, while others would only drop by during mid-terms and finals when large projects came due. As I was the only tutor who was there five days a week, a number of the regulars became my regulars. There were also students who told me they made sure to come during the time they knew they would be able to work with me. Tutoring sessions are designated to be 30 minutes each, but students could sign up for multiple slots, and I had no problem running over if there was not a student waiting. It was accepted practice among tutors to discuss an assignment with a student and have them work independently and check back as scheduling allowed.

During tutoring sessions, students would often tell stories about the class that we were currently working on. They would complain about teachers, and sometimes compare the situation to other classes. I would use these openings to ask what was difficult about certain

classes and teachers, and what was easy. I asked what they would like to see teachers doing instead, inviting comparisons to other schooling experiences they had. When discussing problems they had in the class, I would turn the conversation to how they went about addressing them. This gave me insight into who (if anyone) they went to for help when they felt they needed it, as well as the relationship the students had with their instructors.

Tutoring allowed me to gain some information about their behaviors as students. As part of the sign-in process I was required to ask them when assignments were due, separating the last minute procrastinators from those who planned ahead. Sometimes this sparked conversations about the myriad of other responsibilities the students were facing, indicating an overburdened schedule rather than poor planning or other priorities. I was also able to tell how independent the students were: some would receive feedback and then bring it to the center to get help, and some would try on their own first. When students went off to work on their own after a tutor session on a particular assignment that they continued to work on, seeing how often they checked back in, and the amount of support needed could indicate either extreme difficulty with the assignment, or a lack of initiative on the part of the student.

Observations

When I was not otherwise engaged with students, I was observing the types of interactions students engaged in at the center. At times I would observe an area with desktops and printers available for students to use adjacent to the library, which allowed me to watch groups and individual students working, and their interactions with the circulation desk and reference librarian. Other times I would sit in the open study area at the top of the stairs, or I would sit so I could survey the tutoring center. This also included an additional computer lab,

and some individual study rooms.

There were, of course, many more students passing through the center than I recorded observations for. I limited myself to recording observations from students I was familiar with from tutoring, and the majority of students passing through the center were left out. I tracked interactions by gender, country of origin, age, and also took note of religion if perceivable/known. These observations supported reports of study partners, friends and relationships with people who were of a different gender or from a different country. I was looking to see whether forced migrant students would show a preference towards associating with people from their own countries and to what degree were they interacting with mainstream students.

I recorded student behavior. Many students did most if not all of their homework at the center, and so I could record how much time they spent on various tasks, who helped them, and how focused they were. This included how willing they were to have distractions take them away from the task at hand. The center was not a purely academic space, but also a social meeting place for groups of friends. It also provided access to computers and the internet, which I observed them use to watch youtube videos, shop online, check their Facebook etc. It was also a space where they could pass the time between classes, which is important on a commuter campus, as students do no have nearby private spaces to return to. Some commuted a fair distance, making it both inefficient and inconvenient to return home for short breaks.

I also took notes on language use. While I do not speak any of the native languages of the migrants, I did develop enough familiarity with them that I could tell them apart. I recorded which language was used, who the participants were, how the language might change depending

on who came into the conversation, and whether there was any code switching. I was interested in whether students who did not share another language would speak with each other in English, and whether this varied by ability. I was also interested whether students who were fluent in conversational English because of the length of their time here would speak English or another language when they encountered other forced migrants with whom they shared another language besides English.

Fieldwork Data Analysis

I coded field and interview notes separately by individual and theme. Grouping all information about one individual provides a holistic picture of the individual, looking at factors of educational history, family and other outside emotional and financial support, relationships with instructors and peers, and other experiences living in the Greater Portland area that have shaped that individual's experience at the community college. By also sorting the data by theme, I was able to see if any dominant patterns emerged.

The major areas I was asking about and making note of during observations and interviews: support relationships (who, what kind), past experiences (high school, international schools, interrupted schooling, adult education), current experiences (challenges, interests, effects on future goals, racism/ feelings of otherness, institutional culture barriers), language, and other responsibilities (family, employment) evolved from my research questions. Each data point was tagged with basic demographic information about the individual in question, and when commonalities arose within themes, they were cross-referenced with characteristics of the forced migrants (country of origin, educational background, outside responsibilities, supports, etc.).

I compiled all my data and first coded for certain types of interaction, behavior and topics

based on the themes. I then further differentiated within each data set by looking at the demographics of the social support networks and quality of interaction (content, language, frequency). Interactions with faculty and staff were sorted by whether they were positive or negative. I broke down students' reactions to othering experiences by their race, religion and immigration status. Family data was separated into support and burdens, as well as the quality of the relationships and their influence academically and socially. I coded economic activity by type, duration, instances of conflict/hardship and expenditures (remittances, bills, school, fun). As I was interested in how the community college also worked to assimilate students, I looked for instances of confusion, error or blockages, when migrant students did not behave in the way those around them expected, or the community college prevented them from fulfilling their expectations, and the reactions.

The data I gathered will be put in conversation with the literature laid out in the beginning of the chapter in the following pages. My field site and participants are unique, but they are a part of the American immigrant experience. As such, at times my findings present new variations of this experience, and at times are corroborated by past work.

Chapter 3 SETTING

Southern Maine Community College is located in South Portland in the greater Portland metropolitan area of Maine. This region, while fairly small in terms of population (around half a million) and economic activity when compared with the rest of the country, is the largest in the state. The rest of Maine is rural with a low population density, and struggles economically due to the decline in domestic manufacturing. The demographics of the greater Portland area has undergone a racial shift in the last twenty odd years due to an influx of forced migrants, predominantly from Africa and the Middle East. There are also immigrants from other parts of Asia, as well as Central and South America, however their numbers are not as large, and are not the focus of this study.

Maine is facing a decline in its working population, as are other rural states, because people are moving to find more economic opportunities in large urban areas. However, there is potential for the state, for at least some of its cities, to reverse this downward population trajectory if the influx of immigrant continues to grow. This trend is part of a national shift in immigration away from the more traditional major metropolitan hubs of New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, and towards smaller cities, such as Portland. The small city to the north, Lewiston, where I have done previous research is another such location. Based on that previous research on Somali women forced migrants, the smaller cities are attractive because the scale seems more manageable for them, as they come from communities of similar size, and the immensity of some of the larger American cities can feel too intense (Lassila-Smith 2012, Huisman et al. 2011).

Instead of having to navigate a complex transportation infrastructure to navigate the

myriad of activities that make up daily life, smaller cities are less overwhelming for newcomers (Huisman et al. 2011, Lassila Smith 2012). Smaller cities have drawbacks, especially when they are new immigrant destinations, as supports are not always in place (Shandy and Fenelly 2006). Smaller cities have fewer resources in general, and if they have not been recent immigrant destinations their support services and schools are not accustomed to interacting with individuals with language barriers and trauma, i.e. forced migrants. Local populations can also often be hostile to newcomers with different languages and cultural behaviors and beliefs.

As forced migrants come to Maine, they have to find ways to make a life for themselves, at least for the foreseeable future. While some participants express interest in returning to their home countries permanently one day, in many cases that is seen as undesirable or unrealistic, though visiting is not out of the question. The forced migrants in this study see themselves in the US for a significant period of time and are looking to create opportunities for themselves through higher education at the community college. They are building on the pervasive discourse of “education (specifically higher education) as the key to the future.” For many minority and immigrant students in the US, community colleges are the vehicle by which they seek social mobility. Community colleges are attractive to these groups because of their high admittance rates, low tuition costs and local availability (Shaw and Coleman 2000, Bailey and Alfonso 2005). The students in my study also fit in this demographic, being either racial and/or religious minorities, and having low socio-economic status in the US due to the conditions that made them forced migrants. The community college is overwhelmingly a commuter campus, and all participants live in the surrounding communities. The following sections describe the geographic area and the services available in the area upon arrival. These services are crucial to setting the

stage for the future, as they provide the initial introduction and set up. Lastly, I describe the community college.

3.1 Map of Maine



Maine – The Greater Portland Area

Maine is known for being one of the “oldest and whitest” states in terms of demographics. This inflow of forced migrants who are predominantly people of color has visibly changed the tenor of the communities in which they are settling (US Census 2010). In addition to ethnic and racial diversity, many of the newcomers are Muslims from East Africa and the Middle East, who are creating a new religious minority within the state. Mosques have sprung

up around the state, and now there are women in hijabs where they had rarely, if ever, been seen just 25 years prior.

Maine, and Portland, was built by waves of immigrants in the past. Historically they have come from Europe and Canada. One of the most notable is the influx of Quebecois, now known locally as Franco-Americans. Despite initial friction due to language (largely French-speakers) and religious (Catholic versus Protestant) differences, Maine came to absorb these newcomers hostilities ceased, and heritage centers abound (Lindqvist 2008). The current forced migrants are facing similar challenges, though the main religious tensions are now between Muslims and non-Muslims, and the languages are different. Given the recentness of the new arrivals (the vast majority have arrived since the late 1990s), and their visibility, Portland, and Maine in general, is still struggling to come to a peaceful balance.

Foreign born individuals make up roughly 3.5% of the Maine's population, but the concentration in Portland is much higher, at 13.2%, according to the American Community Survey of 2014, published by the US Census Bureau. These statistics are only for Portland itself, and exclude a number of communities in the greater metropolitan area, where refugees have settled in similar numbers. It also excludes the children of immigrants born in Maine, of which there is a growing number. It is no coincidence that Lewiston, with its Somali population, and Portland, with its diverse forced migrant population, are the two areas of the state where population growth was recorded.

While some see immigrants as a potential solution to the population decline, some are openly hostile. The current second term governor, Paul LePage, is frequently heard disparaging "illegal immigrants," despite the fact that asylum-seekers are not illegal once they have started

the process, nor is there any significant population of undocumented immigrants in the state. He has said that they are the number one public health risk, citing the non-existent “ziki fly,” which he claims they bring to the state (Shepard 2016). In addition, he attributes the current high opioid addiction rates to “blacks and Hispanics” who come to Maine and “half the time they impregnate a young white girl before they leave, which is a real sad thing because then we have another issue we have to deal with down the road” (Philips 2016). His erroneous claims about immigrants, as well as racial minorities, embolden the sectors of the population with such xenophobic tendencies, as the claims have not triggered political consequences. Rather, such rhetoric has been further bolstered by the national rise of candidate (now President) Donald Trump. However, the Portland area is heavily democratic leaning, and did not support Gov. LePage in either election. The local government has worked to ensure continued support for immigrant groups, despite lack of state funding. Gov. LePage has spearheaded a number of general cuts to support services (food stamps, healthcare and disability services), as well as efforts to make citizenship a requirement for general assistance. Portland has committed local funds to fill in the gaps created by state level policies. These support many of the services accessed by forced migrants.

There are a number of agencies working to address the hurdles migrants need to overcome as they adjust to living in Maine. Language, employment, mental health, education, housing and interacting with bureaucratic institutions from the local to the federal level are some of the most pressing issues. Portland, as a major population center has more services available, including a branch of Catholic Charities, the only refugee resettlement agency that works with the federal government operating in Maine. Service providers largely work out of Portland

proper, but Catholic Charities serve individuals from the surrounding towns up to a radius of 100 miles, as well. There are also the Refugee Services Program, the Multi-Cultural Center and the Adult Education Program; all four will be described below.

While the overall immigrant population of Maine comes from all corners of the globe, in Portland the two countries that have produced the greatest number in recent years are Somalia and Iraq (Refugee Services FY 14). This is reflected in the statistics on foreign-born in Portland, which shows that 2,930 of the foreign-born in Portland are from Asia, while 3,354 come from Africa (US Census Bureau 2015). Again, the actual total of foreign-born individuals in the area is much higher, as these numbers exclude refugees living in the surrounding communities. Global conflicts are the cause of these forced migrant flows, hence their numbers reflect current areas of protracted conflict.

3.2 Population of Maine Cities

	Population	Whites	Blacks	Not English at home	Foreign-born	Asian-born	African-born
Maine 2000	1274923	96.90%	0.50%	7.80%	2.90%	6949	1067
Maine 2010	1328361	95.20%	1.20%	6.60%	3.50%	11130	4219
Portland 2010	66194	85.00%	7.10%	14.40%	12.50%	2484	3254
Westbrook 2010	17494	92.30%	2.30%	9.50%	7.40%	201	240
South Portland ⁸ 2010	25002	91.10%	2.10%	8.90%	6.90%	829	323

(American Community Survey)

The table shows that the foreign-born population is rising in Maine, Portland, and two

⁸ SMCC is in South Portland.

surrounding towns, where most of the migrants in this study live, have higher rates of both foreign-born individuals and homes where English is not the primary language than the rest of the state. They also have higher percentages of blacks, as the majority of blacks in the state are either foreign-born or second generation immigrants.

At the community college, the majority of the forced migrants are young adults, under the age of thirty. There is a significant older population as well, predominantly made up of women. The forced migrant students reflect the forced migrant populations in Portland as far as country of origin. The majority of students with forced migrant backgrounds come from Somalia. Somalia has been a major producer of forced migrants since the early 1990s when Siad Barre's regime had its final collapse. The country has been unstable since, with a number of US military operations, and transitional governments have failed to garner widespread legitimacy or longevity. Since Somalis have dominated the new arrivals dating back to the late 90s, many of the young children who arrived have now graduated from area high schools and are seeking post-secondary education. Through the 2000s, forced migrant students at the community college were overwhelmingly Somali, but now there are significant numbers of people coming from the Lakes Region (Rwanda and Burundi), as well as the Democratic Republic of Congo and Angola. Additionally, after the US invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, Afghani and Iraqi refugees became more numerous in the later 2000s. These military interventions increasingly destabilized both countries causing many civilians to flee. With increased unrest in the Middle East, the Asian migrants are becoming increasingly diverse, both in the greater Portland Area, as well as the community college. Somali students are largely in their early twenties, while forced migrant students from elsewhere can be anywhere from a few to many years older, and most did not

attend four years of high school in the US.

Support Services for Forced Migrants

There are a number of agencies that work with new arrivals to get them situated. The first agency for many is Catholic Charities, as it is the only organization that contracts with the federal government to resettle those classified as refugees. They provide case management starting from arrival and lasting five years, which helps with organizing basic needs (housing, food, and clothing), and also provides assistance with connecting forced migrants to English classes, education and employment opportunities, cultural orientation, medical services (including support for torture survivors), among other services and providers. Catholic Charities also provides similar assistance to asylum seekers for the first five years after their asylum has been granted.

Portland is also home to a number of secondary migrants, refugees who were resettled by government partners in other areas of the US but who chose to leave and come to Maine. Because the government grants that support refugees are tied to their original placement, secondary migrants largely become dependent on other forms of government assistance. Catholic Charities will serve secondary migrants for the first five years if they arrive in Portland within the first 30 days of their arrival in the US, as they have had some success with being able to transfer funds in such cases. Secondary migrants who arrive in Portland after the initial 30 day period can receive services through the Refugee Services Program, which is a division of Portland's Health and Human Services division. In addition, this office serves migrants who have been in the Portland area for more than one year, as well as individuals who have petitioned for asylum but whose decision is still pending. The Refugee Services Program offers similar case

management, support for trauma and torture survivors, cultural skills, and employment management as Catholic Charities. For the last five years, the Refugee Services Program has supported between six and eight hundred individuals yearly (Refugee Services FY 14).

In the interest of promoting self-sufficiency, the Refugee Services Program devotes much of its energy and resources to helping newcomers become employed. Currently the employment rate of forced migrants is just over 50%. This number reflects the challenges forced migrants face such as families and young children, speaking little English, being victims of trauma, and having employment and educational histories that do not translate easily to the new context.

Entry Level Positions for Forced Migrants

As refugees fleeing horrendous circumstances in their home countries, most of the migrants arrive with very little in the way of economic resources. Initially, many migrants find employment work in large industrial settings through assistance from either Catholic Charities or the Refugee Services Program. They find jobs in food packing, hospitality (cleaning), shipping and processing plants, and home healthcare. A number of men also drive taxis. The Refugee Services Program tends to place more men than women in full-time positions. As English skills improve over time and within the population, many women work in the area hospitals as low level nursing assistants (often on a per diem basis). Additionally, there are a growing number of small shops owned by forced migrants, who have become more established. Some of the parents of the younger students have established themselves as entrepreneurs, largely catering to other migrants. These types of moves up the employment ladder have largely happened for individuals who have accessed some education locally. Students in this study represent individuals who have already achieved some social mobility, as by and large they have moved beyond “unskilled

labor” jobs in industrial settings. Many of them now work in “low-skilled” positions in the large healthcare centers. As jobs that bring upward social mobility require schooling, forced migrants and their families need to access what is available to them locally. The focus of this study is on students at the community college, but in order to be accepted they need credentials signifying they have completed secondary school.

Primary and Secondary Education

Another office of importance for migrants in the area is the Multi-Cultural Center. It is here that all school-aged children from immigrant backgrounds have their language skills evaluated, in order to place them in the correct English class. The Multi-Cultural Center works with all the Portland area schools, from kindergarten to high school. There are four area high schools, three public and one private (they do offer a number of scholarships to refugee students and have a significant population of predominantly Somali students).

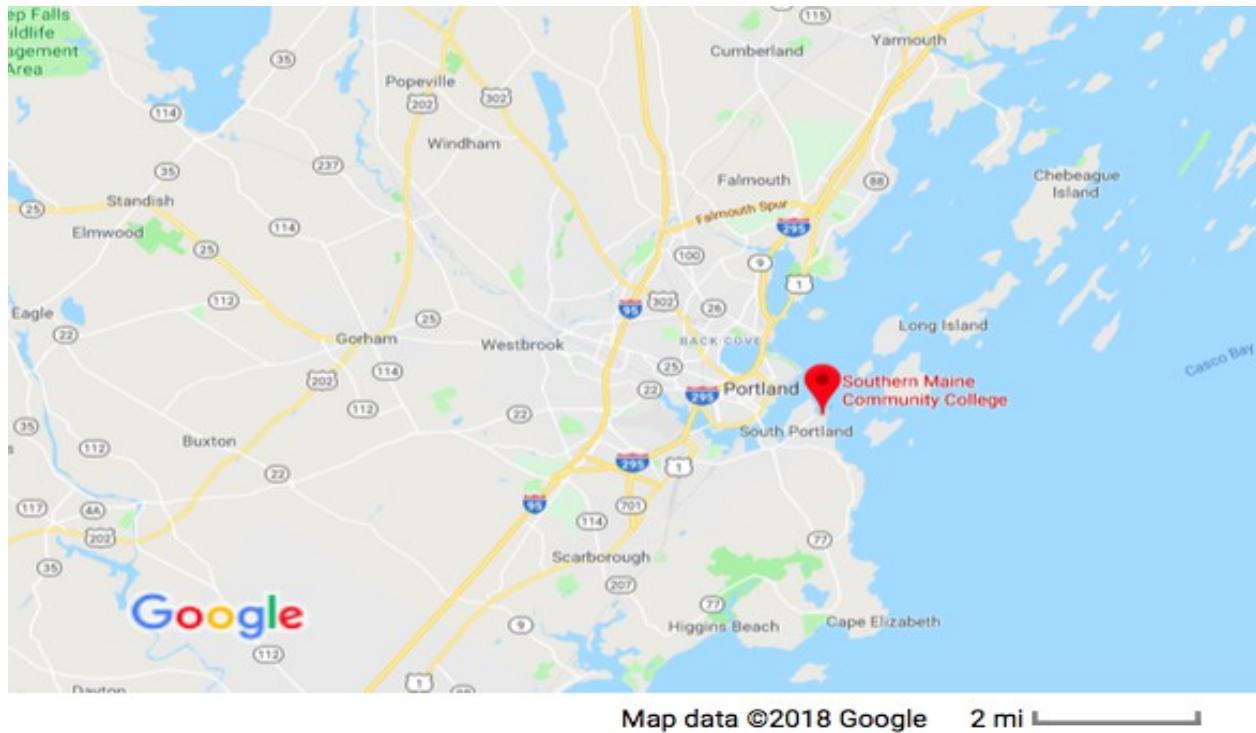
For many migrants who arrive as adults, the Portland adult education program is their first option for learning English prior to enrolling at the community college. For some forced migrants, Portland's adult education is the first formal education they have had, while others hold advanced degrees from their countries of origin and just need English skills and recognized credentials. It offers a wide variety of English Language Learner (ELL) courses, from basic communication to advanced (college preparatory) reading and writing. It also offers high school equivalency diploma courses, computer skills, and some medical courses, coding and CNA (Certified Nursing Assistant) certification. Classes are offered during the day, as well as at night, and are held in one of the popular forced migrant neighborhoods close to downtown Portland. The center is located in Portland itself, but like other support services, serves all the surrounding

communities. It is also accessible by public transportation. The classes often have no fees, and only require students to pay for materials (work books cost less than \$50, and students may pay a little each week). The classes offered at the adult education center have provided many of the credentials necessary for the modest social mobility described above. There is some collaboration between adult education staff and the community college, though not as much as some SMCC staff members would like.

The Community College – SMCC

For students looking to pursue a post-secondary education without leaving the greater Portland area, Southern Maine Community College (SMCC) offers a relatively low-cost option, with a generally low bar for acceptance. Yearly tuition for a full-time student is approximately \$2,700. This low rate can still be out of reach for some potential students, but there is some financial assistance available. Assistance is dependent on immigration status: official refugees are eligible to file for federal assistance in the form of loans and Pell Grants, whereas asylum seekers are not. Some private scholarships do support asylum seekers, but these are more difficult to find and receive. Given the low paying employment available for forced migrants upon arrival, and some limitations on financial support, affordability becomes very important. In comparison with other institutions of higher education in the area (the local state university branch, and three private institutions (at three different tiers)), the community college has a much lower cost.

3.3 Map of the Greater Portland Area and SMCC



The community college's affordability, plus its location in an area home to many migrants, has made it the most diverse within the Maine community college system. The college is proud of this, the president mentions this at events I attended, as well as in press releases regarding the university, and it is first on the college website. According to their 2015 fact book, the college's student body closely reflects the racial and ethnic diversity of the area; the college has 15% minority students, very close to the 16% in Portland that they cite, compared with Maine as a whole, which only has a 5% minority population. The full time faculty of SMCC is 100% white, adjunct faculty are 94% white. Currently there are just over 3,000 students: 42% full-time and 58% part-time students. The majority of students are from Maine (95%), and 68% receive financial aid of some sort.

The community college offers a variety of programs including associates degrees in Arts,

Applied Sciences, and Sciences, as well as some certificate programs. It was founded as a vocational institution; today 35% of students are pursuing liberal arts degrees, compared to 65% in career or trade programs. This significant number of students in liberal arts reflects a change in mission for the community college, from preparing students for trades to being an accessible first step to a four year post-secondary institution. One vocational program is still strong, the nursing program, for which SMCC is known. This program first requires students to take two years of general studies in the Pre-Health program before they can apply, and students report a long (2 year) waiting list. This is not enough to deter many, as half of all the vocational students are in this program.

The Problematic Numbers

As with many institutions of higher education, the community college is concerned with retention and graduation rates. For first-time full-time students who entered in 2012, after three years 37% had graduated or transferred. For the cohort from the year before, the total completion rate was 42%, with 9% graduating in 3-4 years (that data was not yet available for the 2012 cohort). There is no data for part-time students, which most of the forced migrants are.

These low graduation rates are likely linked to the low retention rates from fall to fall, which have dropped to just under 50% in the last five years, from just over 50% in the preceding five years. SMCC measures retention by looking at the percentage of students who were enrolled in the spring semester and who enroll for classes the following fall. Interestingly enough, class failure numbers do not seem to indicate this as cause for non-retention. Of the total classes attempted in 2014 by all students, 21% were unsuccessful, either withdrawn or failed. That means that in 79% of all the classes (including remedial) attempted the students earned a passing

grade.

Another factor for the low completion rates could also be the high percentage of students admitted who need some remedial classes in order to prepare them for college work, a number that is slowly dropping from the high sixties to 55% in 2015. Of the remedial classes, 20% are in English, and while this number includes some native-born students, many of these students come from migrant backgrounds. SMCC does not differentiate in this category between students who need ESL courses versus the remedial English writing course in their data publication.

From the internal data I was given access to, I looked at total numbers of ESL⁹ students and courses. In 2014-2015, 62 students enrolled in 208 ESL classes. In Fall 2015, 57 students took 155 ESL classes. This reflects the fact that each ESL student may be enrolled in as many as three ESL courses a semester. There are beginner, intermediate and advanced courses in Academic Reading, Writing and Speaking/Listening. A student may need to take up to nine classes over three semesters, before they are considered ready for regular college work. As with remedial courses, students may take credit-earning courses while they take ESL courses.

⁹ This is the term used by the community college. While the courses are called English as a Second Language, English is often the third, fourth, or even fifth language for these students.

3.4 ESL Building Front View



The ESL department is in the basement of this building. Most students enter directly through the back from the parking lot pictured below.

3.5 Parking Lot Entrance



Despite the ESL courses, internal data from 2006-2013 shows that students who are required to take ESL courses because of their entrance scores are largely not graduating. Only 11% of students who take the full cycle of ESL courses and pass with either an A- or an A (41%) graduate. That is well below the total graduation rate. Not only are they not reaching graduation, they are not doing nearly as well in regular education English as they did in ESL. Of the 41% who pass their ESL courses with an A or A-, only 31% pass the first required English course with an A or A-. 27% of those students pass the second required English class with an A or A-. The second required English class, which is literature based, seems to be the greater challenge, but also doing well in the course is more indicative of graduation. Of the students who did well in ESL and the first English class 16% graduate. For the second English class the rate is 27.5%. While it is higher, it is still significantly lower the total graduation rate. That data in the following chapters offers some insight into this issue.

The community college makes attempts to address issues of retention and graduation rates for the whole school. During the summer of my fieldwork, the academic support center runs two multi-week programs to assist in college readiness and retention. This summer is their second time offering these programs. One program is residential and the other a day program. Two peer tutors from the writing center work at these programs over the summer. The programs are designed to acclimate students to college-type work and life (residential), and general college readiness. They are geared towards students who have been deemed in need of remedial math or English because of entrance exams, and the programs are designed to boost these skills. When I ask the program director about the summer programs, she says that they have been successful in so far as at the end of the programs, students tested out of 60 remedial classes.

Community colleges present themselves as an important vehicle for social mobility through easier access to higher education, especially for minority and immigrant students. The numbers at the community college reflect the success of this message in drawing students in, but the outcomes for the majority are not the promised success. The community college has a high rate of placing graduates, and therefore does promote social mobility, but this is only true for the minority who actually make it to graduation. Forced migrant students, the majority of the ESL students, are underrepresented in the graduation rates.

3.6 Front Entrance Campus Center



The Center

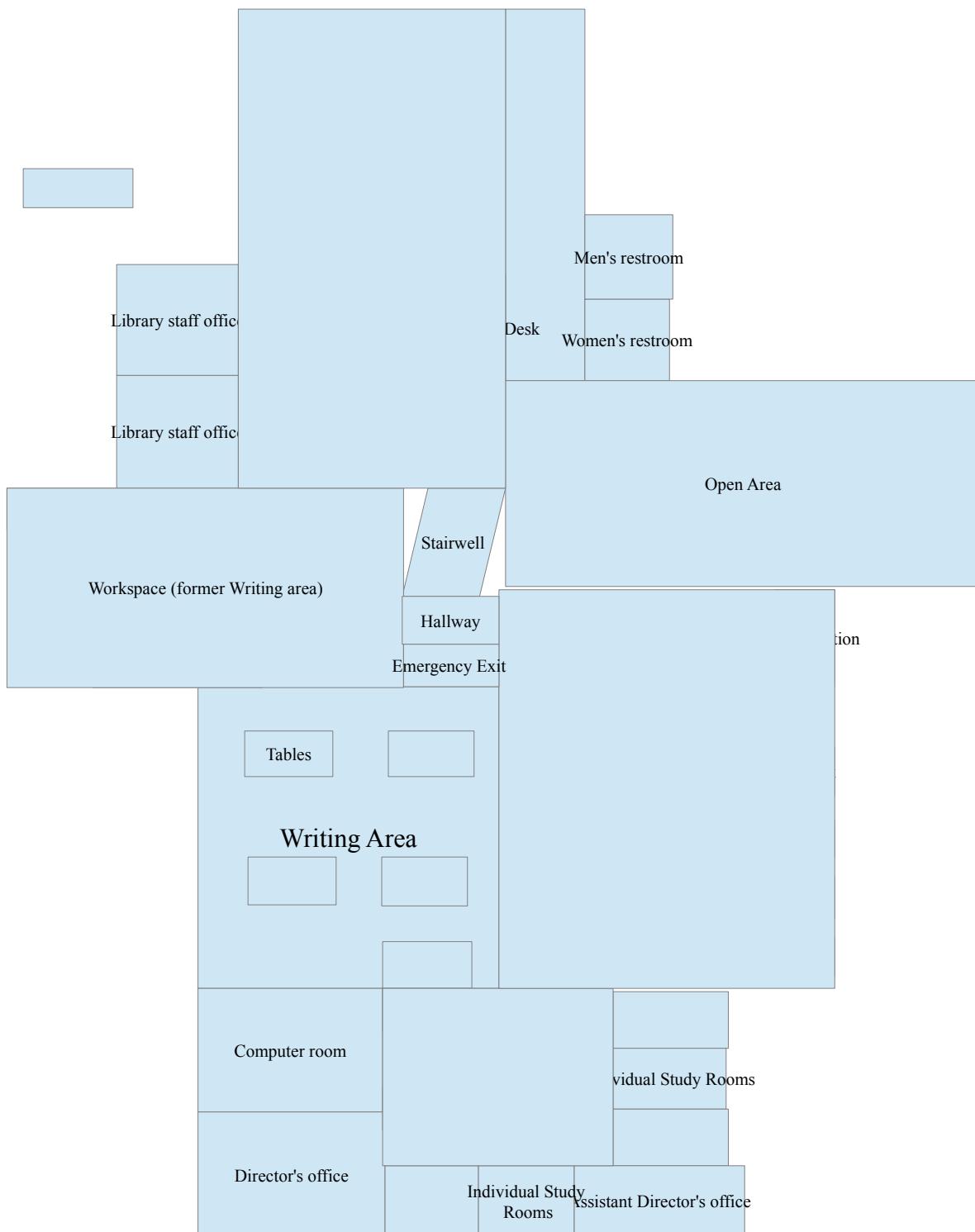
When one climbs the stairs to the second floor of the Campus Center where the center is located, one can either enter the library, an open study area, or proceed around the corner to what now houses the academic support center. In a large opening behind the front desk is one half of

the support center. Here is a computer with a card reader, where students can check in if they need help with math, science, accounting, statistics, circuits etc. The tutors for these subjects sit at long tables behind the front desk, and when a student checks in and indicates a need for help in their specialty, the tutors will approach them. The system functions on a first come first serve basis. Despite everyone referring to this section of the center and its services as “math,” the tutors cover many more subjects.

One used to pass through a doorway to the left of the front desk to enter the writing portion of the center. However, during the summer renovation, it was moved to a jut-out to the right of the tables in the math area. What had been the writing center remains an open work area with computers, tables and chairs connected to the library space. After the summer, writing tutors set up at three tables. Instead of checking in at the computer, students needing writing help sign up for thirty-minute slots on sheets by tutor (this was one of the small adjustments during my fieldwork; initially there was one sign-up sheet per day, with multiple slots at times when more than one tutor was working, but this changed to each tutor hanging their sheet with slots corresponding to the length of their shift). Students come and sign their name for a thirty-minute slot, which does not have to be immediate, but they are limited to the sign-up sheets currently hanging (if a student comes in at 10:30, and wants help at 4:30, they can only schedule that if the tutor who will be working at 4:30 has already arrived to hang their sheet). At the start of every appointment, the writing tutor checks the student into the database. This check-in process entails documenting which class the student is seeking assistance for, the assignment's due date, whether the student has a copy of the assignment, can explain the assignment, as well as how they describe their needs.

If one keeps walking past the open area with tables, there are a number of smaller rooms. A computer enclave is to the right, and small study rooms line the left and back wall. The computer enclave has eight computers, and operates on a free first come first serve basis. The individual rooms have sign up sheets, and the stated policy is that students may only occupy a room for two hours at a time. Two of the smaller rooms along the back and left wall serve as the offices of the assistance director, Sarah, and the director.

3.7 MAP OF ACADEMIC SUPPORT CENTER



The academic support center has undergone a number of changes as it adapts to the influx of forced migrant students in the last decade. Largely these changes have come in the form of expansion of services. There is an air of responsiveness present and smaller logistical changes happen frequently. One large change that happened during my fieldwork was a major renovation of the space over the summer.

The staff at the support center has also undergone a number of changes in order to offer more services to migrant students. Sarah, the assistant director, has worked there about ten years, and has seen both the population of students being served and the services being offered change. Her current employment as the assistant director is indicative of the response by the college to its changing student population, as her educational background is in literacy with a concentration in teaching English to speakers of other languages. Another major staffing change was the job description for the director. The director whose background was in library science left midway through my fieldwork, and the education requirement of library science was removed for new candidates. The assistant director's preferred candidate, who did end up in the position, came from a college in Lewiston (where I had done my previous research with Somali forced migrants). These staffing changes indicate a trend towards prioritizing forced migrant students, and recognizing both their heavy use of the center and their unique needs. When she started, Sarah was only writing tutor. The center now employs a number of professional tutors (mostly adjunct professors from the college) and peer tutors for all subjects.

The academic support center provides study spaces and one-on-one tutoring. It is divided into two areas, referred to as math and writing. For each area there are separate tutors, and separate work spaces. Tutors in the math area are quite varied. They cover various levels of

mathematics, as well as science: biology, chemistry, physics, and some of them cater to the courses for supporting medical careers. There are a number of peer student tutors (of both genders), and a few come from migrant backgrounds. Peer tutors must earn As in the courses they tutor and be recommended by their instructor. Professional tutors are adjuncts, and cover tutoring for their classes as well as other related fields. The woman who runs the front desk, Sharon, also doubles as an accounting tutor, and there is also a student employed to help cover the front desk and direct people to the appropriate help. Given the variety of subjects covered by this half of the academic center, there are generally four to five tutors working. Schedules of coverage by subject are posted, so students can be sure to come during times when there is someone specializing in the material they need help with. These tutors each have multiple subjects that they tutor, so one may be available for basic algebra and biology, another for accounting, statistics and physics, a third for chemistry, calculus and engineering, etc. If a need for a subject appears during a time no tutor with that specialty is available, I often observe tutors stepping outside of their comfort zones to offer what help they can, though they also admit when they are out of their depth. Students come with assignments for homework that they are struggling with, and the tutors work through the problems with them. As concepts arise in problem sets the tutors do some reteaching, give more sample problems, work through examples, until the student feels confident enough to do the work on their own. Other times students have specific questions about concepts they do not understand, and tutors explain and reteach, but this is less common than the first approach.

The writing area is more narrowly focused. It is designed to offer another level of support to community college students who regularly need to write papers to demonstrate understanding

in a wide variety of classes. The emphasis is on structure, format and mechanics. Most commonly students arrive with an assignment already written, and go over it with the tutors. Tutors also help students plan out their writing, offer suggestions for research, and increasingly work on explaining texts. While writing is an aspect of all subjects, approximately 70% of tutor appointments deal with assignments from English courses, and 30% involve assignments for other subjects.

Writing tutors are either student peer tutors, or professionals. Peer tutors work more hours, and cover the beginning and end of the day, with the professionals working alongside them during the peak hours in the middle of the day. Each semester there are three professional tutors, and one works over the summer as well. The professional tutors are either adjuncts in the English or ESL departments. The professional tutors are more consistent over time, given that they do not graduate. However, there is some turnover. One professional does not return the second semester due to family/personal reasons that cut into her availability, and the woman who replaces her dies a few weeks into the next semester. That leaves the center short one professional tutor, though the director is able to hire another peer tutor and extend another professional tutor's hours.

Peer tutors have significantly more turnover than professionals. This is largely due to structural constraints. Students are required to have taken the two required English courses on literature and composition before they are able to tutor. This means that they already have completed at least two semesters, and for full-time students, the degrees at SMCC take around two years to complete, leaving full-time students with only two semesters left during which to tutor. Some of the peer tutors with whom I work have been there longer, as many students take

less than full course loads each semester to balance work and school. These tutors work for about two years before they graduate and move on.

3.8 TABLE OF SUPPORT STAFF

Name	Position	Years at SMCC	Approximate Age	Race
Sarah	Assistant Director	Ten years	Mid 30s	White
Linda	Director (second half)	First semester	Early 50s	White
Ralph	Director (first half)		Late 60s	White
Sharon	Administrator	Four years	Late 50s	White
Jenn	ESL instructor/ professional tutor	Eleven years	Mid 40s	White
Angela	English adjunct/ professional tutor	Seven years	Mid 50s	White
Cathy	English adjunct/ professional tutor	Six years	Late 40s	White
Diana	English adjunct/ professional tutor (deceased)	First semester	Mid 50s	White
Mat	Peer tutor	2 years	Mid 20s	White
Jared	Peer tutor	2 years	Mid 20s	White
Melanie	Peer tutor	1 year	Early 40s	White
Tina	Peer tutor	2 years	Mid 20s	Asian
John	Peer tutor	1 year	Mid 20s	White
Jessica	Peer tutor	First semester	Mid 20s	White

Students gather with their friends regularly to study and socialize, or to meet for group projects or study groups based on classes. The table arrangements in the academic support center also facilitate some conversation between students who otherwise do not know each other. Students working together might start discussing an assignment, move on to commenting on the instructor, and end up giving each other suggestions for future courses, for example.

As many students come to the center for help with specific assignments, ad hoc study groups would sometimes occur. The space has many large tables, and so one or two students working on something share the space with other students. Often groups of friends spend time together at the academic support center. They pass the time between classes, attempt to get homework done, or just socialize.

The academic support center is a mixed social and academic space. Students bring their lunch up from the cafe downstairs and eat while they chat. Many conversations flow between personal and academic topics, and the relationships and the support networks they form likewise combine the two. I use support networks here to include all the people with whom students interact who in some way contribute to that student's success. This expands the view beyond friends and family, and includes study partners, group participants, tutors and instructors. Most migrant students' families have little experience with the US educational system, and thus are not able to offer assistance in navigating the complex bureaucracy (though of course they provide other support such as emotional and economic). This requires students to search out other sources of support. In some cases this can happen along formal channels such as advisors, instructors or financial aid counselors, but this study seeks to include all the informal support that happens between students as well.

The total context is important in shaping the experience of the forced migrants at SMCC. SMCC is part of the greater Portland area community, and how this community provides services to individuals is based on how they are classified, by immigration status, age and language ability. These services are instrumental to forced migrants on their way to SMCC. Social acceptance and cultural citizenship are influenced by how individuals classify forced

migrants based also on race and religion, which affects perceptions of belonging. How SMCC provides schooling for students and the ways it classifies students makes certain resources available. This access can aid those who are given resources (transfer credits or financial aid for example), while making the path harder for those whom it denies.

INTERLUDE - Give Us Your Tired...

“Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”

All my participants would be welcomed by the Statue of Liberty according to Emma Lazarus in her poem 'New Colossus,', whose quote gives the name of this interlude. They were all practically homeless and tempest-tost, though at some point in their lives a number of them had been comfortable and some even wealthy so perhaps they are not wretched (see Table of Key Informants). However, before arriving in the US they have lived through extreme danger and instability and witnessed unspeakable violence. Long-term residents of refugee camps have been in very precarious situations for years, sometimes even decades. My participants are widows and orphans, but above all, survivors. They arrive in the US looking for safety, and acceptance. They find safety, but because of their minority status as immigrants and people of color (for many), acceptance is harder to find.

“If I’m there, I’m dead”

Amina's father was killed in Somalia shortly before her mother died from complications of a pregnancy. Loss of life is a threat that these women are familiar with. Amina tells me the story of when she was in high school in Portland and the fire alarm went off.

We were sitting in class and the alarm goes off. The teacher says we have to go outside. “What if there is a fire?” It was winter and it was cold outside, so I did not want to go. I was not afraid of the fire. I couldn't see any danger. I think because I have seen real danger and lived through it, that I didn't take it seriously.

Physical safety is not often articulated as one of the benefits of living in the US as the

mainstream population cannot largely not fathom the daily violence and uncertainty that forced migrants lived with previously. For the forced migrants, safety is the primary, implicit cause for their flight.

Like Fartun, whose story is told in the introduction, these histories of violence came out in passing and are not central to how the forced migrant women describe themselves. The quote at the beginning of this section comes from Angelina, who fled Eritrea, leaving behind her three children. I have to ask her explicitly about why she came to Maine before she tells me the following:

Angelina: I'm a refugee, I came as refugee. My father, he was in the government there, and then they kill him and threaten his family. I have to go. If I am there, I am dead. So I went to Ethiopia, and then Sudan. In Sudan I was in the camp, and from there they resettled me here in Portland.

Astrid: What about your children, are they in danger?

Angelina: No, they are part of their father's family, they won't hurt them.

She does want to bring them to the US so they can be together, but at times she feels conflicted about whether or not she should really bring them here. She misses them, she feels they "are missing time to love each other" while they are apart. She also wants them to have the educational and economic opportunities available in Maine that are not possible in Eritrea, but she also sees drawbacks. Currently, her children are safe. Angelina feels discriminated against because of her immigration status and her race, which she did not feel before coming to the US. Here she constantly feels like she is fighting a losing battle for full citizenship, economic, political and social, and it exhausts her.

We are not blessed. Maybe if we were blessed we would stay home and we wouldn't have to come here and get this whole situation in our face, you know. But, I just, I feel like I'm not blessed I'm not, I'm just getting punishment from God, you know. I feel so frustrated and kind of falling apart, I want to give up. But I have many friends and they call me, no no don't give up, keep going, keep going.

Even after ten years you know you can graduate, and then by the time I go to hospital [to work as a nurse], you know I start going school since I came here and I can't graduate and I don't know why.

She does not want to expose her children to feeling this kind of frustration, but at the same time feels that there are potentially many opportunities for them here, if she could only fight hard enough for them.

I don't know, because I don't have hope of getting any peace of mind here, and then how I'm going to bring them here, that is my question. Then how long are we going to be separated, that's also making me crazy. So maybe some time ... And then if they like it they can stay, and if they don't like we can go back.

Despite increased opportunities, she is not sure that her children could accept what they would face from the anti-immigrant and racist people she encounters living here. She is willing to work as hard as need be (she has two jobs on top of the classes she takes). However, she is not sure any amount of effort on her part would make people truly accept her. She is angry at what she sees as her second-class cultural citizenship, and speaks to its unfairness, confronting people at her jobs and school. She does not see her life in the US as a source of pride, but as a constant struggle. She works hard, studying and at her jobs, but she does not see herself advancing, she feels stuck. She is safe, but stagnant and alone. She is not able to build the life she would like, and often thinks of the positive things she left behind.

Relationships to both the US and the other countries in which they have lived and retained connections through family members and other personal investments are colored by the political, social and economic realties they encounter. Angelina has never before encountered discrimination based on her phenotype, nor her immigration status. This keeps her from feeling connected to the US, and at times she longs for home where her family is and she does not have

to fight such situations. However, in Eritrea she became subject to persecution because of her family connections, and it caused her to flee.

For Aisha, her US citizenship is the first she has ever had. Her parents are Iraqis, who fled to Kuwait during the first Gulf War after her father was accused of being a traitor. Aisha was then born in Kuwait, but as her parents were forced migrants, she had no rights to citizenship and so she had no official papers. Without papers she had not been able to attend school. From Kuwait her parents moved to Jordan, where she faced similar barriers due to her lack of any citizenship. In Jordan, her parents applied for resettlement to the US. The US Government's chapter on refugee resettlement demonstrates an understanding of lack of proper documentation given the reality of refugee producing situations: "Refugees are often unable to provide documentary evidence, however, due to the circumstances that give rise to flight. In such cases, testimony, if credible, may be enough to establish eligibility for refugee status without corroborating evidence" (Gov. of USA 2013:5). However, for Aisha, her parents' testimony was nearly not deemed credible, and she told me they were advised to leave her behind. Her liminal state was the direct result of the US intervention in Iraq, as it had resulted in their flight. However, years later this liminal state became the reason to suggest exacerbating her already precarious state (by separating a young girl from her parents) for which the US was culpable. Her mother refused, and prevailed. Based on Aisha's experience with the difficulties presented by not having any citizenship, her US passport means a lot to her.

I finally feel like I really belong somewhere. This is my country now. I came here when I was 12 and they put me in seventh grade. Now I am here at SMCC. I started in ESL classes, but now I am in regular English. I want to keep studying and become a doctor, or maybe a nurse. Something medical so that I can help people and get a good job.

Having access to formal schooling is important to Aisha. It is what she was not able to do before coming to the US, where she first had official refugee status, a green card, and eventually citizenship. She sees her progress, from none in Kuwait and Jordan, to starting in seventh grade in the US. Eight years later, through that schooling available to her in the US, she is now at the point that she is taking regular college classes.

This new sense of belonging in the US, and her difficult past in other countries, does not prevent Aisha from embracing cultural ties to her past. Since her arrival, she has taught herself to be literate in Arabic via Youtube. She is extraordinarily proud of herself for doing so, and she says it made her parents also very happy. Being literate in Arabic allows her to read the Koran, and access news and other media from the region of her family background. This is important and exciting for her and her parents she tells me, because they are both illiterate, and now she can help them stay in touch with what is happening. She wants to try and help her mother also learn to read. Despite the Islamophobia so prevalent in the US, and the ongoing conflicts in the region, Aisha does not see her belonging to the US from precluding her from developing ties to cultural practices from the places she has moved beyond, or actively pursuing Islamic practices like learning to read the Koran.

There is no denying that the women in this study have lived lives that are different than those experienced by women in the US. However, there are limited categories of difference in the cultural understandings of the US, some based on race, ethnicity, religion, and – pertinent here – citizenship and immigration. This born elsewhere status is a fundamental source of being identified as an “other”. There are preconceived notions about what it means to be certain kinds of “other” citizens, a dominant one being that all those who arrive in the US must be eternally

grateful for the opportunity, so much so that they willingly cast off their other identifications of “otherness”. However, the women in this study fail to do this, maintaining transnational ties to their countries of origin.

The US, as a nation-state, was founded by immigrants from Europe, and has a long tradition of new arrivals from other parts of the globe. Despite the variety of backgrounds represented by the people who inhabit its territory, the dominant discourse espoused by US politicians and other public figures is a very traditional perception of itself as a nation-state and what citizenship means. Traditional views of citizenship link it with nationalism and loyalty, and imply a shared, constructed past of all members (Anderson 1991). Very much in line with traditional immigration theories of assimilation, state-level policies and practices push conformity to values of family composition, economic independence, loyalty, and submitting to surveillance and regulation by governmental bodies.

Tsing (2015) argues that current immigrants no longer feel the same drive to assimilate upon their arrival as did the immigrants in the post WWII era. She cites Japanese immigrants experience in the internment camps as a motivating factor to discard any outward displays of their immigration background. At that time, the US was a place with worker protections and other programs that allowed immigrants who did this and found work to provide stable, upwardly mobile lives for their families. The deterioration of state protections and services in the 1980s lead to new waves of immigrants no longer assimilating as it became increasingly impossible to move up even if one did so. Despite the fact that immigrants increasingly do not seek to disappear into the mainstream, the dominant view remains that they should, even leading some to lament how the new generations of immigrants are more problematic and less grateful

than the immigrants of the past.

Because they do not conform to perceptions regarding traditional citizenship and grateful victims who now embrace the US with singular loyalty, the women in this study demonstrate the need for a new, more widespread transnational approach to understanding the migrant experience. The new approach should take into account the various ways people relate to states and other governmental institutions as they strategically adopt, adapt to or reject institutional pressures facing the fact that these government institutions discriminate against their non-conformity to assimilative pressures. The lack of this leads some to increasingly problematize the forced migrant women; they are seen as the “wrong type of immigrants.”

CHAPTER 4 BECOMING FAILURE FROM SUCCESS

High school graduates are expected to be literate, both able to understand and produce text that has the level of complexity designated to a 12th grade level. They are also assumed to have certain math skills and a general understanding of US history and civics. At issue here is the lack of literacy in English as demonstrated both on the entrance exams of forced migrants who had diplomas from local high schools, and in the work I see while in the field. So while the official recognition of failure does not present itself until after graduation, what happens in high school is very much a part of the story, because the assumption is that graduating from high school means that a student is ready to be successful at the next academic level (i.e. they learned the expected skills while in high school), because there is no intermediary step. There is, however, an intermediary gap, ESL and remedial classes where many forced migrant students fall into as a result of their poor preparation by local high schools.

This chapter follows the directive laid out by Varenne and McDermott (1998) in looking at how schools in the US make it known that students are successes or failures. Sorting students in successes and failures is one of the quintessential tasks of US schools. Conferring diplomas is an official record of success, just as a recorded failing grade, or standardized test score that falls beneath the threshold dictated by the school is a failure. Such failures become full “status degradation ceremonies,” where students are compared to standards set by the schools and found lacking. Such degradations become difficult to move on from, even when a student is able to demonstrate success in other areas, as the failure becomes a part of what the school identifies the student as being able to do.

The forced migrant students in this study are not official ultimate failures in the community college as they are currently enrolled when I encountered them. However, many have small failures on their academic record: a remedial class requirement, a course dropped or failed, and most commonly a low ACCUPLACER (standardized entrance test) score. Forced migrant students are treated differently (though no official record exists of this) and required to take an additional section of the test because they do not speak English at home. However, their difference is not documented officially, as there is no official record of who takes the additional section, and no questions about citizenship or country of origin are asked. This is part of demonstrating equality: the college cannot be accused of discrimination on these grounds if officially it does not know. However, this occludes the practical difference the additional ACCUPLACER scores make for forced migrants, placing them in a lengthy lower remedial track. These initial failures do not yet amount to failure at the post-secondary level, yet the overall numbers of SMCC show that such markers correlate with later drop out (which is also witnessed during my research to be examined in Chapter 8). These failure are produced and become recognized within the community college, though the skills gap that may lead to their recognition is a product of their earlier schooling.

The local high schools are awarding diplomas to students who do not have the student skills such diplomas would indicate. In effect, there are many students who believe themselves to be ready for community college since they have graduated from high school, even though they lack the English reading and writing skills to be successful. Many of them end up in ESL and other remedial classes that increase their risk for eventual non-graduation. The largest ethnic group is Somali, and within this group a significant portion completed high school locally after

arriving around the middle school years. This population of local graduates brings to light one of the major hurdles that forced migrant students face as they try to pursue social mobility through education at the community college.

This chapter will focus on the experience of students who arrived in their pre-teen to early teen years and graduated from a high school in the Portland area. The students describe being isolated in ESL classrooms in high school. When their graduation dates drew close, guidance departments would walk them through an application to SMCC, telling them they would be accepted. What they were not told is that many of them would still be required to take remedial classes, mostly ESL, which they would pay for but that would not earn them credits towards graduation. By isolating forced migrant students from the white American population, high schools create a two tiered education system, with one tier that prepares students for post-secondary, and one that does not. Gitlin and colleagues (2003) find that ESL classrooms often function to educationally segregate linguistic minorities and serve as barriers to educational achievement for minority students.

Forced migrants, more commonly than other migrants, are likely to be students with limited or interrupted formal education (SIFE). The circumstances which cause them to be forced from their countries of origin often disrupt their formal education. Ros (2016) finds that a lack of familiarity with school settings created increased difficulties, as did limited literacy in their first language. SIFE students face the typical immigrant language barrier, and could benefit from increased understanding of their circumstances on the part of teachers and staff (trauma, interrupted curricula, multiple national curricula). In addition, the SIFE designation is often misused to label students as requiring more remediation than schools and teachers are willing to

provide, instead of describing their educational background. For example, Bartlett (2007) finds that the SIFE label is used to indicate students who are beyond the capabilities of the schools. This leads to teachers treating the students as if they lack any academic skills or potential, which is the very opposite of what they need. One student, once she had a teacher with a similar linguistic background and who saw her as capable, was able to tap into her talents and perform at a high level. “Students … have better and positive learning experiences when they are taught in a developmental rather than a deficit manner and are allowed to build on their existing knowledge” (Moll and Ruiz in Hos 2016).

A Note on Forced Migrants' Education prior to Arrival in US

The majority of the participants in this study had some formal education outside of the US. Most refugees¹⁰ are not settled directly from their country of origin, and often attend schools in the countries of first (second or third) asylum. While schools and other agencies, like the Multi-Cultural Center in Portland, evaluate students' language ability upon arrival, little is generally known about their education prior to arrival in the US. Due to the protracted nature of current global conflicts, the UNHCR, which oversees refugee education has shifted towards schooling using the curriculum and language of instruction in the country of asylum (Dryden Peterson 2015). Refugees who have travelled through multiple countries on their “journey” have thus been educated in multiple languages and curricula. They are always trying to catch up to a new language and system, leaving little chance for mastery.

Dryden Peterson (2015) identifies three major hurdles for refugee students prior to resettlement: language barriers, teacher-centered pedagogy, and discrimination. In many cases, to address language barriers, students are placed well below their age-appropriate grade, which

10 Here I am referring to official refugees as classified by both the UNHCR and US ICE.

means they do not receive instruction of academic content appropriate to their age. Once refugees are resettled, they often face another language barrier, and in the US face the isolation in ESL classroom described above compounded by missing content. Teacher-centered pedagogy in pre-resettlement contexts differs greatly from the type of instruction found in most primary and secondary schools in the US. Instruction is largely composed of lecture, and questions posed by the teachers and students center around recall of previous information relayed orally and written on the chalk board. This means that when refugee students are resettled in the US, they are often quiet, unsure of how to ask exploratory questions or how to participate in classroom discussions, misleadingly bringing their US teachers to the conclusions that they are not engaged, or have little to contribute, when in fact they are displaying appropriate classroom behavior according to their previous educational experience (Dryden Peterson 2015:143). Because students are not seen by teachers as engaging as expected in the classroom, teachers discriminate against them, believing they are not adequately interested in their schooling. But this discrimination is not the first the students encounter. Often first countries of asylum are geographically adjacent to the refugees' country of origin and have been negatively affected by the refugee-producing circumstances. This can lead to outright hostility and politicized instruction of refugee students. Having these kinds of experiences can make refugee students and their families even more wary of schools when they reach their resettlement countries (such as the US). These three factors do not even include the challenges refugees face in attending school, whether it be due to violence (insecure routes to school), policy barriers, infrastructure damage, and on-going migration, all of which result in refugees attending schools at lower rates than nationals.

High School Graduates – Not Yet Failures

There is currently a lot of pressure on American high schools to increase their graduation and post-secondary attendance rates. This is part of the current era of accountability in public schools, where such statistics are gathered at local, state and federal levels to determine the success of the schools. The schools are themselves very invested in performing success, regardless of whether students are actually learning what people expect to learn in American schools. Forced migrant students who graduate locally are a part of the school's success story, particularly those in this study as they are in post-secondary school. Once these statistics are published and the students enroll in post-secondary education, the statistics are no longer a part of the high school's accountability. What this success hides is the fact that many of the students do not have the skills expected of a high school graduate, which quickly results in preliminary identification as failures in the community college.

Much like schools are invested in demonstrating their accountability in their students' successful graduation, they also work to increase their numbers of post-secondary enrollment. I ask my participants how they came to SMCC in the first place, and their narratives largely follow a similar pattern to the account Hassan, from Somalia by way of a refugee camp in Kenya, gives me.

Astrid: What made you come to SMCC?

Hassan: They told me to.

Astrid: Who is they?

Hassan: The guidance people at Portland High School. They gave me an application and said write this here, and this here... Then they will take you and you will go to college.

At no point in this conversation does Hassan tell me he had wanted to go to college, nor does he

mention any discussion of other post-secondary options. The guidance department appears to be taking advantage of the community college mission to have a largely open admissions policy to increase their own statistics improving their image and reputation. It increases their own standing to construct Hassan's, and other students' like him, success as college-going individuals. However, the open admissions policy renders the statistic largely meaningless, ultimately only demonstrating the ability of the guidance department to get a student to fill out and sign an application.

A part of the mission of the community college is to be accessible to students who may otherwise not be able to access post-secondary education. Many students are accepted and then required to either complete certain levels of ESL courses, or remedial English or math courses. This practice does nothing to hold high schools accountable to making sure their students are graduating with the ability to have their skills recognized as sufficient to be successful at the next step in their schooling trajectory. When the students then go on to fail, or perform poorly on the standardized entrance exam to SMCC, it is no longer on the high schools, but on the individual students themselves. This can be understood through Bonilla-Silva's racial framework of abstract liberalism, where actions are solely a matter of individual choice, and ignore the structural constraints that society or schools place on individuals. When the structural constraints include segregation into ESL classrooms where a lower tier of academic instruction is taught to foreign students, in this case forced migrants from Somalia who are recognized in the US as people of color, this perpetuates the racial stratification (both blackness and Islam), as well as the marginalization of immigrants. This continues in the testing of such students during their enrollment, where they are again sorted into the lower tier of taking remedial classes.

The current system at SMCC participates in marginalizing students who are not able to pass their entrance exam. As their failure is now on them, forced migrants are now faced with the additional burden of paying for classes that are described as imparting the skills the students should have received in high school. This is a population with limited financial means, and so placing another financial responsibility on them just increases their chances for non-completion and remaining at the lower end of the socio-economic order.

The SMCC admissions office makes the determination where students need remedial coursework based on scores on the ACCUPLACER test all incoming students are required to take. The ACCUPLACER is a standardized multiple-choice exam that has three sections, one each on reading, writing and math. The scores are used by SMCC to determine placement in remedial classes. In the US tradition of equality (not equity), forced migrants take this test with the same threshold as incoming students who have had 12 years of schooling in the US. However, students who acknowledge having a home language other than English are submitted to an additional section of the test. They are required to complete additional ESL sections on reading, writing and speaking, and those scores will determine placement in ESL courses at SMCC. The college does not collect this data, because it could be considered discriminatory. This additional section is an opportunity for the school to measure the forced migrant students and find them lacking. The tests “are organized for the purpose of documenting who is doing better than whom, and a point this way or that can make for a quite different institutional biography” (Varenne and McDermott 1998:31). The more times one is measured, the more chances there are to come up short. For many migrant students, the ACCUPLACER is the first indicator of failure, being found wanting. These tests are seen as objective measures and they are

given authority to determine everything from college readiness to licensure.

Passing either the ESL or the remedial courses does not prepare them to be successful in regular courses. All the students who are in the two required English classes have either been found to have sufficient English skills via ACCUPLACER or have passed the ESL and remedial classes assigned to them based on their ACCUPLACER score. Yet many of the forced migrant students in these regular education classes who come to the writing center write sentences without academic English grammatical structure, and do not fully understand the stories and other texts they are given to read. Vocabulary is a large issue, but in addition, even when they look up each unknown word, they miss vital information, or are not able to connect information across the text.

Students are allowed to take some non-English general education courses without having first passed their required remedial courses. Students who, according to the ACCUPLACER do not have the academic English skills to succeed at the community college are allowed to take courses on psychology, sociology, medical assisting, etc. These courses include a lot of reading and written work in academic English.

Amina, a Somali woman in her early thirties, graduated from a local high school and has been a student at the community college at least part time for six years. She still struggles with some reading comprehension, and her written work is full of grammatical errors. Amina comes to me often when I am in the support center, and I become quite familiar with her and her school work. She is in the pre-nursing program, and has already passed the remedial classes the community college required when she started. One day she shows me a USA Today article she was asked to read and answer questions about for homework. USA Today is written at an eighth

grade reading level. The article covers the differences between bacteria and viruses, and the questions ask some general as well as specific questions like who performed the research this article is based off on. Amina struggles to identify correct answers from the text. Initially she identifies the author of the article as the originator of the research. When asked why antibiotics are not effective against viruses she points to the paragraph describing the two types of viruses used in the study. Over the course of my time in the field, Amina and I go over many written assignments of hers. In most sentences her thoughts are understandable to me, but she struggles with using the prepositions, complex verb tenses and articles required in academic English. On the few occasions I do need to ask her to explain a sentence to me, she is always able to do so orally.

Amina is fairly typical in her difficulties with academic English. Hassan came from the refugee camps in Somalia around the age of ten. At 18 he has just graduated and is trying to convince SMCC that he should not be in the intermediate ESL class, but rather the advanced. Like all incoming students, he has taken the ACCUPLACER, and the admissions office uses his score to determine his placement. He lives in an English speaking realm, where he functions smoothly. He has little to no problems conversationally. He works in the service industry, and graduated from an English speaking high school. He knows he struggles somewhat with writing, but is not willing to accept that he still requires two classes to be allowed to take regular education courses. He is sure there is some mistake. He talks to his current ESL teacher, Jenn, and she advises him to study and try and retake the exam. He comes to the support center for help with the exam, but I am unable to give him any as I have no familiarity with the ACCUPLACER. Instead we look at some homework and I notice he cannot put together a

grammatically sound written sentence.

Hassan attempts the ACCUPLACER again with no better results and stays in the intermediate ESL course. His grades are low. His teacher, Jenn, shows me an exam where he does not answer in complete sentences as asked, and incorrectly identifies parts of speech. When he comes for tutoring, we discuss what might come next in his essay or how he wants to answer a question. As we sit next to each other I am able to observe his typing and see that what he produces in his written work does not reflect the depth or fluency of his thoughts in his speech.

Astrid: Do you want to have children? Why do you want to have children?

Hassan: I will have children. Because it is important to pass on the family, to teach them the right way to be, children are the future.

Text entered: I want have kids for important future. (spell-checked)

Both of the students above share the country of origin of Somalia, and are SIFE students, but the low skill levels are not restricted to this population. Nadine, from Burundi, has also attended some high school in Maine, and received a diploma. She attended school regularly in Burundi before her parents brought her to Portland four years ago. Her spoken English, like the two Somali students, is conversationally comprehensive. However, her reading and writing skills hamper her considerably in her academic work. When she writes, nonsensical words or combinations thereof appear frequently in her text. One day she asks me to help edit an essay she wrote. It is on the current issue of police brutality and the discrimination faced by blacks in the US. She lays out the situation well, demonstrating a good understanding of the topic, and articulates it clearly, except for the fact that she commonly uses the wrong homophone (fare instead of fair), but there are no misspellings, indicating that she most likely used spell check. The substitutions are mostly understandable, particularly when the word is spoken aloud; they all pass the “sounds like the right word” test, and I have no issues following her train of thought.

Then I get to this sentence: “Blacks in the US face a lot of horse meat.” At this point I have to ask Nadine, “What are you trying to say here?” “Black people, you know, the police, they bother them a lot, they *harass* them,” she replies. With such a substitution, even if it happened accidentally, someone with solid English reading comprehension would be able to see the error, as such a substitution results in the sentence making no sense. I ask her if she reread the essay before she came to get help to double-check it for mistakes, and she says she did.

Nadine also struggles with reading comprehension, often having to redo assignments because she does not understand the instructions correctly. Her current lack of academic English reading and writing skills seemingly should preclude her from being accepted at the community college, as it severely hinders any chance that she would have at being able to pass classes and graduate. However, she has been accepted, and she and her parents hope she will become a nurse initially, and move on to earn more higher education credentials, either a Medical Doctorate or Ph.D. in nursing.

Jenn, one of the professional tutors is also an ESL teacher at the community college. She tells me that around ten of her current students had been students of a friend of hers who teaches ELL in local middle schools. That means that 5-7 years of formal education in the Portland area has not given the students the academic English skills to pass the placement test for English SMCC requires, funneling many into remedial classes. “My friend teaches middle school ESL in Portland. I'm getting some of her students in my classes now. It's unbelievable the problems they are still having.” Hassan is one of these students, and Jenn wonders aloud to me whether he may have a learning disability. Jenn cares about her students a great deal. If she were not so emotionally invested in them she may have felt less emotionally exhausted to the point that she

resigns after that semester. Her students like and trust her, demonstrated by many turning to her for a sympathetic ear, which she is always willing to provide.

In all of the above cases the failure of the students is being negotiated and is not yet codified in their non-retention. At this point, I, Jenn, and other tutors work on behalf of the community college to identify academic English language behaviors that will lead to official failure identifications. It is the tutors' task to change comprehensible sentences into ones that fit the formulations required by American schools. In this way the tutoring offered is a part of the larger mechanism acting on these students as people in need of changing, in this case what needs changing is how they write sentences. Despite the tutors being a part of the overall system, the work that I and other tutors do in correcting English errors is inconsequential to the students' overall recognition as successes or failures (we do not give out grades). This shows how even within the school not all failure is of equal consequence. Failure must be constructed in a certain way by certain individuals (teachers, people who record test scores) for it to be widely recognized as such. Jenn, when she tutors, can point out errors without changing the student from a success to a failure. Coming to tutoring to have their mistakes pointed out may even show that student to be a "good student," one who "puts forth the necessary effort to get the help they need." There is a consequential shift from when students move from failing in the learning center where tutors are "helping," to the classroom where the teachers recognize it as a meaningful failure (i.e. one that goes on their record). This does happen when Jenn is operating as an ESL instructor: any failures she observes on exams become a part of the students' academic story.

Hassan's struggle to move up to the advanced ESL course results in failure, as he does remain in the intermediate course, which becomes part of his academic record. The

ACCUPLACER, as with all such tests, only determines whether or not a student can answer the types of multiple-choice questions asked about English, but it is nevertheless used as an indicator of whether or not a student can read and write English as prescribed by the American school.

Jenn participates in this process, giving credence to Hassan's score by not entertaining an alternate assessment (which she has done). She is sympathetic to him, and even seeks to not see his failure as not a product of his personal efforts, but due to a learning disability, which is framed as a personal biological problem, not a moral one (failure resulting from lack of effort or ability).

A high school diploma should indicate being able to read at a twelfth grade reading level, and not requiring remediation. These failures are produced and recognized at the community college, but are largely the result of the high schools they attend. It is not the objective of the community college to teach students to read, they are expected to already know how to do so when they arrive. As soon as students begin to enroll in community college, they are marked as being not quite the right type of person, which is what we turn to next.

Enrolling in Failure – Bureaucracy of the Community College

Beginning right after students are accepted at SMCC they start to report experiences that make them feel like they do not belong – that their foreignness is a problem. Angelina, from Eritrea at first enrolled in the state university when she arrived in the Portland area. She had difficulties after completing their cycle of ESL course when they still refused to pass her. She was told to go to the community college as it would be easier. First she went to the nursing program's office to find out which of her classes at the local university and from her degrees in Africa would count towards their requirements.

The woman asks if I am a citizen, I tell her I'm an immigrant. She says they don't take me, I have to be a citizen. She was wrong but I left. Then I went back and asked again and she said I made a mistake, that I didn't tell her right. [As an institution SMCC does not require students to answer questions about citizenship, though they do ask.] Then she says okay, I can come. I give her my transcript and the woman there, she says to me they don't count, I have to take them all over again. I said to her the [local branch of the state university] accepted them, what makes them so special that they don't take them? The woman said I was being rude and she wasn't going to talk to me any more. "Go away" she tells me, when I ask her how I can get answers.

The phrase "what makes you so special" does sound rude to a native American English speaker. However, Angelina's use was meant innocuously, and the level of offense taken is definitely not helpful.

Navigating course registration and financial aid are major challenges that Afsana faces in her first semester. At the end of the term, she is assigned to write a letter to an incoming freshman giving them advice and describing what she wishes were different.

If you are an immigrant student, find another immigrant student who has been at SMCC longer to help find the right classes, and all the right offices, and doing all the paperwork. It is very hard and very confusing. Find an immigrant who understands you and has done it before.

When she applied and enrolled, Asfana had to provide proof of high school graduation, which for her happened in Iraq, where her family initially fled after leaving Afghanistan. Making sure to have the right documentation in the right format was a challenge for her. How does one get an official document translated? There is little guidance as to the expectations or process. In addition, she also had to take the ACCUPLACER exam. Her score was below the accepted threshold for regular education classes. As a result Asfana spends her first semester in ESL courses, not taking any college courses for credit besides the 1 credit required first semester college orientation course.

Hila had almost no formal education in Afghanistan and Pakistan before arriving in the US. When she came to Portland she enrolled in the adult education center, taking English and GED classes. These courses prepared her for the ACCUPLACER, and her advisor there guided her through the whole process.

My advisor [at adult education], she would suggest everything to me. She knew I passed the ACCUPLACER test, so she told me that SMCC is a good place for the beginning. So if you want to go there, the classes are cheaper and they will help you a lot. Then you go to the university later. That's how I came. Then I got a new advisor, she meets me every two weeks. I think I'm lucky... She tells me how to get scholarships and financial aid, my major, if I'm confused, she tells me.

Hila has yet to be recognized as a failure. She did not attend high school in Maine, in fact, she has the least formal education of any of my participants, having stopped going to school after the second grade due to security concerns. Her hiatus from schooling lasted until she arrived in the US, at which point she attended the Portland Adult Education Center and earned her GED.

Jeanette came from Burundi on her own at the age of 20. She is an asylum seeker. She was able to gain entrance to SMCC in a much smoother fashion than Angelina and Asfana because she had connections through her church to the then president of SMCC.

He is like my dad, he goes golfing with this man [president of SMCC], and they talk about tennis, so my dad tells him about me, we play tennis together and I'm good. He says I should come here for school, and that I need to take the ACCUPLACER. My first time I didn't pass, so I studied and took it again. But again I didn't pass. My dad's friend tells me to go talk to Jenn in the ESL department, and she tests me so I can be accepted.

Jeanette is a good advocate for herself, both educationally and in her workplace. When she took the ACCUPLACER her score was borderline, and she was placed in remedial ESL. Jeanette did not accept this, and with the help of a golfing buddy of SMCC's president in her network she was able to contact Jenn. After speaking with her, Jenn allowed her to do a written essay exam to

demonstrate her capabilities. In this way Jeanette bypasses paying for courses that do not confer credit, making the most of her modest financial resources. She is able to find many private grants and scholarships to finance her education. “You just have to ask, and not take no for an answer. You know, it's harder for asylum seekers, because we can't get financial aid.”

Jeanette's struggles with being not the right type of person (an asylum seeker not a citizen). This does not stop her at the local level where her network helped her push through, but it is different on a federal level. When I meet her, she has been in the country for two years and has just recently had her final asylum hearing postponed due to a snow storm, from February to sometime before the end of the year her lawyer tells her. She is frustrated, despite the fact that having a hearing scheduled after two years is pretty quick. “You're lucky,” Audette tells her, “I know people who have been here three years and are still waiting. I got it after one and half years, but that was really fast, I was very blessed to have it so fast.” “I know, I know a lot of people who are still waiting too, but it is hard to wait,” Jeanette replies. It means a delay in her ability to apply for financial aid because she is not yet a green-card holder, but she is set to graduate from the community college and wants to apply to a four-year institution.

It all depends on scholarships now. Because my hearing [for asylum] was cancelled, I can't do the FAFSA for this year. I can't pay. All my money [she worked 40-80 hours a week depending on the number of shifts she was able to get] goes to my bills, and everything that is left over goes to my sister and brother.

My sister is in China and my brother is in Uganda. We have no parents, so I have to take care of them. I want to bring them here, so we can be together and be safe, but I need to be a citizen so I can sponsor them.

Her applications to transfer to a four year institution are successful, and she is awarded some private scholarships, but not enough to cover the full cost. There are no more classes she can

take at SMCC that will transfer, and so lack of permanent status means that she is financially unable to take the next step in her schooling. Jeanette does work as a Direct Service Provider (DSP) in a home for troubled girls, working full time and often overnight shifts. With her A1 number she is able to work legally, and pays taxes. “So why can't I get federal aid?” Her lack of only partial economic citizenship while waiting for political citizenship frustrates her.

Despite being high school graduates, Nadine, Hassan and Amina all struggle with demonstrating basic student skills. Amina cannot answer questions correctly based on a text written at the eighth grade level. Hassan cannot turn the fluidity of his oral expression into typed sentences. Nadine does not differentiate between words, and combinations of words that sound like the ones she wants and the ones she actually means, even when the ones she uses have dramatically different meanings. Their high schools not only graduated them, but pushed them into community college, thus improving the high school's statistics on post-secondary attendance. Now the students are paying for, or have paid for remedial classes that were supposed to fill in the gaps of what the high schools failed to teach them, but still display many of those gaps.

Angelina often feels like the white population is against her, but she does not back down. The woman in the nursing office tried to make her feel like someone who did not belong in post-secondary school, but Angelina persisted: not only did she belong but her credits needed to be recognized as well. This issue with her credits would not be resolved after this one encounter, but become an ongoing point of contention between her and the nursing program. Her transcripts were evaluated and accepted by an outside agency, but what the acceptance means as far as her

schooling at SMCC differs between Angelina and the program. At issue here is how even on her first steps, metaphorically, in the door at SMCC, she is told she is not allowed. The woman staffing the office is in the wrong since many non-citizens attend SMCC, but her hostility is not to be discounted because in her official capacity she felt secure in articulating her anti-immigrant position, even later blaming Angelina for what was not Angelina's error. This does not spring solely from an individual's racism and xenophobia, otherwise the woman would not have felt free to express it, but rather a part of an institutional permissiveness towards treating foreign-born individuals (in this case of color) as not belonging to the institution.

Asfana's experience is reported to be less overtly hostile, yet it was disorienting enough that she recommended reinforcements for other students like her coming after her. Without having been there to create a record of the interaction, I am unable to say how the exchange happened, but in the end she came to think of herself as not up to the task, and felt that many others with forced migrant or otherwise foreign backgrounds would similarly struggle, indicating that the struggles did not seem personal to her. Her reaction is very different from Angelina, who felt the interaction very personally.

Hila provides an important contrast because she would be expected to struggle because of the lengthy interruption to her schooling, and thus have failure on her record, but this is not the case. Furthermore, her explanation that she is "lucky" with her advisor is worth noting. She feels she is experiencing success navigating the bureaucracy because she has someone who will meet with her frequently and go over any issues until Hila is confident in the situation. This indicates that Hila is aware of other students who do not have the same relationship with their advisors. If other students do not have such a resource person, then it is likely that they will run into

problems because of bureaucracy. However, being able to navigate the system should not be a matter of luck – that is why schools developed advisors. Hila is actually pointing out failure on the part of the community college, yet this recognition of institutional failure is (unfortunately) inconsequential, because she is not in a position to make it known failure.

Jeanette reported the least local difficulties, but she also benefits from having locally powerful individuals in her social network. Her struggles came from a federal level, and the four cases show how four individuals encountered barriers in bureaucracy, showing the prevalence of these structures: Despite the resources of the individuals to overcome them in their own fashion, the structures do work in some capacity to hinder the students' path towards feeling they can become recognized as successful in post-secondary education. At this point the success means to be allowed to partake in the post-secondary schooling offered by SMCC, which for most of the forced migrants is made conditional.

The various ways the forced migrant students are marked as not quite fitting are a part of their first failings constructed by SMCC. Angelina does not have the right kind of transcript or interactional style, so she is quite literally told to “go away.” Asfana fails because the admissions office gives credence her score on the ACCUPLACER. Hassan is similarly constructed as a failure after his official success in the local high school, not only for graduation, but acceptance at SMCC. However, these cases show that many migrant students become constructed as failures as soon as they start the enrollment process.

INTERLUDE- Identifications of Race

A group of African students chat in the academic support center: two men, Daniel and Henry, with two women, Claire and Claudine. Daniel has been in the US for eight years and Henry for six. Their English is fairly unaccented, and they both attended local high schools. Daniel is wearing trendy fitted sweatpants, brand name sneakers, t-shirt, and a Red Sox ball cap. Henry wears jeans and a t-shirt. The two women are more recent arrivals from French speaking African countries, though they had been in the Portland area long enough to feel comfortable making jokes about “people fresh off the boat” (Stepick and Stepick 2003). Both women wear their hair in long braids, and are dressed in jeans and shirts. Daniel complains about how newcomers are all obsessed with their African identity, expressing irritation about they are always talking about how “I'm African” (which he utters in an affected accent). There are some agreement and snickers, but once that passes, Henry says seriously, “I am African and proud.”

The conversation moves on to a gathering that is to take place that weekend. It becomes clear that Henry and Daniel do not know the women that well, as they discover that Claudine does not yet have her Maine driver's license. “You've got to get your L”, Daniel tells her. “What's L?” she asks. “Your driver's license. I have to take the bus now, but it gives me anxiety. I got caught driving without a license and now I have to wait until my record is clean to get my license back.” “I only have my permit. The bus is not so bad, I take the bus or ride my bike,” Claudine replies. “I'm good at it now. Besides, I don't have money for a car or insurance.”

It is one thing to make fun of newcomers, and they all share in the hilarity of people who constantly talk about where they come from because, as the students see it, they feel lost in Portland. It is another thing to let go of what made them different from other phenotypically

black people, a category whose membership would not benefit them in this country. Students are proud of their heritage, at the same time they are proud that they are somewhat established here. However, they recognize that becoming established is an ongoing process, with skills and nuances constantly being learned, such as the current slang for driver's license. Daniel is engaged in teaching Claudine what she needs to fit in and live a comfortable life in the Portland area (a driver's license). At the same time, because she does not yet have one, nor sees a need for one since she cannot afford a car to drive, she defends her current status as "not that bad."

Claudine is not ridiculed or even gently admonished because of this resistance, just as Henry is not when he (without any affectation) states that he is "African and proud." While some immigrants will take on hyphenated identities with time (country of origin-American) (Stepick 2003), that is not something I observe in my research, even among students who had come to the US at a young age. Generally students from Africa identify their country of origin when asked where they are from, but will also say they are African.

Fatuma from Somalia, recognizes that she is seen as black, but never self-identifies in this way. "You know, my boyfriend, my parents don't like him. He thinks it's because he's not black. I try to tell him it's not that, my parents don't care about that. I think they don't like him because he's not Muslim." This tension between her and her parents regarding her boyfriend weighs heavily on Fatuma, and she brings it up to me a number of times over the semester. She knows that her boyfriend sees her (and her family) as black, and never reports arguing the fact with him, nor does she with me, but she never says she is herself. What she also never says directly is that he is white, showing how she has taken up practices of white privilege that erase whiteness as a race. She had come to the US when she was in middle school, and her family,

including her uncle, are well-established in the area. They run a small shop that caters to the Somali population, carrying clothing (including the long dresses and hijabs favored by many older Somali women), food items, shoes and other daily necessities consumed by their co-ethnics, but not by the white population. This business often takes them back to Somalia to organize deals, and they also recently sent Fatuma back to Kenya and Somalia to visit relatives. The family has sufficiently assimilated to enough of the institutional practices of the Portland area to be financially successful, but they have not assimilated to the US black identity despite the fact that they are identified this way by locals and government documentation. In fact, their shop, by carrying items only used by Somalis, helps their co-ethnics maintain their separate expressive culture.

Angelina from Eritrea, who at times uses the term black, more often refers to herself and others as “Africans” or “immigrants.” When she uses black to refer to herself and other forced migrants, it is always in the context where they are experiencing discrimination. She is familiar with what being “black” means in the US, the sometimes unconscious stereotypes people hold, and how it results in lowered social and economic chances (Bonilla-Silva 2006). She tells me the following about her experience at the state university.

Angelina: They [teachers] used to say that ten years ago they didn't have, they never see black people in there... now there are many black students and the reason they want to make it harder is they want to challenge them [in an aggressive sense], that's it. That's the point. They're not really for students to know better, but they are challenging because we are not English language speakers so we are not going to get there. So they are not teaching us how to do it.

Astrid: So you...

Angelina: Not just me, everybody does.

Astrid: So all the students of color felt like it was racist?

Angelina: Yeah, because we talk, we see, we know.

According to Angelina, the black students at the state university's nursing program feel held back because of race, despite the teachers saying it is a language issue. They would receive low grades, but the teachers would not actually tell them specifically what they were doing wrong.

According to her, the black students feel that because there have not been students of color in the program until recently, the teachers are trying to prove they do not belong there.

Blackness as an identification is linked to a subordinated status, and only deployed when discussing the problems from the white American population who react to blackness (as a phenotype), not an identity Fatuma or Angelina embody. Immigrants do deploy identity agentically, at times taking on hyphenated identities to display belonging, at other times dropping the hyphenated part to demonstrate more ethnic pride in difference (Stepick and Stepick 2003).

Ignoring Racialization

As part of the College Experience class that all first semester students are required to take, students are asked to answer questions about racial discrimination, prejudice and stereotypes. Aman, her sister Leila, and Rania are all in the same class. The four of us sit at a tutoring table, Aman is signed up to work with me. She asks me to clarify a few of the questions she has been assigned.

Astrid: Have you ever faced discrimination because of your race? Have people ever treated you badly because of your race or skin color?

Aman: My race? No, I'm white.

Astrid: How would you feel if someone discriminated against you?

Aman: I don't know. I'm white, so this doesn't happen to me.

Astrid: What about for other reasons? What about religion?

Aman: I mean, yes, sometimes people say things, like that I'm a terrorist, or that I shouldn't wear it [hijab], but that isn't because of race.

Leila and Rania have been paying attention to the exchange because they have the same assignment, and nod in agreement. Aman and Leila come from a family of privilege in Iraq.

Their father had been a regional governor before the US invasion, and they had led a comfortable life. They had two homes and full time driver. At first they fled to Lebanon, “things were okay, we had an apartment and we could go to school, but then we have to go to Turkey. We didn't have a home. Finally we meet a man and he finds us an apartment. And me and Leila, we have to work in a restaurant and wash dishes. We can't go to school.”

All three wear hijabs everyday, and acknowledge having experienced Islamophobia, but separated that from discrimination based on race. For them, there was no connection between the two types of discrimination. However, many scholars of Islam argue that Islam has been racialized since 9/11 (i.e. Garner and Selod 2015, Selod 2015, Kromidas 2004). The three women are familiar with the racialization of phenotypically black people, but do not connect that type of marginalization to their own experience. Most language in the US however, links many categories of discrimination, such as in equal-opportunity clauses that state no discrimination by “race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy, gender identity, and sexual orientation), national origin, age (40 or older), disability or genetic information” (<https://www.eeoc.gov/employees/>).

Community College on Race and Privilege

The community college holds a panel discussion on race displaying the way that race is thought about by the white American students, faculty and staff. Their understanding revolves around privilege or lack thereof. The panel is specifically about race per its title, but the discussion moves away from race and experiences of racism almost immediately to talking about relative “privilege.” According to this discussion, one can have “racial privilege,” i.e. be white (reifying the invisibility of whiteness as a racial classification), or “straight privilege,” or “cis-gender privilege,” or “class privilege.” The stated intention is to start conversations about

minority experiences that the organizers feel the dominant population is unaware of. Organizer frames it as a “way to prevent future Michael Browns¹¹.” The audience is made up of students and faculty, with some students of color. Given the presence of veiled women on the community college, their absence at this event is further underscored when a Somali woman around 20 years old wearing a hijab enters the room only to immediately depart. The panel talks about the lack of white privilege among minorities, being quite broad in their conception of racism while also grounding it in the African American experience, as the first speaker begins by giving a brief history of racism that starts with Africans brought to the American colonies as slaves.

One of the few African students present talks about how the “black problem is a global problem”. Blacks need to fix Africa first, and then they could demand respect from the rest of the world, according to this African man. For him, blackness is rooted in Africa, and he called on all blacks to go back to Africa and make it better. This is a very different understanding of blackness and racism than what is presented at the beginning of that panel by an African American woman who traces it from slavery.

Some of the panelists talked about the history of race relations in the US, and how social structures privilege whiteness. Comments from white students and faculty use this language of privilege, one student asking about how one could engage racism when one did not have “straight privilege.” Other white American students also talk about the privileges they do not have. Faculty talk about what they ask their students to do, their own work with minorities, and encouraging people to “listen.” Over the course of the panel, there is a shift by white faculty and students from race to privilege, and from black experiences to white.

11 Black teen who was shot by police in Kansas City, sparking increased media coverage of minorities, mostly young men, being disproportionately shot by police officers, who then faced no consequences.

Juxtaposing how the panel talks about race, and how Aman, Leila and Rania overwhelmingly reject talking about the racialization of Islam shows the contestation surrounding these social markers and their meaning. It is not that forced migrants of color do not recognize racism, or the plight of black Americans, but rather attempt to distance themselves from such social identities because they know what the cost of the systemic structural racism is (Bonilla-Silva 2006). They also do not have a shared history, cultural practices or language with African Americans, and thus do not identify with them, and attempt to reject whites doing so (Foner 1998). It is not surprising that the migrant students do this, but what is important is the lack of understanding of the differences between forced migrants and American people of color by the white American population. All government forms ask about race, and will categorize individuals on this basis, which is problematic as it occludes very real differences between African immigrants and African Americans.

Ajrouch and Kusow (2007) looked at racial identification among Lebanese and Somali immigrants, and found similar self-identification strategies. Lebanese immigrants, largely Shi'a, and a minority in their country of origin were quick to align with whiteness as the unmarked powerful majority, and disregard the US racialization of Islam. Because they are a minority back home, they spoke positively about the US, and their position post-migration. Race was something that troubled others, much in the way Aman talked about it, and the only reason she mentioned her whiteness is because the assignment asks about race. For Somali and other African participants, they are forced to confront phenotypical blackness¹². In confronting blackness, they largely reject it, taking up African identities in order to create boundaries

12 There are ethnic/racial hierarchies in Somalia, however, both in Ajrouch and Kusow's study as well as mine, the participants belonged to the ethnic majority.

between themselves, and subordinated populations in the US. They do not want to get trapped into racial identities that would prevent them from fully participating in social life.

Bonilla-Silva (2006) argues that contemporary racism in the US has now been recoded often into cultural terms, removing the racial language, which has become politically incorrect. The way Angelina describes teachers talking about their lack of language skills shows that she feels a recoding of race through language. “Cultural” differences between different groups are also used to create hierarchies by faculty and staff.

The participants reject the classifications of otherness placed upon them locally. The white population attempts to place them into locally accepted classifications along racial lines. Racial categories are cultural constructions that are made meaningful in social interactions. They are also grounded in the local context. For the women in this study who come from outside the US do not identify with the culturally constructed racial identities created within the US, which is not surprising – why should they? They aren't African-American/black, they are Africans in America, not the same thing. They also come from places that think about race differently, where it is constructed through a different rhetoric, not necessarily relying on understandings of privilege.

CHAPTER 5 WORKING HARD

This chapter looks at the work the forced migrants do outside of SMCC. Every student must balance their economic and social responsibilities with their educational needs. They also must balance the needs and desires of their families with the expectations placed on them as a student. The women in this study perform their roles vis-a-vis their families and household, taking into consideration the “role households play in developing strategies for survival” (Pessar 2003:80). In developing strategies for survival the women in the study prove themselves to be quite successful. They are able to meet the needs of their families by becoming stably employed, despite hurdles to employability such as language skills and recognized credentials. Many report some social mobility already, and they have shown themselves capable of taking care of their economic responsibilities within their families, which often require a great deal from them. While at SMCC they struggle to be recognized as truly capable individuals, in their working lives they prove themselves able to meet their financial obligations.

Their financial obligations are not only to the students themselves (providing food and shelter), but include individuals in their social networks both locally and across the globe. These social networks are important to the migrants, as they are a source of support but also responsibility. Despite the fact that US colleges place primacy on students' submission to their authority to control achievement, the migrant students do not neglect their familial ties and responsibilities (Harklau 1998). The details of each situation create different expectations for each woman, yet all experience the tension between the demands they take on from home and those from their roles as students. There is not enough time in the day for all the expectations to

be met fully, leaving things undone, poorly done, or sleep forgone.

For many, these familial expectations cross international borders, for some in the form of remittances, social pressures, or both. Forced migrants send money overseas to help support family members. This allows them to go to school, start a business, or even just pay for day-to-day expenses. The forced migrants face expectations about how much care they should provide to other members of their household, often in the form of domestic obligations, expectations that are shaped by social practices from their countries of origin, rather than the US.

Unemployment is high among the forced migrant population in the Portland area, but not among the participants of this study where the vast majority are employed, and many of the women are the sole income earners in their families. Often the women are missing husbands or fathers. A number have parents with physical or mental difficulties sustaining work because of the circumstances leading to their flight. Despite all these challenges, the women find work and retain it, making it possible to contribute to their social networks.

Initially the women largely work entry-level jobs that require little formal education or English skills. Many start out as so-called unskilled labor: housekeeping or factory work. The women at the community college have mostly progressed past this level, and hold low-skilled jobs, predominantly in the medical and social services sector. For the women who have improved their English skills, this allows them to work in higher-status occupations. However this has not moved them off of public assistance. This is a statewide problem not unique to migrants. “As a result of poor wages, 53 percent of the direct care workers [the umbrella term for the types of jobs most of the women in this study have] in Maine rely on some form of public assistance to make ends meet, and 12 percent live below the federal poverty line, according to

census data” (Hughes 2017). This means that although they are doing better financially than they were when they first arrived, they still face significant financial challenges. The women are not satisfied with their social mobility thus far. They would like to live up to the “American Dream” and not be dependent on social welfare programs. They see post-secondary credentials (as opposed to certifications) as the means to move beyond low-skilled labor to skilled occupations, hence their enrollment at SMCC. The sample population in this study is, by design, skewed towards such a population, as it looks at students in the community college.

The social mobility from unskilled labor to low-skilled labor is not a product of the community college education, but rather comes from English skills gained either in high school or adult education. Certifications (for nursing assistants, medical technicians, direct-support providers) come from training either at places of employment or the adult education center in Portland. Many of the students in pre-nursing or medical assisting programs at SMCC have already started working in auxiliary roles in medical settings, which require some training and certification, as well as higher English skills. The medical field provides a lot of employment in the Portland area with two large hospitals, along with a number of other nursing facilities. These medical facilities need large numbers of low-skilled workers, providing incentives for training programs to certify potential workers, including immigrants whose English skills are found lacking at SMCC.

Taking Care of Family in the US

A woman's work is never done. The proverb is certainly true for Marie, a single mother from Rwanda with two small children. She arrived in Maine two years ago and is in her first semester at SMCC. She had finished high school in Rwanda and then married her husband.

When he was killed she fled. She does not like to talk about him or her life before, "He is dead, so we leave. Now I try to make a better life for us in America." That life requires much from her, with school, work, children and home all making demands on her time, yet she is successful in caring for her children and paying her bills.

One morning, around nine, Marie approaches me. She is not a regular with the writing tutors, since she prefers to work by herself. Most days she just takes advantage of the study space offered in the academic support center.

Marie: Can you help check my essay?

Astrid: Of course, is there any thing you want me to pay special attention to?

Marie: Grammar... and spelling? This one needs to be checked. I'm so tired, normally ok, I do it. But I have no sleep for this one.

Astrid: Why haven't you slept?

Marie: I worked last night, and then I have to finish this essay. Then I need to get my kids ready for school, fed them breakfast. Now I'm here and I have to give it to my teacher today.

Astrid: When will you sleep?

Marie: I'll sleep when it's done. I have to go to class, then go home and take care of my kids. I have another shift tonight.

But of course "it's" never done. Marie works in a packing plant. This is the type of unskilled labor available to those with very low English skills. But Marie is still a success in the area, as she maintains her employment despite also juggling two young children and classes at SMCC on her own. She has been with the same employer for over a year and a half. If she were unable to perform her duties, either due to lack of time or language skills, her employment would not have lasted as long. Her children are cared for, they go to school and are clothed and fed, and she makes sure to spend time with them every day. Marie works nights to make the most of her time, sacrificing her own sleep.

Hila, from Afghanistan, shoulders the bulk of the domestic duties at home. She is the last

of eight children, and already in her twenties. Hila's parents are elderly, and because of advanced years (both are over 65), they have been found eligible to have home-health aids. Neither of her parents speak English well, and so when home-health assistance was being established there was concern about how they would communicate with an outside person. The agency suggested that they have one of their children fill the role. Hila is thus formally recognized as their home health aid, and works 15 hours a week doing so. She is very happy with this arrangement because as their unmarried daughter, she would have been responsible for their care in any case. "It's a culture thing, I would have to do this anyway." She does do a lot more than the roughly two hours a day she is paid for. The language barrier her parents face as non-English speakers means that she pays all the bills, does all the shopping and has to take them to doctors appointments. "My parents are like my kids."

Not only is Hila successfully aiding her aging parents, she made it into a source of financial support. Hila would like to get another job outside the home, and pass on her home-health aide hours to her sister who lives with her husband and children in the area, or her brother who still lives at home. Just because some of the familial care duties have been formalized through the social structures in the US, which do not take for granted filial responsibility for aging parents, does not mean that domestic duties have been reorganized in her household. Tasks are designated by gender (which questions the plausibility of her brother taking over). The cleaning and cooking duties are either Hila or her mother's responsibility. Hila is irked by the fact that her mother thinks she should cook for her brother, and then clean up after him as well. She tells me she says to her mother, "Mom, he is an adult, he can do these things himself. But for her, he is her child."

In the US as elsewhere, work is generally considered to be only paid labor that happens outside the home. Hila shares this belief, saying she wants a “real job”, and that she wants to take advantage of such opportunities here to help her family be more financially independent. In Afghanistan, she explains, had she stayed and married the man who her parents had arranged for her, she would have been entirely dependent on her husband¹³. This emphasis on financial independence is what she cites as her motivation for pursuing post-secondary schooling.

Amina's mother and father both died in Somalia, and her aunt has taken over the mother role in her life. Amina refers to her as her mother, and has her entered into her phone as MySweetMother. Her brother sometimes lives with them, but Amina tells me he has problems with alcohol and sometimes disappears for weeks at a time. This leaves Amina, her mother, grandmother and youngest sister as the main members of the household. Her mother and grandmother speak very little English and have some serious health problems. Amina's youngest sister is still in high school. This leaves Amina as the only wage earner in the family. Two of her older sisters live nearby with their husbands and children, and these households help each other. Amina and her mother provide child care, and her sisters and their spouses contribute financial support.

Amina is in the pre-nursing major. She works in a support role in one of the local hospitals. She takes as many shifts as she can get and still accommodate her classes. In the semesters that I know her, Amina never takes a full course load, and is realistic about how much school work she can handle. She takes online classes when they are available to free up her schedule, but still comes to the support center to get help when she can because she wants to do

13 There are a number of professional, educated Afghani women who are both married and work outside the home. This is not meant as an ethnographic statement, but rather as a report of how Hila imagines her life would have been.

well on all her assignments. Like Marie and others who work nights, Amina is strategic with her time, so that she can work at the hospital as well as take care of her responsibilities at home. “I’m working on Thanksgiving, I work Christmas too. They don’t mean anything to me, so I work. The other people don’t have to.” She also earns overtime on these days, demonstrating one way Amina is able to leverage the resources available to her to help her family.

In addition to the work she does outside the home, Amina does much of the housework.

Amina: Sorry, I’m so late. I wanted to be here at ten, but I was doing all the laundry. My niece and nephew are at my house right now, they make so many dirty clothes. It took much longer than I thought. I hope we can finish this lab [report] today. Tomorrow I need to clean.

Astrid: Does your younger sister help?

Amina: Sometimes, but she needs to study. You know she has a scholarship to [local private school]? I want her to study, so I do it.

Her youngest sister who still lives at home helps with interpreting at appointments for her mother and cleaning at home, and her mother cooks. For her nutrition class, Amina has to keep a food diary, which then needs to be entered into a software program that calculates her caloric and nutritional intake for each day. It is a bit challenging as the software only contains limited options, so Amina describes the elaborate fish, chicken and vegetables dishes her mother cooks for her, served with homemade Somali flatbread. While her mother does depend on Amina in many ways, she also supports her and her schooling. One day she calls Amina while we are working. I ask Amina if she needs the car. “No, she was just calling to see if I ate before I left.” Amina does a lot to support her family, but she is also supported in return. The family only has one car, and often her mother or grandmother have appointments while Amina is at SMCC. She tells me that her mother always wants her to take the car, to make it easier for her, rather than having to take the bus, which takes significantly more time.

The Role of Remittances

Angelina from Eritrea faces challenges in getting re-credentialled as a maternal nurse and puts her education on hold because of systemic barriers in the educational institutions, so she focuses on economic gain for her family's benefit. In her formal schooling in the US Angelina has faced a number of situations of failure. Her first attempt was at the state university where she was told she could not move on despite taking all the ESL courses they required. "I take the classes, but they tell me it's my English. I can't continue." At SMCC they accepted many of her credits from her past nursing degrees, but are still requiring her to retake the classes without telling her why.

While she feels like she can never quite make enough money to make everyone happy, she successfully supports a number of people both in the US and in Eritrea. Angelina lives with her brother, and has three young adult children back in Eritrea to whom she sends remittances. She feels the distance between them growing, and this is exacerbated by them pressuring her for more money.

My youngest, she is now done with the army (mandatory military service in Eritrea), and she wants to start a business. So she asks me for money. My son, he also wants to open a shop where people can charge their cell phones and watch soccer games. My oldest daughter, she wants to open a fashion store. They all want me to send them money to get started, but I don't have so much, so I tell them "I can't choose which one, so work together." But they won't. My youngest and her brother, they say ok, but my oldest, she wants to sell clothes and says "Mommy, you have to send me the money." I don't know what to do because I have to pay bills here and my brother's children, but I'm their mother and I have to help them.

At this point she is putting off more schooling, despite having some financial aid, in order to be able to work a new position at the packing plant, which guarantees her forty hours a week. She also works as a nurse's aid when she can get the shifts on a per diem basis. With these positions

she manages to meet her financial obligations while she is studying to retake the nursing program entrance exam (another failure in school). After retaking one course over the summer, she is putting off retaking other classes SMCC is requiring of her in order to earn more money.

Angelina's home situation also changes over the course of the year, as her brother's two young children come to live with them. This places new financial burdens on her in Portland, meaning less money to send home to her children. She now needs to be home when her brother cannot (is working), and also manage the additional laundry, cooking and cleaning required to care for two young children. She is handling all of this. The children are fed and cared for, and remittances are still being sent. In this Angelina is succeeding.

Not only does Angelina send money to her children, but she also sends money to other (former) family members in Eritrea.

Angelina: Oh, I got divorced, after my graduation. I graduate 2011, no 2001 from nursing school and then by the time I went back home, his sister, she is very jealous about my schooling stuff. So she lied to him, she lied to him. She said "Oh she studied with boys how are you going to trust her?" Then he divorced me, and so 2002 we got divorced. He is still there.

Astrid: Does he help support your kids?

Angelina: Oh, he is sick, really really sick right now. He needs support, I send [money], he doesn't like me and he doesn't talk to me, but his mom is my friend, my best friend. So if I send money I just I send to him because he is my kids' father, I don't care, really what he- he doesn't like me.

Astrid: You just see someone who needs help.

Angelina: Yeah, I don't really care. Liking and liking that's over, not liking and not liking, that's gone. So this is different chapter. Because of his mom. She is the one who helped my kids until they grow up, and my daughter, when she comes back from military she stay with them. And even my son, when he comes back from boarding school for vacation he stays with them. I don't have family [her parents are deceased but she has brothers living] but she is like my mom. No matter what, I'm going to help them anyway because of his mom. I don't like to help his sisters, but I help his sisters. Yeah, because she is the one who [caused my] divorce, you know she lied to him and [he] divorced me and now I don't have help. But she screwed up my life, so how am I going to send to her? I give her money because I just, I want to, but I'm not going to plan to give them every time.

Despite the severing of legal and religious bonds through divorce, they are still family. Angelina does differentiate between her children to whom she sends money any time she can, and her former in-laws, who do not receive remittances every time. She is grateful to her former mother-in-law for taking care of her children, and additionally the emotional ties to her former mother-in-law have not weakened, despite distance and divorce.

Jeanette's family obligations are also transnational. She arrived on her own in the US from Burundi, and is an orphan. One of her siblings is in Uganda, and the other in China, and as the oldest, she sends them all the money she can. This prevents her from having any savings to put toward her tuition at a transfer school. Even though she is not the parent, she feels responsible for her siblings, and helps them financially as much as possible, and always wants to do more, even at the cost of making her own education more difficult.

Jeanette works 40-80 hours a week, but a combination of family responsibilities and low wages make it impossible for her to afford tuition at elite private four-year institutions, even after scholarships. Currently, she works in social services, at two different agencies that have group homes for troubled teens. She works as many hours as she can, and often takes night shifts that leave her free, though tired, to attend school and do her work. "This semester I only have one class on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Thursday I have my internship the rest of the day. I try to work every Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday, and I take the overnight shifts too. Usually I work Tuesday and Thursday nights." At work, she makes a lateral move from one group home for troubled girls to another because, "You know, when you have your own trauma and you're dealing with someone else's trauma, it's difficult." The new place is for less intense cases than her previous placement. In this way she is able to balance taking care of herself, and

her own mental health needs, with the responsibilities she feels to her family. Jeanette wants to use her education to go back to Burundi, and help rebuild the country, but family obligations make it so that she has to put her dreams of attending a four year institution on hold. This also means a delay in earning the credentials she needs to increase her income to help her siblings abroad.

Being on the low end of the socio-economic scale is not unique to forced migrant students at SMCC. Of the total student body, 60% are considered low income based on Pell Grant eligibility. However, asylum seekers are not eligible for federal financial aid, thus not counted in the 60% of low-income students despite the fact that asylum seekers like Jeanette would be considered low income. This means that the majority of students work in addition to attending classes, everyone is looking for upward social mobility.

The question of forced migrant social mobility through education in the US is generally measured by whether the second generation does better than the first. However, this cuts off whatever socio-economic statuses the family held before coming to the US. The upward social mobility usually cited, from unemployed upon arrival to now belonging to the working poor, only covers their time in the US. In some cases it is hard to compare. Many Somali migrants lived in meager conditions in the refugee camps (where some of my participants were born), and largely only under slightly better circumstances before their flight as life has been hard in Somalia for decades because of the political instability. Other migrants were much higher socio-economically in their countries of origin than they are currently. It is important to consider that though the conditions leading up to their flight took a large toll on their resources, they were not

always poor. For some this is a relatively new thing. Aman and Leila's father was a wealthy politician in Iraq, as was Angelina's. All three attended private schools in their youths. Other parents were engineers and business owners, but none work in those fields now.

Hila navigates the complicated bureaucracy of in-home care, which requires proper documentation of hours and mileage for reimbursement, and also of her parents' medical care. She found a way to both care for her parents, which she feels would have been her responsibility in any case, and add to the family's income. Her relationship with her father has even improved during her time in the US, as she claims she is now his favorite, "he loves me more."

Jeanette and Angelina work to not only support themselves, but also send remittances across the globe to support other family members. These are responsibilities that mainstream students simply do not have. Despite having to navigate unfamiliar systems of finding employment, becoming employed, and staying employed, they manage to be where they are expected and fulfill their duties. Both make sacrifices in order to maintain their transnational financial commitments. Jeanette ends up going to the local state university instead of the elite private college she dreamed of because of the limits on her financial capabilities due to the type of employment she currently has. Angelina puts more coursework on hold to take care of family near and far, but in both cases family members are still being taken care of because the two women's ability to do their jobs and do them well. Both also make improvements to their job situation: Jeanette finds a placement that is easier on herself, allowing her to be more successful despite her own trauma from her forced migration and Angelina moves into a guaranteed 40-hour a week position. If either were marginal employees, neither of these moves would have been possible. Despite the very different circumstances of their employment, the two women

make choices that allow them to fulfill the expectations they set for themselves in the realm of employment.

Amina has been labeled a failure by the community college in a number of ways: she has failed classes and was required to complete remedial work when she enrolled based on her ACCUPLACER score. However, she maintains steady employment, and reports no difficulties performing the required tasks at work. Even while she was taking remedial English courses, she was able to communicate clearly with her patients and supervisors in the medical field. When I asked about difficulties at work, whether there were language barriers or anything of the sort, she replied that she had never had any miscommunications or mix-ups at work. The only time she had not been able to perform her job was when a patient refused to cooperate, not allowing her to touch him because he claimed she was a terrorist (Amina wears a hijab).

The above women are all successful at work, and all have demonstrated some social mobility from unemployed at arrival to employed, with all but Marie taking another step upward to low-skilled labor from unskilled. However, this is not the whole story of their social mobility. Like Aman and her sister, Angelina's father had been a government official in her childhood, affording her expensive private school education. As for the Iraqi sisters, Angelina's immediate social mobility after arrival in the US was upward, but all three still have not reached anything close to the position they had as children. Whether or not such upward movement is possible remains to be seen, though aspirations largely are to this level.

CHAPTER 6 STRUCTURING MIGRANTS

Because the women in this study come from outside of the US, there exists the perception in the community college by some faculty, staff and white students that they need to learn how to behave appropriately according to the norms of the American schooling system in order to be successful, and if they are not, it is assumed to be because they are just too different. This relates to what Varenne and McDermott (1998) term the “difference theory” in anthropology of education that posits that underperforming groups do so because of the miscommunication between the students and the white American teachers based on cultural differences (141). From understanding difference in this way, they argue, it is a short step to imposing the dominant “culture” onto minority students so that they can be successful. This can become more overt when dealing with populations who can easily be identified as “not from here,” as opposed to resident minorities.

The community college attempts to shape the forced migrant students into individuals who function according to its expectations: how they plan their day, speak, think, interact with others, etc. Because immigrants are people who are believed to need to learn how to behave correctly, they get folded into mainstream understandings of the marginalized groups already within the US who are also seen as needing intervention to learn how to behave and be successful (see interlude on race for one aspect of this).

It is the aim of the community college, as it has been of other educational institutions in the US for the past century and half, to assimilate newcomers to how things are done locally (so they will no longer be “different”) (Bartolome 1994, Varenne and McDermott 1998). This is

done through their expectations of attendance and participation, which have overt consequences for grades if not met. It also takes place through interactions between migrant students and mainstream faculty and staff, who both model what kinds of behaviors are expected and also sanction students who miss-step.

Structuring Time

Time management is a big topic of explicit instruction in the academic support center, and also in the college experience and ESL classes. It is particularly emphasized for migrant students, because teachers and staff feel that they need more time to complete assignments. As Jenn, and ESL teacher and professional English tutor, tells me:

They don't really seem to understand the work needed behind getting an education, there is so much "whining" from students, like when I give them work over break. They don't get the amount of competition out there, and that it means they need to be a standout in order to get jobs. They feel put upon, when asked to do work, I try to tell them that if they think this is hard a real college class is going to kick their butts, and it's not because I'm a mean teacher. A lot of them are trying to do too much, they also mostly work full time, have kids, or if living at home have responsibilities to their siblings and parents. The women especially have a heavy burden of house work....It seems like homework is done for credit instead of understanding the use of it....they can't or won't devote the amount of time they, as ELLs, need to really comprehend the material, which leads them having difficulties when they end up in regular classes. ... If I give them long reading assignments they may flip the pages but don't retain any of the information.

The academic support center also emphasized adherence to institutional behaviors of timeliness and scheduling by requiring sign-ups to use the various resources available.

Time Management/Allocation

There is a formula for how much time post-secondary institutions expect students to put into the work for their classes. The standard is that for every hour spent in the classroom with the instructor, students should spend three hours outside of class, doing homework, reading

assignments, studying, etc. At the community college, for a typical three-credit course, they meet for 2.5 hours a week, meaning that students should be spending 7.5 hours per week outside of the classroom on the materials. All of the professional tutors mention this to students on a frequent basis. For the forced migrants, as English language learners (ELLs)¹⁴, they are often told to expect to spend even more time on homework, as their English comprehension and composition skills are less developed than mainstream peers.

Audette: This class is hard, there is so much reading. Everyday we have something to read or an essay to write.

Angela: You should be spending 3 hours each week for each hour you are in the class room. College is hard, and it does take a lot of work. You need to make sure you have enough time, and you might need spend extra time, because the reading might take you longer. But you need to make sure that you understand what you read. It's important to do your homework well, and that takes time. You also need to make sure that you are getting enough sleep, and eating well. Eating good foods so that your brain is working.

Not only are tutors relaying this information, but as part of the college experience class all first semester students are required to take, they are asked to document how they spend their time. For a week they are asked to keep detailed journals recording how much time they spend on daily activities: personal care, working, sleeping, socializing, watching TV, exercising, surfing the internet, in class and doing homework. Once they document all of this, they are given guidelines about how much time they *should* be devoting to each. These guidelines tell them they need to get 7-8 hours of sleep, get 30 minutes of exercise (or three hours a week), and spend three hours on studying per hour of class time. They are asked to reflect on their school performance. Are they satisfied with their grades? If they are not, are they spending enough time per class according to the formula in the assignment? The students also need to identify how

¹⁴ SMCC uses English as a Second Language (ESL) for the names of their courses and department. However, to reflect the fact that most forced migrants already speak more than one language I use the term ELL.

they can find more time to make sure they are doing the “essentials” properly. How could they find time to study, exercise and sleep more? The message is that there is a right way of doing college, and if every student follows this formula they will be successful. What this exercise does not take into account is the other pressures that students face. There is not space in the formula for working, which the majority of the students need to do to be able to pay their bills. There is also no time for taking care of children and other family members, making it incompatible with the actual demands on the lives of forced migrant students.

Sarah runs a series of lunchtime workshops for students, though these are not very popular. No students show up for the session on test-taking, and only one white man in his early twenties comes for the time-management workshop. However, just because students do not show up (perhaps because they already have time-management skills (see Chapter 5) and are making other tasks a priority) does not lessen the effort by SMCC to teach students how staff think they should be dividing their time because it assumes that the students are not able to.

Students have their own methods for how to get their work done that reflect the particularities of their lives. Fatuma talks to Warsame about the strategies she uses to get her work done when she is at home.

Warsame: I'm missing so much work, they put me on academic probation. Now they send me emails when my assignments are going to be due.

Fatuma: I need that! I was so bad in high school, I didn't do my work. Not that I was really busy...I don't know, I guess I didn't care, but now I'm trying to be better. It's so hard to remember all the deadlines. I should do it right away, but... When I know I have a lot to do, I put my cellphone and my laptop in my room, and get all my books out on the kitchen table. I tell my mom I need to stay here and do my homework. If I go in my room with my cellphone and computer... you know how it goes, I don't get anything done.

Fatuma admits that she lacks discipline, and did so especially during high school but is now

making efforts to perform in the ways that the community college expects her to. She would even welcome more intervention and structuring in the shape of emails to help her reach her goal. She enlists her mother's support, as well as takes over the family area. Her parents want her to do well, and expect it of her, so they are willing to support her in this way.

Sign-Up Sheets and Procedures

One of Sarah's responsibilities is to create the schedules for the tutors. She needs to take into account both their availability, as well as the needs of the students. This is challenging, as some semesters students come mostly at the end of the day looking for support, while during others the busiest time was from about 10-3. For the math division, she also needs to balance which subjects to cover. Over the years, the structure and availability of tutors had changed. Initially, it was a drop-by system. At that point she was the only writing tutor in addition to her administrative duties, and whichever student arrived first would be able to access her. However, in response to a growing need, largely fueled by the influx of migrant students who were struggling academically, the academic support center underwent institutional changes. More tutors were hired, requiring the reallocation of resources (largely in form of allocating time to apply for grants that fund these positions).

The academic support center underwent institutional changes, but it also required behavioral changes by the students. It became mandatory to sign up, either electronically or on posted sheets in order to access tutor support. Not only does this structure the interaction, it also gathers data about the students. The sign-up sheets for the writing tutors change slightly while I am in the field, but they have been around in some form for a few years. The basics remain the same, the students sign up for 30 minute slots, one student per slot.

At the beginning of every semester, students come to the center to familiarize themselves with the space and services offered. A number of teachers send students on “scavenger hunts” during the first few class meetings. They are asked to answer questions about what kinds of support are available and what procedures they need to follow. They must also get a tutor to sign their assignment sheet. Other forced migrant students come because their teachers, both ESL and regular education, recommend that they familiarize themselves with the tutoring services. These are efforts by teachers to encourage students to exhibit “proper work habits,” and are especially emphasized for forced migrant students. Other teachers will offer bonuses on assignment grades if the student can document that they accessed tutoring.

At the beginning of the fall semester a number of students pass through the center. The work study student, Safa, an Iraqi forced migrant who works the front desk, brings them to the writing corner and explains where to sign one's name next to the corresponding half-hour slot. Despite these efforts, the sign-up sheets regularly cause some confusion.

One day during the second week of September, Safa brings three veiled women to the sign-up board, and speaks to them in Arabic. She has done this many times before, and herself uses the writing tutors with success. Shortly thereafter, at the end of the half-hour interval, Jared looks at his sheet, and there are two names entered into the field next to the time.

Jared: Farrah, Amira? Whose turn is it? Only one of you can sign up at a time.
Farrah: We are together. We only have one question, we are in the same class. It doesn't take long.

Jared: But I can only work with one person at a time. *That's how it works.*

Amira: But we have the same problem. We can go together.

Jared: I need to sign you into the computer, and I can only do one person at a time. That's how it works.

In actuality, tutors do often work with more than one student at a time. Jared often spends a

session with one student going over their assignment, marking errors and discussing what the next steps need to be. Once the half hour is over, if another student is waiting, he transitions to them, but when the second student is to the point that they need to/could work independently, Jared checks back with the first student to check their progress. In such cases he will check in each student into the computer system. He will also work and chat with multiple students who he is friendly with, and not enter any of them into the system. However, in this case the students are unfamiliar to Jared and so he defaults to the procedure set out, i.e. each student needs to be entered into the computer for their own time slot. Despite the protocol laid out by the tutoring center, in practice there is much more flexibility. Quite frequently, the sign-up laptop does not work or its battery is dead, and tutors continue to work with students without signing them up. Angela almost never enters the students into the computer, even when it is in front of her and working.

It is 12:25 and Jessica's (a peer tutor) sheet is free from 12:00-12:30, but Ayaan is signed up for 12:30-1:00. Marielle, a forced migrant from Burundi, approaches the board and puts her name down for 12:00-12:30 and approaches Jessica.

Jessica: I don't have time to work with you.

Marielle: But you are free.

Jessica: Yes, but Ayaan has signed up for 12:30, so we don't have time. When she comes I need to be able to work with her.

Marielle: But you can work with me right now. I signed up.

Jessica: Five minutes is not enough time to sign you up and do any work. If you want help you need to sign up before the time starts, not with five minutes left.

That doesn't work.

Marielle stands up and stares at Jessica. Jessica is sitting at the table by herself, and since she is a tutor, Marielle seems confused as to why Jessica is sending her away. In this case Ayaan does appear at 12:30, allowing Jessica to focus on her and turn her attention away from Marielle, who

remains present and seems poised to continue the confrontation. Jessica starts tutoring towards the end of my time in the field. At first she is quite hesitant to engage with students except with the piece of writing directly in front of her. She quickly begins to feel the frustration that all the tutors express that classroom teachers are not doing a lot to actually teach the ELL students. “They (ELL students in general) just have so many problems” she tells me after working with Ayaan one afternoon. She does become more comfortable with many students toward the second half of the semester. One morning I overhear her having a conversation with David, a forced migrant from the DRC, about how evil “ISIS and Iran” are. They agree about how lucky people are who are allowed to come to the US, especially from “those places.”

Many students sign up ahead of time and then do not return for their sessions. Jessica has come to expect this at the time of her confrontation with Marielle. In actual practice, many of the tutors work with another student if they approach them during such a time, but the tutor will let the student who is not signed up know that someone else is signed up for the current slot and they, the tutor, would have to switch to the student who is signed up if they come. In this instance Jessica does not give Marielle this option. The sign-up sheets are given a sort of authority. Those who follow procedure are given precedence, even when they then do not follow through, or come late, wasting the tutor's time.

Students are also required to sign up to use the individual study rooms, and there are other rules posted about the use of an individual study room. They are only to be occupied by one person at a time, and an individual is not supposed to exceed two hours in a room at a time. However, the rooms are generally not in constant use, and so these rules are not particularly strictly followed by migrant students. Zaineb and Halima both, separately, enter these rooms in

the morning and appear several hours later to go to lunch or class, never having signed up. At times a friend will join Zaineb while she is working as well. Again, when there are conflicts, those who follow the sign-up procedure prevail.

A white American student checks the sign up on the first room. Dahabo is working inside, but only signed up for one slot. The newcomer puts her name down for the next slot, which begins in about ten minutes. She sits down to wait at the table across from the door. At the appointed time, Dahabo doesn't come out of the room. The white student walks to the front desk to get Sharon, the full time staff member [by passing Safa the forced migrant work study]. "There's someone in there and they won't come out, even though I'm signed up for 2:00," the student tells Sharon. They return to the room, and Sharon explains to Dahabo that she has to leave, because the other student signed up for that time.

Integrative Efforts

Some classes would assign group projects or presentations. Though most migrant students organize their schedules so they have at least one forced migrant friend in their section, there are never enough to make up a whole group for an assigned project. This necessitates reaching out to people outside of their normal network and that means including white students. Other times, teachers assign groups, which are always mixed. Many of these groups meet at the center to work. It is in these more formal academic peer groups that the most mixing along lines of country of origin, language, gender, and religion occur. The mixed group of students may continue to greet each other after the project is completed, but there is no further socializing and support. By the following semester they rarely acknowledge each other.

Zara and Dahabo, both Somali women about 20 years old who regularly socialize together in the academic support center (and beyond) sit at one of the work tables, chatting in Somali. Zara has her laptop open and shows Dahabo something. They are joined by a white man Dave, who is in his early twenties, and the conversation switches to English and they talk about

accounting. It is clear that they have a project to do together. “Do you have the assignment sheet with you?” the man asks the two women. Dahabo nods. They do not actually start work, but make small talk.

Dahabo: Do you like how he teaches?

Dave: He's ok.

Dahabo: I wish he would go over the problem sets from the chapter more.

Zara: Yeah, and sometimes he goes too fast.

An older white woman, Jane, joins them.

Jane: I'm sorry I'm late, I had to drop off my son at daycare.

At this point they really get to work, looking over the assignment sheet that Dahabo produced earlier, dividing up the questions and tasks and asking each other for help when they get stuck, or to check an answer. After about 45 minutes, Zara and Dahabo leave. This same group meets the next week. As Zara and Jane wait for the other two to arrive, Jane tells Zara how her son has been sick. Zara makes sympathetic noises. This group meets a few more times and the conversation does not get any more personal. Once the project is complete, I see them greet each other in passing a few times in the academic support center, but by the next semester they pass each other without a word, with the exception of Dahabo and Zara, who were friends before the project, and remain so after.

For Angelina, one group project is a great source of frustration. The group is asked to present the life and work of an author, William Carlos Williams. In doing the biography portion, she researches who his influences and teachers were. During a practice session she feels her suggestions and contributions are dismissed.

They made me so mad when we practice. We only have 15 minutes and we get marked down if we go over. I am last and they all talk too long, so when I say my part we are over. They tell me I can't say so much and to take out this and this. I say we should add what we learned and they tell me “good luck with that.”

When I ask her how the presentation goes a few days later, she gets even more upset.

You know, they make me so mad, that guy, he took my information, what they tell me to take out, and he said it in his part. That's wrong and it's rude. That was my work and not his. And do you know what? The only question the teacher asked after we finish was what we learned. Stupid. So stupid.

Angelina is well educated and proud of it. She tells me stories of how hard she needed to work in school while she was still in Eritrea, and how well she had done. “Even through my country is a mess, everything is a mess after Independence, the education is better. It is harder, we have to learn more than here.”

She is asked to do a reflection on the experience of doing a group project.

Angelina: I want you to help me. I'm so mad about this, but I don't want to sound bitchy. I need you to help me make it sound nice.

Astrid: It's ok to tell the teacher what happened.

Angelina: No, I can't say “he took my information.” I don't want to say that. It's ok, I don't want to blame him.

In her reflection she wants her teacher to know the truth, but at the same time does not want to seem like she is placing blame on others. In the end, she doesn't mention any negatives except when asked what challenges she faced, she simply writes, “working with immature students.”

Angelina does not want to be a problem, a potentially “angry black women” (Fordham 1993), so while she is angry enough about the situation to vent her feelings to me, she does not want to present herself as a problematic student to her teacher.

The academic support center also forces integration in a more subtle way through the way the space is arranged (see figure in Chapter 2). The large tables promote individuals sitting with others, forcing people to at least share space, if not also conversation. Some social groups are large enough to be able to fill a whole table, and create boundaries in that way, eliminating any intrusion from outsiders, though most are not. When the center is busy, students are forced

to sit with people outside of their social networks, or leave the area.

Staff also try to integrate students in not so subtle ways. They ask students who are working independently what they need help on, and students who are not actively seeking tutoring sit in the area that corresponds to the work they are doing. Tutors, particularly in the math area, sometimes mention that someone else is working on similar problems and point them out, in an effort to create new study partnerships. Other times they work with a few students who all had similar questions at the same time, and have them answer each others' questions (again violating official tutoring protocol). These types of study sessions can include forced migrant and mainstream students, creating interactions between the two parties that would not happen otherwise.

Such efforts do not always work. Hoda, a veiled young Somali woman, comes in asking for help studying for an upcoming exam. At that time, unfortunately for her, there are no tutors available who work in the subject she needs. She sits down to study on her own. Shortly thereafter, two mainstream college-aged students arrive and ask the same thing. They are given the same answer, but Sharon points to Hoda and mentions that she is also studying for the same exam and suggests that they all work together. Hoda eagerly looks up from her books and invites them to join her. One of the other women looks at her and then suddenly claims she needs to be elsewhere right then, and as she turns and leaves, the other silently follows.

For writing tutors, it is less common to pull students together to work on an assignment, due to the more individual nature of written work. At times, the tutors bounce between students, offering some guidance and letting the student work individually for a while while they work with another student. This does not facilitate as much conversation between students. However,

English Literature, which is required for all students at SMCC, does lead to discussions between students as they analyze and interpret their reading assignments. This can even span semesters, as the instructors do not change their courses significantly.

As the community college is not that large, many of the students have had the same teachers and read the same stories in the core curriculum of required classes. Conversations often arise between migrants who are working in the vicinity of the writing tutor area, as they overhear what others are working on, often chiming in with their experiences. They do not do this when white students are receiving tutoring.

Audette works on a paper exploring the significance of “Richard Cory,” but is struggling with how to form her ideas into an essay in the way the teacher is asking. Audette has a bachelors degree in hospitality, she is well-educated and writes well, but had a bad experience last semester with a teacher telling her he did not feel she was up to his course (for more on this see Chapter 8). The teacher in her current class has a well-known reputation for being difficult, and this seems to be eroding Audette's confidence. Hila stops by to say hello to Angela, one of the professional tutors, and overhears our conversation about the assignment. “I remember that poem, I had to write that paper too last semester.” “I'm just not sure what she wants,” Audette tells her. “I still have the paper on my laptop. I can print it so you can see, if you like,” Hila offers. Audette takes her up on the offer, and a few minutes later has a copy of Hila's essay on Richard Cory in her hand. Audette and Hila come from very different migrant backgrounds, do not share friends, home language, or religion, but nevertheless Hila goes out of her way to help Audette.

Angela is a professional tutor who also teaches the required college experience course.

She is a favorite among many of the migrant students. During the first week of March, she works with Khadija on an English assignment.

Angela: How is the class going? Do you like it?

Khadija: I like this semester. I was in the same class last semester but I dropped it. The instructor was terrible. Everyone [fellow migrants] who stayed got really bad grades, so I wanted to drop it so I wouldn't fail and hurt my GPA. I didn't want to drop it, but it was so bad. It was all tests, closed book. I was on academic probation so I really couldn't get a bad grade. Now I'm not, but this semester is so much better. We do group work.

Angela: Do you like working in groups? Because some people really don't, and so I don't do much in my classes.

Khadija: I really like it, I learn so much from my peers, and it's less stressful for an ELL. Also, I like the open book tests, because even though I read and understand the story, it is hard to pull out what I need from the story for the test without having the text. It's hard to do in a different language.

A few weeks later, Angela is working with Myrtle from Rwanda on the story "Richard Cory", which is about a rich man, and they start talking about people who cannot get ahead in life. Myrtle tells Angela about her aunt who works two jobs but is just barely making ends meet, and the effect it has on her kids because they never see her. "Her kids need affection." Angela wants to show Myrtle something in Google docs, but isn't sure how to do so. Audette, who is working across from them, explains how all the students have Google docs linked in the email accounts and explains how to use it. Once Angela moves on to the next student, Myrtle and Audette talk about their English teachers. Myrtle likes the instructor Boyd, says that she does things that other teachers would not do. For example, she asks her class what they wanted to read for a section, and Myrtle is glad they chose a novel, since she would rather read novels than disconnected pieces. "Even though there are still words that are hard, you could still look them up on google." Khadija shows up and joins the conversation. Boyd was the instructor whom she had when she dropped the class the previous semester, so her opinion differs.

Despite writing tutoring being generally more one-on-one, Angela actively seeks to bring students together. She is only there the first semester I am in the field. She tells me that she really cares “about the community in community college.” She is very personal with many students, some even refer to her as their “mother.”

Angela tells me it is important to her to know who the students are, what their goals are, and how that relates to the paper they are working on. She always asks students where they are from, what they are studying, what their life goals are. She also asks questions about them throughout their sessions, starting up discussions left and right. She has many regular students who come almost every day she works (Tuesdays and Thursdays), and do their homework in her vicinity, so they can ask her a quick question at any time.

Angela's practices as a tutor lead to increased interactions between students who would not be classified as friends. Since her regulars are nearly all migrant students, it does not lead to many more conversations between migrant and white American students, but it does integrate more forced migrants, leading to increased interactions across religious lines. Given the more personal nature of her conversations with them, as well as having multiple students around her while she has these conversations, it can spark interactions between the tutor, her current tutee and the surrounding regulars. It creates opportunities for students to support each other in small ways, offering a lesson from personal experience, or just a chance to commiserate about a certain instructor.

Because of the work habit patterns, Angela's group of regulars greet each other when around her, and build on this throughout the semester as they spend more time around each other. Even when Angela is not around, many would say hello and ask each other about

assignments they have completed together, inquiring after outcomes. This group crosses religious lines, making it unique. However it does not last after she does not return in the summer or fall. Once she leaves, the connections she facilitated between students from different social circles also dissipate.

While Angela is popular with some students, she also frustrates others looking for tutoring. She notoriously disregards the sign-up sheets, runs over appointment times, and works with multiple students at once. At times this can cause difficulties with other tutors and the assistant director, while some migrant students also feel they are given the focused attention on their work that they need, since other students interrupt, and sometimes even take over their time. Because the writing tutors use sign-up sheets, and being on time and following schedules is so emphasized in classes, migrant students can get angry and confused at Angela's tendency to disregard such practices.

At times the forced migrant students have more personal conversations with peer tutors with whom they work often and have a closer relationship. For Muslim students, some of these conversations with non-Muslim peer tutors revolve around which tenants of their religion they are questioning or rejecting (polygamy for example), rather than what makes them love their religion or proud believers. The peer tutors are an assimilative presence in that forced migrant students only feel comfortable discussing topics aligned with dominant American interpretations of Islamic practices. Hila, who told me “I really love my religion (Islam)” in her interviews never once mentions it to the tutors, though she regularly works with a number of them and will share other aspects of her life in Pakistan and Afghanistan. She tells me that she generally will not enter into discussions about Islam with individuals from the dominant population.

I will end up in a fight. I know how they see us, so I don't want to talk to them about it. I can't change their minds, even though I am Muslim and it isn't how they see it. I know how they see us, I see it on television. It's terrible and not true. But that is what they believe.

She has also witnessed and been on the receiving end of Islamophobic attacks. In a class, her teacher claims that Muslim women cannot get divorced. When Hila speaks up and says this is in fact not the case, the teacher tells her that she needs to learn her religion better. "I could not say anything. She is the teacher. But she is wrong. But I can't argue with her about this, she thinks she is right." It is instances like this that convince her not to share her passion for her religion widely with white Americans.

Fatuma frequently works with Jared, a peer tutor. She graduated from a local high school. While a visibly observant Muslim woman in her dress, always appearing veiled and wearing a long skirt and sleeves, she discusses issues in Islam in a way that is more in line with US mainstream understandings of Islam as oppressive to women.

It's really bad there [all Muslim majority countries] for women. Men control everything and tell them what to do. Like polygamy, if a man wants another wife it's ok. Me personally, I can never imagine being ok with that.

Fatuma had recently visited Kenya, which is not a Muslim majority country, and Somalia, but has never been to another Muslim majority area. However, she includes all Muslim majority spaces in her description of places that oppress women, positioning them negatively in comparison to the US, which echoes mainstream US discourse on Islam. Jared always supports Fatuma when she says such things, agreeing with her, and expressing his inability to understand living under such conditions. Such discussions ignore the diversity of the Muslim world, and the many pious Muslim women who would argue otherwise. Amina similarly talked about women's oppression by men in Somalia, but as she describes it, it has to do with Somali culture, not

Islam.

Mixing Migrants

The most successful integration produced by SMCC is in creating friendly interactions between migrants who do not share religious backgrounds¹⁵. The community college treats all migrants as people in need of assimilation versus the white Americans who are not. The immigrant students are willing to navigate differences between themselves, but not between themselves and people who can be identified as non-immigrants. Migrant students are friendly and helpful towards other migrants who are not in the social networks, and largely build on feelings of commonality deriving from their outsider status in Portland.

At the end of the school year, the ESL department hosts a social gathering for all students, past and present. This has happened for a number of years. I walk over with Jenn, an ESL teacher and professional tutor, and Mat, one of the popular peer tutors. The gathering takes place outside under a large gazebo, and when we arrive there is already about 40 students milling around. The tables under the gazebo are filled with food, mostly store bought. Jenn greets every student she meets. She gets drawn into a longer conversation with a young Afghani woman about her plans for the next semester. This party is a sort of goodbye for Jenn, after ten years as an ESL adjunct she says she is tired, and needs to do something else. Mat also knows the majority of the students, and asks them about their current classes and family members. Many of these students are not well known to me, so I spend more time observing the interactions. Unlike in the tutoring center where the main focus is always interactions with individuals from one's social network, here the crowd is in constant motion, everyone flowing

¹⁵ There are a number of student groups who socialize beyond the boundaries of SMCC that are made up of people who do not share country of origin or language. This will be taken up later in Chapter 7 devoted to peer supports.

together with no established groups. The group as a whole is diverse as far as observable characteristics such as age, race, religion. Some stop to chat with people who share a home language, but most speak to each other in English.

After an hour or so the gathering starts to break up. “What's going on? Where are you going?” Jenn asks a few departing students. “I have class,” says one, “I have to go to work,” replies another. “Where's the music? Why is nobody dancing?” Jenn asks Mat. They reminisce about past years' gatherings that lasted much longer with all kinds of impromptu activities. Despite its brevity, this gathering shows how integrative efforts have worked as far as enforcing secularity in the public space, but the integrative efforts fall short of bringing migrant students into relationships with students from the dominant population.

English the Unofficial Official Language

The US has no official language. Despite a lack of legal foundation, the policy on refugees strongly emphasizes the importance of language. “English language ability is critical to a refugee's successful transition in American society” (Gov. of USA 2013:10). Non-native English usage is perceived by many of the women in this study to be a barrier to their economic and social citizenship. While migrants freely converse in other languages than English in the academic support center, faculty and staff speak critically of practices that they believe hinder the progress of students' English skills. Jenn, an ESL teacher and professional tutor tells me:

I notice when they don't take classes over the summer and don't practice. Or they go away to Somalia or Kenya for a semester. They will be doing really great, making so much progress, and then they stop, and it all goes backwards. It's so frustrating as their teacher, it's like we have to start all over again.

Students are not openly told not to speak non-English languages, but they are encouraged to

practice English at home, which does not leave much time for maintaining other languages. They are given lists of ways to add to their English practice outside of class, which include things like “get together for coffee with friends and only speak English, read to your child in English, watch television in English, read the newspaper.” The message constantly is that they need more practice, which articulates a priority for English over their home languages.

An older Somali woman just starting her student career at the community college talks about why she had enrolled.

I came here because I want to learn English. I want to learn English for my kids. I want to be able to help them, to understand what is going on in their school and to help them with homework. I want to be able to get a good job so they see me work, and they work for more too.

For her, being able to speak English means engaging with larger social spheres including her children's schools. It also means that she can find work outside her home, and not be restricted to the typical migrant work that is available for those with low levels of English fluency. This would bring her into social and economic realms where she wanted to participate more fully, like any other citizen. By expressing her hope that improving her English would allow her to access these areas, she shows that at this point she feels shut out from them. English fluency is required for women to be seen as fully “modern.” This woman, like many of the older Somali woman, wears long hijabs over long flowing dresses. She recognizes the need to function according to language norms, but is not willing, nor did she feel enough pressure to assimilate in her dress or religious expression.

Most of the women I speak with mention English first when I ask about what is the most challenging for them. Halifa from Ethiopia, started at the community college because she wanted a better job. Previously she worked in a factory setting, where it was too loud for conversation,

and she did not see her English skills progressing to the level she wanted, for the life she envisioned for herself and her family. She hopes that taking classes will both help her English skills, and allow her to find a job that pays better.

Despite the recognized importance of English in daily life outside the home, and the subsequent barrier it can present to non-native speakers, the women do not give up their native languages for it. Migrants who share a common language other than English will speak to each other in that non-English language. This is also true for phone conversations. Those who arrived as young children are predominantly Somali speaking and tend to code-switch more between English and Somali, liberally sprinkling their conversations with English phrases. However, they always speak Somali with their parents on the phone.

Native languages are also being preserved in the next generation. Amina tells me her sister teaches her children that “you speak Somali at home, and good English outside,” just as their mother had always stressed to them. Amina speaks Somali both to her mother and other family members, as well as to other Somali students even when regional differences make it difficult. Other students are concerned about how their first languages would be affected by the new emphasis on English necessitated by their current situation. Myrtle from Rwanda, who lives with both her parents started learning English eight years ago, when she arrived as a 12-year-old. Over those years she became extremely fluent with no noticeable accent, to the point that I believe her to be US born when I initially meet her. However, she still only speaks French to her parents, and also does so with other French speaking African-origin students.

This practice of speaking their first languages in the home is something that many of the women mentioned. Those with children want to pass the language on, preserving the social

practices from their home countries, but still want to improve their own English skills to help with their children's education, homework and school interactions. There is a creation of separate linguistic spheres. English is important for engagements in the public sphere, while native languages are to continue to be nurtured at home. For the students, this public/private line becomes blurred at the support center, as they study and socialize with other migrant students, and commonly speak shared languages other than English, either native languages, or lingua francas such as Swahili, Arabic, or French.

By virtue of how the community college is organized, and how the material taught, forced migrants are expected to behave in certain ways or risk “not doing it right.” This would bar them from accessing services or being seen as appropriate students. The faculty, staff and students who belong to the dominant population act towards the forced migrants as “person[s]-to-be-changed,” women who are in need of being developed by virtue of being foreign born (Lave and Wenger 1991:112; Adely 2012). These individuals act as gatekeepers from full participation in the community of practice, both in the community college, but also in the greater Portland area, as the intended purpose of the college is to prepare the students for what comes after graduation.

The ways of being, such as time allocation and scheduling are assimilative, but seen as culturally neutral, instead of recognizing how they are culturally situated in the community college. Colleges “present an imperative to assimilate that is broader and more sweeping than anything that has come before, entailing nothing less than a fundamental realignment of values beliefs and attitudes” (Harklau 1998:642). The authority of the sign-up represents a way of knowing, and regulates ways of being on a fundamental level: as *individuals* who recognize a

certain understanding of how time is to be used, even when observance of actual practice teaches a different lesson, or the realities of the demands on their time are considered (see Chapter 5).

According to Harklau (1998), and as the time-management practices indicate, colleges expect students to place institutional authority and individual achievement above family responsibilities (domestic and economic work). However “newcomer families may see this as an unnecessary distancing of children from the familial and community sphere” (646). This relates both to the students who are the children in their family, as well as to the students who are parents themselves.

The efforts at SMCC to overtly teach time management and scheduling, which it believes to be necessary for employment after graduation (what the schooling is preparing them for), is somewhat ironic given the data presented in the previous chapter. The women are already working and able to schedule themselves and allocate time to make sure they get to their jobs and still pick up the kids. Yet due to their difference, they are seen as still needing to learn such ways of being according to the mainstream. The tutors insist on correct scheduling and sign-up protocol from forced migrant students despite the fact that they violate these protocols on a regular basis. Farrah and Amira are chastised for wanting to work together, even though tutors bounce back and forth between students, and it is more efficient to answer one question once, and only take up one half-hour block rather than answer it twice and take an hour. Marielle does not even get the chance to get started because Jessica determines there to not be enough time (without giving Marielle a chance to say what she needs). In practice there is a lot of flexibility in the adherence to sign-up rules and time allocation, but when there is a question of a forced migrants practice, the official policies are deferred to.

The official policy of the community college is to be an inclusive institution adhering to larger US policies of equal opportunity, and in such efforts teachers and staff create instances when forced migrant students must collaborate with their white peers. The groups either assigned or ad hoc show the limits to the authority of the teachers and staff. They can mandate that students complete tasks together, but they cannot force the creation of long-lasting relationships that would lead to feelings of inclusion by the forced migrant students (to be taken up in the next chapter). The inclusion that teachers and staff at SMCC have fostered is limited to between forced migrants from different backgrounds as demonstrated by the support and interactions between Angela's regulars and the ESL students at the year-end party. In both these cases the integration is limited.

English is recognized as being vital for full participation, both by faculty, staff and forced migrants. English practice is so emphasized, it discourages the continuation of home languages because there is no time given for their maintenance, but the forced migrants are not prepared to give them up. Bartlett and Garcia (2011) study a high school for immigrants from the Dominican Republic. What they document challenges the predominant method of seeing home language as a hindrance. They find that by incorporating Spanish and “translanguaging” in the classroom the students are able to succeed both in English and their academic subjects. Instead of seeing the home language as an obstacle, it is used as a resource, and thus the achievement of these students is higher than in high schools with more traditional ELL classrooms. With a diverse linguistic population, incorporating home languages by the instructors is not realistic, but there is potential for instructors to encourage continued engagement with literacy in their home language. Angelina, who studied nursing in Amharic, is able to read very complex medical

studies in English, with more fluidity and comprehension than when she reads English literature, because she is able to draw on her existing medical knowledge in another language. However, her way of speaking English is constantly being evaluated in her school work and found lacking.

The difference theory sees underperforming minorities as merely coming from a different culture, but still needing to learn dominant cultural behaviors to be successful. It is very successful in making well-intentioned teachers and tutors who are trying to help into people who reify failure identifications. Tutors and staff want to “teach them the way we do things,” and adhere strictly to official rules when forced migrant students attempt to deviate. Perhaps they are not aware of their own flexibility, because in practice tutors deviate from the written standards themselves. Students who speak their home languages in order to maintain their language skills and connections to people from their countries of origin are seen by their teachers as not committed enough to learning English to be able to be successful in the long run. The teachers want the students to graduate and get better paying employment, and so they act in ways that reinforce the behaviors they deem successful, and denigrate others. Instead of recognizing the capabilities forced migrant students demonstrate in their daily lives, given that they are operating in a system that they are less familiar with and in a language that is not their own, the focus is on how they are not conforming – allowing for the migrant students to be found lacking.

Formal academic English in particular is used as a gate-keeping mechanism to block the migrant students' entry into full participation in the community college. ESL teachers exert pressure to get it “right,” such as with suggestions of how to practice English, specifically mentioning instances where they should speak English and not valuing the maintenance of home languages. The use of academic English only intensifies in regular education classes in

pertaining to written work, as will be taken up in Chapter 8.

CHAPTER 7 PEER SUPPORT

Forced migrant students seek refuge among others who are similar, undermining the whole integration for assimilation agenda. Hila has a diverse group of friends, but they are all forced migrants.

I don't have American friends, all of my friends are immigrants, I feel like I feel more comfortable with immigrants. Some Americans are really responsible and understandable, but some of them are like, they don't understand or they don't want to understand. So I don't want to be in that situation, when I want them to understand my situation. Like when I can't go out because of my family situation, I feel like they are going to make fun of me, maybe it's just me, my feelings, so that's why I'm not so close to Americans. But I have some women friends, like all of my tutors and my teachers are close to me. Sometimes I go out with my tutor, so she understands.

For Hila, having friends to whom she does not have to explain herself is important. She feels that if it becomes necessary to do so she would be ridiculed for her difference. Initially she is talking about other students to whom she does not have to explain herself, which she feels she would have to do with peers from the white American population. However, she mentions friendships with teachers and tutors, who belong to this population, but sees these individuals as exceptions to the norm. It is not an issue of her rejecting Americans, but rather a protective measure reacting to experiences of being rejected, questioned or ridiculed by Americans. "I don't want to explain why I can't go out, and have them laugh or think it's strange." She does not seem to mind explaining herself to me, nor to the tutors, and often explains how things are for her, but from these individuals she does not fear rejection because of it.

Angelina also reports experiences of rejection by white American students. She does not have any strong friendships at the center that I see, and I ask her about friends and study

partners. She says she has tried in the past to make connections, initially to study, with white students in her classes, and says that they all act interested, exchanging phone numbers and promising to make plans. However, she reports that when she reached out and wanted to get together, she said that they either did not pick up the phone, or made hollow excuses often enough that she gave up on them. When I ask her about who supports her she mentions “study partners from the same, you know from Africa, not from here. This is how we study in Africa, we quiz each other until we know it.”

When the local context displays a strong political bias against them, racially, religiously or both, it may appear prudent to retreat from the local population where one is able to, in order to preserve the dignity of one's sense of self (Stepick and Stepick 2003). The forced migrant students at SMCC do not have observable long-term friendships with their white American peers. The institutional structures at SMCC and the faculty, staff and other students react to the otherness of the forced migrants in a way that forced migrants create a border around themselves as a whole. Within this border the migrant students create groups of friends who support each other. The groups are composed in ways that show how certain differences are made more or less important. Among the forced migrants, religion, and how individuals express their piety, create boundaries to groups in ways that language and country of origin do not. Within these groups, there is some informal education happening, particularly surrounding religion that relates to proper conduct and how to be “other” in the community college (both how to survive and navigate difference).

Enduring Social Interactions

There are a number of groups that have resiliency over time and regularly meet at the

center, as opposed to the fleeting nature of groups created by teachers and staff. Not all members are necessarily present on any given day, and their membership in these groups does not preclude them from interacting with others. I determine group membership by observing whether the individuals will seek out each other over other acquaintances. These groups also pool resources: borrow books from each other, carpool, and lend each other their computers. As mentioned, there are relationships across groups (as is the case of sisters who belong to different groups), but there are also clear divisions.

Group 1 - Nadine and Esme

I meet Nadine (Burundian Christian, around 20 during the time of the study) when she needs help on a presentation about friendship. She is being asked to describe her best friend. She describes her closeness with Esme, who shares a similar background. I get to know the two over the next few months, and observe as they interact with the others who make up their regular network at the center.

In the speech for her class presentation on her best friend, Nadine describes how she and Esme both “come from the same place.” Esme always understands her, she is always there for Nadine when she is having a hard time. Nadine talks about how funny Esme is, how she is always making her laugh. While I work with Nadine to fix some of the English writing errors in her slide show presentation, Esme comes over to join us. They speak to each other in Swahili, laughing and joking, seemingly about Nadine's speech. These two are very close, as documented by Nadine claiming Esme as her “best friend.” They discuss their classes and current assignments, talking about challenges and frustrations. I also see them socializing with other Christian African migrants. They spend time with each other outside of center. At times they

recount parties or other happenings (often organized through their church) they attended together, or make plans together. They also carpool to and from the community college. Nadine and Esme provide practical aid to each other, as well as emotional support, and similarly to Hila; this is rooted in mutual understanding of their experience.

Practical aid is at other times extended beyond close emotional ties, but still within a bounded grouping of forced migrants.

Lydia: I still have one more class today, after I finish this work, but then I don't know how I am going to get home. Daniel brought me today, but he is at work now.

Dominique: I have to go now, my shift starts at four, but I think that Gaston is here, he has to stay late too. He will take you home. Do you want to call and ask?

Lydia: I don't really know him so well, I hate to ask.

Dominique: But it's ok, he will do it. He does not mind.

Lydia: I will call.

The people in this group are all young adults on their own and are mainly orphans, though some have parents still living in Africa. They spend much of what little free time they have with each other. Jeanette, from Burundi, tells me how wonderful it was when she first arrived to have other Africans she could talk to in between her long hours at work.

We eat dinner together, we cook, we go to the beach, and we all borrow the same DVDs. We don't have television, because it is expensive, but we have DVDs, some are from here, and some are from home. They are good for learning English and when you are homesick.

While Esme and Nadine come from the same country, not all the other forced migrants in their group do, though they are all Christian. This is the same for Jeanette and the group of young African forced migrants she associates with. For Muslim forced migrants students it is the same. All the members of a friendship group share their religion, but not language or country of origin. The exception is among Somali support networks; Somalis are the largest population and

this facilitates the creation of single ethnicity groups in the way forced migrants from other countries with fewer representatives at SMCC are not able to.

Group 2 Asfana, Leila, Aman and Co.

I know Asfana best in the first Muslim group I will describe. She is from Afghanistan, and fled to Iraq with her family where she attended some high school before moving to Portland. Afsana's sister, Sadia, also attends the community college. Despite being sisters, Afsana does not socialize or even sit and work with the same Middle Eastern women as her sister (including her sister). In fact, I am not even aware that they know each other, let alone are sisters until a number of months have passed. When I learn that they are sisters, it is in a conversation where Sadia mentions how she is questioning aspects of her religion, which her sister and mother do not. When I ask about her sister, Sadia points to the table across the writing area where Asfana is working with Jessica.

Afsana is friends with two sisters from Iraq, Aman and Leila, rather than her own. The two Iraqi women both veil, as does Asfana but not Sadia. They all arrived in Portland 2-3 years ago and initially attended the adult education center to start learning English. English remains fairly difficult, and their vocabularies are not extensive. They are in similar classes, remedial ESL and the first semester required class, as their English levels are at a similar level. This is possibly due to the shared education at adult education. This group does not meet outside of the support center. They always sit together and chat. Because they share their classes, they often collaborate on their assignments, but do spend time just being social as well.

Group 3 Sadia, Safa and Co.

The group to which Afsana's sister Sadia belongs are all from the Middle East. Members

of this group are more active in their discussions and behaviors questioning Islam. This questioning however, is not about being a believer versus not believing, but more about certain practices they feel are oppressive, specifically in regards to their gender (none of the women wear a hijab while at the community college). Sadia describes her mother and sister as “good followers of Islam, but me, I'm not so sure. I mean I believe, but... some things... They always wear hijabs, but not me”. She tells me how Islam values boys over girls in the family, that girls are not really considered part of the family, because they leave and marry into someone else's family.

In Islam they want boys, they carry their family name, so that is important. My father is not like this, he only has two girls, and he loves us. I think he would like to have a son, but he never says anything. He is a good Muslim and loves his family.

Her current, personal rejection of veiling does not preclude Sadia from demonstrating other behaviors in line with ideas about modest Muslim women. She confides that she was having problems finding a section of her math course that suited her.

I had to change my math class. The first class, there were no other girls [this meant no other Muslim women], so I have no one to work with. I don't want to stay in the that class by myself, so I looked at the schedule to see if there was another. I changed to a different day, and there is another girl I can sit with. But then she dropped the class! I talked to my friend, and she also has to take a math class, but she only has time during the first class, so I ended up back in that section! But this way we can do the work together in the class.

She wants a study partner and a friend in the course. In hopes of finding a woman to work with, she changed sections twice, even ending up back in the same section. Approaching a man or a non-(forced) migrant woman to study with is beyond what she deems appropriate and possible for her. This shows a border for her, who she can informally work with and who she cannot. However, she often works with one of the white male peer tutors. In the case of a formal,

professional/educational contact, it is possible for her. At the same time she discusses being open to dating, and demonstrates the liberal western orientation of a “good Muslim” as she mostly desires her independence.

Group 4 Hila, Madina and Co.

The way that Sadia and her friends talk about Islam is different than how Hila, who is also from Afghanistan, and her friends talk about their faith. While Hila also expressly values her independence, regarding her religion she is much less hesitant. “I really love my religion.” She also has no interest in dating saying with pride how she is still “a good girl,” though she rejected her arranged marriage. She is careful to respect her parents, especially her father, but also feels that her father gives her leeway because “he can see I'm not going in a wrong way” by focusing on her education and not running around with boys. Hila does have friends who are male, but she does not even think about dating and marriage. “Some day maybe, but I have to fight so hard to get my education, this comes first. When I am done, then I will think about that.” She is friends with a number of Muslim men and women. The men are all from the Middle East, as are a number of women. One woman, Madina, is from Somalia. A number of them speak Arabic, either because they come from countries where it is potentially their first language, they had spent time in Arabic speaking countries on their way to the U.S., or they had learned it as part of their religious upbringing. However, Madina does not speak Arabic, and English is also very common in this group. The women always wear hijabs. There is another group of women who are also Middle Eastern Muslims who do not veil, and the men in Madina's also socialize with them (Sadia and her friends described above). Women who do and do not veil are friendly with each other but do not belong to the same social networks.

This group does get together outside of SMCC and help each other navigate different aspects of life in the Portland area that present challenges to them. One day while she is at the support center, Hila helps Ahmed fill out a job application. On another occasion Madina sits with Zohal while she registers for classes. They have a conversation about which teachers to take in the available sections, and Madina gives her other tips about how to put together a schedule.

Group 5 Dahabo, Hoda, and Co.

Madina's younger sister, Dahabo, also comes to the center on a regular basis, but does not socialize with the same group as her sister. She belongs to a group of young Somali women all around 20 years old, who are younger than Dahabo's sister and her friends. Dahabo's friends do the most socializing compared to academics. They all arrived in the US in their early to mid-childhood, and attended high school locally. Also, many in this group wear makeup, spend a great deal of time talking about hair, fashion and beauty products. While there are other forced migrants who wear makeup, it and fashion are less a topic of conversation. Members of this group report having difficulties with their fathers – having to behave differently if they are in their presence, or in the presence of someone who can report their behavior back to their fathers. Although some practices prevalent in this group challenge what might be considered Islamic practices by mainstream discourse, there is no rejection of either Islam or Somalia. They have clear modesty standards that all members of this group conform to, which are slightly different from Middle Eastern standards. Both wear long sleeves and hijabs, but the notable difference is pants, Middle Eastern women wear them, Somali women overwhelmingly do not. Among all the Muslim women I know in the Portland area, I only observe this one hard rule that separates women from the Middle East from those from Somalia. Women from the Middle East would

pair hijabs with pants, while among Somali women, if they were wearing pants, they would not also be veiled.

Dahabo's group speak Somali to each other, though interspersed with English phrases. Their spoken English is fluent and they switch easily, though among themselves they create a barrier to outsiders through their use of language. They spend time together outside of SMCC and will often carpool to and from campus. Their families all know each other.

Group 6 Amina and Halima

Two non-traditional aged Somali women students are strong supports for each other, Halima and Amina. Despite being from the same country, they have some linguistic differences.

Astrid: So there are regional differences in Somali, and you don't always understand?

Amina: Yes, like Halima is from the north and I am from the south, so she uses some different words than me. Like "knee" she says [both dissolve into laughter]

Halima: Sometimes we have confusions, and we have to ask, "stop, what did you say? What do you mean?" But it's ok.

Amina: Halima has travelled a lot, and so she is used to different accents, she understands more than me.

Halima and Amina are taking two of the same classes, and often work together on assignments at the center. Amina and Halima have a warm rapport. They also carpool some days, though on others they arrive separately, without a plan to meet, and spend those days working individually. Other Somali women over the age of 30 who come to the center often greet the two, and at times they chat or work together. The younger Somali women, such as Dahabo's group, rarely interact with them, so it appears that a line divides the older from the Somali women around 20 years old, despite being in the same classes. They know each other, but do not greet each other or work together.

One day, one of the younger women approached Halima, Amina and me as we sit at a table, and without preamble asks Amina a question in Somali. Despite my inability to understand the exchange, it is clear that the two know each other, and she just needs information, but there is no lingering socializing. Amina answers her and the woman returns to her table. Amina sometimes tells me things about some of the younger Somali women who come to the center, she knows who is getting married and all their family members, but this does not constitute a friendship or peer support, at least not of the sort seen or reported at the academic support center.

Amina does talk about her responsibility to offer support as part of her duty as a Muslim woman.

My neighbor, she is Somali but not from my part, I can't understand her, she knocked on the door yesterday. She asked me something, and I didn't understand. But I tried, I have to help her you know? It is what God says I have to do. She needed something. So I brought her in, and she showed me, she needed some sugar.

This helpfulness extends to other Somali students at the support center, but it is different than the friendship with Halima. Unless she is directly engaged in helping, Amina does not interact with the younger Somali students. Amina interacts in a friendly helpful manner with a number of younger Somali women, but it is never more than just attending to whatever the goal is at the moment. Over the summer Amina and I spend several days working on the food journal project, inputting the data and then analyzing the results. The teacher for the course has left a sample project at the support center so that students have a model to follow. As we finish up the project, Amina gets the model to make sure that her work is matching up with the expectations. On one such day, Fardowsa, a Somali woman in her early twenties, approaches us and greets Amina in Somali. She then asks “do you have the model?” The next few exchanges are in Somali, and

Amina hands her the packet. Then Fardowsa leaves. “She's in my class,” Amina tells me, “she'll bring it back when she is done.”

Amina's sense of obligation to help can also be seen when she brings a younger Somali woman in and arranges for her to get help on the same assignment we had worked on the day before. Since Amina wants to work with me on another assignment for her sociology class, I arrange for the other woman to work with a peer tutor at the next table. While we are working, Amina's prayer alarm goes off, and she turns to me and says, “Can you excuse me? I need to go pray.” Then she turns to the woman, and speaks in Somali. There is a brief exchange, and they both laugh. Amina turns to me and says, “I'm giving her a hard time for not going to pray,” with a smile on her face. Amina also describes her style of dress as a religious obligation, it is the “correct way” of doing things. She explains to me that it is important to cover one's body and hair, and to wear long loose clothing, because “your body is from God and for you and your husband, you should not show even its shape to another man by wearing pants.” The other woman is wearing hijab and clothing that would pass Amina's appropriateness threshold. However, her understanding of pious behavior does not necessitate praying at school. Amina exerts gentle pressure toward her religions practice, yet they both laugh and Amina smiles as the other woman declines. Muslim forced migrants face some assimilative and secularizing pressure from the white American population, but also face opposite pressure from other Muslim peers, such as Amina, to perform their otherness, and to not forget their Muslim practices.

Support systems are critical to academic success. Friends serve as study partners, lunch dates, rides, gossip buddies and more, all within the space provided by the community college.

Friendships have not been widely studied among immigrant communities. At times they are mentioned in passing, and are largely assumed to be co-ethnic in nature (e.g. Suarez-Orozco 2003, Ngo 2009, Kusow 2006). In studies on minority achievement that look at support networks, these are nearly always assumed to be homogenous. Within these groups there is policing of proper behavior, rooted in their country of origin. This study provides an interesting situation where there is so much diversity within the newcomer group that most peer groups consist of members from different countries of origin, yet there are clearly rules for behavior being upheld.

Mir (2009) examined how Muslim students in American universities informed each other about how to act properly “Muslim” in various situations: in private, in the greater public and in Muslim Student associations. They were careful not to appear “too American”, and what that entailed was informed and enforced by more senior members of the student body. This informal educating follows the model set out by Lave and Wenger (1991), where in a community of practice, newcomers move to more full participation through legitimate peripheral participation. All members are continually participating through practice, which involves no direct instruction, but rather in the act of engaging in these communities they figure out what to do next. Hence, informal education is ubiquitous, according to Sabin (2007), an anthropologist of education, as “interaction in all contexts has the potential to be educative and that the nature of such educative interaction is the production of behavior appropriate to the particular context” (1691).

At SMCC, there is some similar informal educating about how to be a Muslim. However, the various social groups show that different women make different choices in this regard. They surround themselves with others who make similar choices about how to follow Islam

appropriately in this context. This is seen in the groups in the way they make choices about how to dress and veil. As Amina demonstrates, sometimes those with different interpretations will nudge others into practices more similar to their own, but this is done with a light touch, in a nod to the largely secular space of the community college (more on practicing secularity in the following chapter).

Ngo (2009) finds among his Lao participants that their co-ethnic peers and parents would overtly pressure them to confine their friendships to their own ethnicity, out of fear that the young people would pick up “bad” practices from other groups, leading them to “forgetting their own race” (9). The friendships with other immigrant students are also seen as dangerous because they are seen as being more Americanized, causing fears that they will “forget [their] identity as a Lao person” (*ibid.*). The women in this study do not report any fears about losing their own ethnic identity through mixed friendships. However, the boundary making between friendship groups who demonstrate different religious behaviors may serve a similar function. Less outwardly observant Muslim women do not want to be grouped with those more visibly “other,” fearing that identification and subsequent ramifications from the public. Conversely, more observant Muslim women may fear the US influence undermining their own religious identity. At the same time, both types of groups may not want to feel pressure to perform certain religious behaviors that they choose not to adopt.

Internally for all the groups there is some education about how to perform othering, because for all these groups an important aspect of the support they provide each other is the understanding of being an other in Portland. They do also provide other types of emotional support, as well as practical, but the main theme is the need to be understood, to not have to

explain or justify their difference. They do create boundaries between themselves as forced migrants, and perform and justify their difference in various ways, but these boundaries are porous compared with the borders the forced migrants erect between themselves and their white American peers (refer to integrative efforts in previous chapter).

CHAPTER 8 EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

Getting a school degree is touted by authorities the world over, such as UNESCO, as the “key to a better” future. Forced migrant students ascribe to this, telling me that their education would give them better opportunities for easier lives in the future. They report big dreams, becoming a doctor, dentist, lawyer. This study only covers a year, so it cannot definitively say what the final outcomes of their educational and career trajectories will be. However, there are several indicators that while some social mobility may be possible through the successes up to and at the point I am able to observe, it is more than likely that their initial aspirations will be blocked by a variety of institutional factors, as they are already facing challenges in this area. Teachers can either help compensate for institutional problems or compound them. Teachers are fundamental to the success of students, as they are the gate-keepers who decide if students have sufficiently demonstrated the targeted knowledge, and teachers are also supposed to facilitate gaining the required knowledge. Forced migrant students are at a disadvantage. Not only do many not have complete schooling experiences, their education thus far has not always been in the US system so they lack exposure to expected curricula. Even for those who graduated locally, their relegation to ESL classes means they do not have mainstream experiences, and are missing some of the expected skills (Chapter 4). The institutional barriers forced migrants encounter, whether they be in understanding how to navigate bureaucracy at SMCC, or demonstrating the required academic English skills in the classroom or on standardized tests, cause many to cool out or drop out all together, settling for less lofty futures than they first dreamed of.

Forced migrant students face many hurdles once enrolled at the community college, passing placement exams, signing up for classes, and paying for it all. This chapter turns to what that struggle is all for; what does this education that they worked so hard to access actually looks like from their perspective? The opportunity to access schooling is one of the things the forced migrants are grateful for in the US. However, students are not overly satisfied with their actual experience, and their experience does not match up with their aspirations. They see themselves as working hard, and yet still being blocked from moving forward, which does not add up in their estimation, especially when their teachers do not make clear to them where they are going wrong.

Other issues are a matter of protocol and systemic hurdles that frustrate the progress they wish to make. There is the bureaucracy of making sure all the paperwork is completed on time and the finances taken care of. These issues were addressed in previous chapters. Also mentioned earlier was the use of standardized tests for placement in regular or remedial classes. Standardized tests continue to be an issue for students who aspire to the nursing program. These tests are known to be problematic, and many institutions are lessening their usage, yet, they still are utilized and carry a lot of weight, having serious impacts on the lives of forced migrant students. The nature of standardized tests and the way they are used have racist/xenophobic results, labeling migrant students as failures and blocking social mobility (Steele & Aronson 1995, Good et al. 2003).

Credit or No Credit

Asfana is in her first semester at SMCC, and after two years of English instruction at the adult education center, she still has ESL courses she needs to take. As ESL courses do not

convey credit, the bulk of her tuition pays for classes that do not count her towards graduation. “I also wish that there were more classes for ESL students to take. I wish I had more academic English so I could take more courses so I can move ahead.”

Asfana comes from Afghanistan by way of Iraq, and lives with her sister, mother and father. After fleeing Afghanistan for Iraq, she and her sister, Sadia, attended high school there. She feels she has a solid academic foundation, but she is only just starting her third year studying English.

Astrid: When did you come to Portland?

Afsana: We came two years ago.

Astrid: Is that how long you've been learning English?

Afsana: Yes.

Astrid: How did you learn English? Where?

Afsana: We go to adult ed. I was there two years, and then I apply here and they take me, this is my first semester. I want to get a good education. I want to be a doctor.

Astrid: A doctor?

Afsana: Yes, I want to study here and then go to medical school so I can be a rheumatologist. My mother, she has arthritis, and it is bad. I want to help people like her. She suffers a lot. But it is hard, I want to take more classes, I want more academic English so I can take medical classes, not just ESL.

This desire to take classes she feels would contribute more towards her future career comes up often, and is a large source of frustration for Asfana. Both with herself, in that her English isn't advancing more quickly, but also with the community college, because she is restricted to only introductory-level general education requirements because of her ESL status. She has many years of formal schooling ahead of her to become a rheumatologist, and it is understandable that she wants to advance quickly.

Asfana is not the only forced migrant student eager to finish with the remedial and ESL courses so they can start taking content courses for credit. Because they are able to take some

regular education courses concurrently, many do. However, many of these migrants are still struggling with written English grammar as required by their teachers, and their teachers find their performance and understanding to be poor, reflected in the poor and sometimes failing grades the migrant students receive.

Sarah, the assistant director of the academic support center, also takes issue with the remedial nature of how ESL is structured. “They [students] should be getting credit for ESL classes. We give students credit for studying French or Spanish, so we should value that they speak other languages. But we don't, so they are paying for years and never feel like they're making progress.”

The question of credits and concurrent coursework is connected for students, because it has to do with their progression at SMCC. However, they are separate issues. Students who are taking credit-bearing courses at the same time as remedial courses do not show potential to be recognized as successful. It is possible that if students learning English were given credit, then the pressure to take regular education classes would not be as great.

“They're not teaching us”

Halifa came to the Portland area nearly ten years ago. She learned some English in school in Ethiopia during her childhood, but describes it as rote memorization. Her English skills were not functional when she arrived with her husband and young son. At that point, she worked in a packing plant, a position available to her before her English skills improved. Now she works as a CNA (Certified Nursing Assistant). Through English classes at the adult education center in Portland she progressed to the point of being accepted at SMCC. She hopes to become a medical assistant, wanting a stable career and to improve her academic skills to help her children. I meet

her at the end of the spring semester. She is a regular who comes in early in the morning to devote time to improving her writing skills since she is very frustrated by her low grades. She is looking for additional tutoring over the summer, as she is receiving poor grades on her essay and does not quite understand why. I volunteer to work with her after explaining my double motivation considering my project. Looking over the essays Halifa brings me from her class, the first in the two required general education English classes, I noticed the written feedback is sparse and vague. This course has no prerequisites beyond the student having a high enough ACCUPLACER score to forego any remedial English. It is a basic English composition class, designed to prepare students for the type of writing their subsequent college teachers will expect. However, Halifa cannot recall ever being instructed on how to actually write a college style essay.

Astrid: What did you do in class?

Halifa: We read things, and the teacher talks about them. Then she tells us to write an essay.

Astrid: Does she ever mention things like introductions, topic sentences, transition sentences?

Halifa: No, she just tells us to do it.

What I observe from one of the professional tutors who teaches the class is a focus on learning essay structure. Cathy, the tutor and instructor, tells me she works with her students first to create an outline with the requisite parts (introduction, thesis statement, transitions, topic sentences, etc.) and they then put it together in essay form. She shows me the worksheet she uses. “First they need to get the basic formula down. Once they know it, then they can get creative.” Halifa is not in Cathy's section of the course, and she does not report any such scaffolding exercises. Her teacher feels that Halifa's work lacks organization and she has a tendency to ramble according to the rubric they marked to calculate Halifa's score. Halifa asks

me what the teacher means by her comments.

Astrid: It says that you ramble in this essay.

Halifa: What does that mean?

Astrid: Do you see here in this paragraph you talk about meeting your best friend, when you had your son, and when you had to say good bye to her?

Halifa: Yes

Astrid: You are jumping from one topic to another in the same paragraph. A paragraph should be about one thing, you start by saying what it will be about, a topic sentence, then you give the details, and then introduce the next subject to transition to the next paragraph to end¹⁶.

Halifa: Oh

Astrid: Did the teacher go over what a paragraph is? Or how they expect an essay to be structured? Tell you what goes into an introduction and what a conclusion is?

Halifa: No, she never said any of those things. She talks about other things in class, but not writing, not how to write. But then we do these essays and she says it's bad.

Many forced migrant students report similar lack of teaching by instructors what students need to succeed in their classes. Many of my participants express frustration during tutoring sessions because teachers simply say that something is wrong, but do not explain what would be right. Students are told to “be specific,” “stay on topic,” “correct grammatical mistakes,” without ever knowing what is meant or where the errors occurred. Teachers have expectations of what the students already should know, based on their placement in their class, which reflect the expectations of a US high school diploma. Forced migrant students either attended high school outside of the US and learned different curricula in different languages, or were in ELL tracks as opposed to mainstream course where one would learn the expected content. The required SMCC ESL courses do not fill in the gaps for students so there is no opportunity for them to learn what they are already expected to know. Many students feel frustrated by the fact that their teachers give such general feedback, “need to work on grammar”, for example, instead of pointing out

¹⁶ My answer was based on what I had heard professional tutors say, specifically those who also taught ESL and English courses at the community college.

“this is wrong, and this is how you fix it.” Rubrics show that students are being marked down for grammatical errors, but as Angelina said “the teachers don't actually teach us like the tutors do.

They don't say this here is wrong, and this is the right way. Or you can't say that in English.”

Migrant students report that instructors lecture for the class period about something the students feel has nothing to do with the assignments given. Once the class period is over, the teachers disappear. They cannot approach the teachers themselves for help as they cannot be found outside of class. “I wrote her an email but she never answers me.” “It says this is his office, but when I go there he is not there.” In a number of instances I work with students who asked for help completing assignments, only to find that links do not work. When students email the instructors they receive no responses. All teachers give their email address, but many do not regularly answer them. The students report that they are not given any opportunities to ask questions. When they ask the teachers for extra help they are brushed off, and told to get a tutor. Many of the forced migrant women say that they learn about the existence of the support center when they initially ask for help from the teachers. They all express gratitude towards the tutors, really appreciating that it is free of cost, and also because the tutors are often the ones who point out the language errors and explain the correct form.

Tutors talk about how they feel many teachers do nothing more than give poor grades and then send the migrant students to the writing tutors, not bothering to do any teaching themselves. According to Mat, a popular peer tutor who has been tutoring for two years, “It does feel like teachers just don't want to bother. They tell them to 'work on English,' and if they ask for more help they just send them to us.” Jared, another popular tutor, immediately agrees.

One of the teachers of the two required English courses allows students to resubmit their

papers multiple times to correct mistakes and earn a higher grade. Hila takes advantage of this, redoing all her papers until she gets at least a B. She does this by bringing each draft to the support center and working with one of the tutors. On one such occasion we work together. She has received this assignment back for the second time. In order to focus where it will do her the most good, I look at the rubric the teacher has attached. Grammar is one of the major areas that Hila lost points according to the rubric, where she only scored 8/15. I look through the paper and see no notations indicating where such grammar errors are. Reading the paper I do notice a few problems with academic English conventions. However, it is unclear how Hila is supposed to learn to do better when she is not shown what needs improvement. The assumption seems to be that she should just go to tutoring where any issues will be pointed out and corrected. This runs counter to the training tutors receive.

Sarah, the assistant director who trains the writing tutors, makes a point to let all the tutors know that they are not here to simply fix mistakes. Students are expected to identify what they would like to work on. If they are looking for grammar help, tutors are told to explain what is expected in academic English, and how the student is not doing that in a few examples pulled from their work. Then they are to allow the student to make the rest of the adjustments. In some cases it is unrealistic for them to be able to work through all the errors in the half-hour slot.

Hila encounters another issue with the same teacher. On one such assignment, Hila notices that the grade written on her new draft remains the same as the previous draft, despite the fact that she made numerous changes. Overcoming her shyness, she approaches the instructor to ask what happened. The instructor took another look, and admitted she had never actually read the latest version.

When I ask forced migrant students about their relationships with their instructors, many say that they feel like the teachers do not care about them, and do not want to be bothered with getting to know them and their situation, or to teach them. Most of the students are also quick to name certain instructors who are exceptions to such patterns. Hila mentions how much less caring the teachers at the community college are in general than at the adult education center. In two years she went from having nearly no English to being accepted to the community college without having to take any remedial courses. There, her teachers had been “like my parents,” but her teachers at the community college do not care to know her, she feels. Hila also has a private tutor in addition to the help she accesses at the support center.

Hila describes herself as very quiet, particularly in large class situations. Because of required class participation, she regularly approaches her teachers to tell them she is shy, and asks how she can make up for her lack of participation in class discussions. She says often teachers would tell her it is fine, and not to worry, but then score her negatively.

Audette is told by a different teacher that he is concerned that the course is too hard for her. The teacher doubting her ability sends her to the tutoring center to make sure her performance is up to expectations. This is when I meet her, and the essay she shows me is well-written, though it has some errors and some non-English sentence constructions. When I see her a few weeks later, she tells me she got a C. She tells me that when the teacher handed the paper back to her, first he accused her of plagiarizing, asking her if she had really written it herself because it was better than he expected from her. She answered that she had, though she had worked with a tutor. The teacher is sending out contradictory messages, first saying the paper is too good to possibly be hers, but giving her a mediocre grade, much like she had received on her

other papers. This indicates that he is grading her, not her work. This experience makes Audette really question her abilities as a student, which she has not up to this point. She is educated, having completed a bachelors degree in Rwanda. Before this, she just felt that her challenges were with English, as her education previously had been in French.

In general, many students feel they are treated as an unwelcome burden, if not with downright hostility from many of their instructors. Muslim students encounter some outright Islamophobia. Hila reports that in her class a white student is allowed to proclaim, without any push back (in fact Hila feels that the teacher was in tacit agreement), that all Muslims should be rounded up and interned, as the Japanese were during World War II. Another Muslim student reports that her classmate stated in class that she did not like Muslims (with a number of Muslim students visibly present). To this the teacher responded casually, “Yeah, because they kill us.” This clearly violates the college president's message of the college being a place “where we welcome, prepare and inspire all to learn, succeed and lead” (President's Office 2017). The above cases are extreme and not common. However, certain teachers have reputations in Muslim students' social networks as being hostile to Muslims and to be avoided.

Dropping/Cooling Out

Many of the migrant women enroll at SMCC envisioning that they will complete the pre-nursing program and then be accepted into the coveted nursing program. However, there is a large demographic divide between the students in pre-nursing and those in the nursing program. The nursing program itself consists overwhelmingly of white American students, while pre-nursing, at least initially, is much more diverse. This discrepancy could be happening for a number of reasons; the standardized entrance exam (PAX) is an important one. However, the end

result is the same: forced migrant students are kept out of the nursing program and from any social mobility that completing that degree would afford them.

Despite her insistence that the marginalizing treatment is not going to stop her, Angelina does show signs of becoming disheartened. In the spring semester Angelina shows me her transcript, which includes all the courses that had been accepted by SMCC. At this point she has 202 credits. In her negotiations with the community college they keep telling her that she needs to retake a number of classes she had already passed and they had accepted on her transcript. In March, she is determined to fight what she sees as unreasonable requests for her to take redundant classes. She had taken two Anatomy and Physiology classes and a Pharmacology class in Africa, passed them with high grades, and the classes had been accepted onto her transcript as transfer credits. Why should she have to retake them?

Angelina: After this semester I will tell them, I will take this one (Anatomy and Physiology II), these nursing courses, but they need to take this one (point to Group Psychology on her transcript), this one (Pathophysiology) and this one (Anatomy and Physiology), so I don't need this one (Anatomy and Physiology I listed on the pre-nursing requirements). And then I'm done. I am already a nurse, so I shouldn't have to take, but ok.

Astrid: They probably want to be sure you know what they think you should know because your degree will be from here.

Angelina: I know, so ok, I will take Nursing I-IV, but then I'm done.

When I see Angelina again over the summer semester, she is taking Anatomy and Physiology I, one of the courses she had earlier been vehemently against taking. When I ask her about it, she says that she was just tired of fighting them. In the fall, we meet for coffee in downtown Portland because she is not taking any classes. She does have increased pressure to earn money for her family (see Chapter 5), but perhaps she would find time to juggle school work as well if she were not being asked to simply repeat classes she has already passed.

I get there first. After she gets her coffee, she sits down and tells me she recently took the standardized exam required by the nursing program but failed.

I failed the English. Math is perfect, science is perfect, but the English is too hard. I don't know the words. I got this app on my phone to help me study and next time I will do better. Each day it gives me a new word to learn, but these words are so hard!

I ask to see her word of the day and she shows me her phone. The word is sybarite, not a word I am familiar with. She tells me she was not the only immigrant she knew who had failed because of the English section, and she feels it is discriminatory. The words on the test are esoteric at best: none are commonly used in colloquial speech, nor are they medical in nature. She questions why they are on the test, if not to confuse non-native speakers. To me they seem to be of the same nature as those found on SATs, thus more familiar to students who have completed high school in the US, and present a real challenge to students who have other educational backgrounds.

Angelina does insist that she, and others like her are undaunted despite initial failures. "They [Nursing Program acceptance staff] will learn that we are immigrants, and they can't keep us down." She is planning on retaking the exam in another six months, at the earliest allowable time. However, even if she does pass at that time, it is not certain that she will be able to start classes in the Nursing program, as she stopped retaking the required classes, and stopped actively fighting to get such courses from her past recognized.

Halifa, from Ethiopia, also ends up dropping out. After meeting with me a few times, and understanding what she needs to work on in order to bring her writing skills to the standard expected, she decides that it is not worth the time. She calls me to say that she no longer needs to meet with me because she will not be returning to SMCC in the fall. She has steady work as a

CNA, which is not as well-paid as what would be available for certified Registered Nurses or Medical Assistants. For Angelina it is not an expressed end, she is adamant that she is not giving up, yet practically, she has left higher education (for now).

Zaineb attended high school in Portland after her family fled from Somalia. She started in the pre-nursing program, but failed a few classes, and changed her major to medical assisting, which she thought would be less challenging. “I want to do medical assisting because it's easier than nursing, and better than being a CNA.” Better means easier, less back-breaking work, and also better pay. She already works as a nursing assistant, and is familiar with a hospital atmosphere. She enjoys her work, and feels confident performing all of her duties. When I ask her what caused her to struggle in some of her classes, she cited teachers who “don't understand refugees.” She is a diligent student, and is a regular in the academic support center. The semester she completes her second required English course, she always has a tutor work through her final draft of the assignment before she passes it in. In subsequent semesters she has less written work, and thus spends more time in the individual rooms, though continues to come to tutors to check writing assignments, especially when doing second drafts. Zaineb is a competent writer, though her teachers often want her to show more depth of understanding of various written sources. Zaineb's cooling out seemed to largely be because of academic challenges and lack of support by teachers to help her overcome them.

In a study on remedial classes based on large sets of statistical data from across the country, Bailey (2009) finds that most remedial classes do not help prepare students for regular college work, and instead increase their rates of non-completion. Instead, particularly for

students who are near the cut-off point in the entrance exams for remedial classes, both above and below it, he suggests that community colleges implement in-class support, such as peer tutoring. He points out that the over-reliance on entrance exams means that students just below the cut-off become frustrated by being kept from truly participating in college, and thus receive little benefit and are more likely to drop out, while students just above the cut-off struggle in the regular classes. For students well below the cut-off, he suggests more targeted interventions to streamline the process of getting to the point where they can participate in the supported class experience, as students easily become frustrated with long sequences of remedial classes, which they largely fail to complete. By their mission, community colleges are committed to accepting students who may not be fully college ready, and therefore it behooves them to create structures that allow them to succeed.

Asfana scored well below the cut-off point on the ACCUPLACER exam as she is starting at the beginning of the ESL series at SMCC. This leaves her with a long sequence of classes before she begins to take classes for credit. She is very ambitious now, but there are some structural indicators that she may fall far short of her ambitions. Halifa and Amina have lower ambitions of becoming nurses, not requiring medical schools as do Asfana's dreams, but nursing also appears out of reach. Halifa becomes convinced that she will not be able to succeed in her courses with the amount of work she can devote to it. This is a substantial amount, as she spends multiple hours three days a week at the support center during the spring semester. This leads her to drop out of SMCC in her first year of taking classes for credit. While Amina is still taking classes, she has already been doing so for six years, and it seems unlikely that she will be able to pass the PAX exam that is giving Angelina so much difficulty.

Similarly to the ACCUPLACER exam, the PAX exam functions as a gatekeeper that keeps forced migrants out of the higher track. The ACCUPLACER first sorts them into the remedial ESL track, and the PAX keeps students from the track to earning credentials as a registered nurse, a career with much higher social mobility than the tracks that remain open to them, nursing and medical assistants. The use of standardized tests with certain cut-off scores appears to be a function of an objective, impersonal bureaucratic mechanism, yet the achievement gap between whites (and Asians) and other minorities is so well documented (Aronson and Steele 1995, Good et al.) that the tests continued usage should be recognized as a way to preserve the current system of stratification. However, as the results are targeted at the individual (instead of recognizing the failure groupings produced by the supposedly objective test), the failure label bestowed by the exam is seen as the product of the forced migrant student, and thus justifying their stagnant social position (Bonilla-Silva 2006).

Another similar standardized test, the SATs, have been shown to be problematic when it comes to immigrant students. “The predictive value of the SAT ... has been shown to vary by ethnicity. Such tests have been criticized for containing cultural content and assumptions that are biased against native-born minority students as well as newcomers” (Harklau 1998:637). The fact that the nursing program entrance exam even includes such obscure vocabulary can be seen as based on the “American notions of language proficiency [which] stand in contrast to much of the rest of the world, where multilingualism is the norm and language capabilities are judged more pragmatically on the basis of communicative efficacy in particular contexts ... rather than on minor markers of nonnative origin” (Harklau 1998:641).

The teachers uphold boundaries of language and culture as required by dominant racial

and educational structures. By understanding students from different backgrounds as deficient, especially in the case of refugee SIFE, they often are “considered to have too many learning problems to have a chance for success” (Bartlett 2007:221). This can give teachers an excuse as to why they do not put the effort into actually teaching, improving the skills that the students have. At SMCC there are structural considerations when looking at many of the instructors, particularly the ESL teachers. The ESL department is staffed entirely by adjuncts who are poorly paid and have at will contracts. There is a lot of turnover in these positions. Jenn, who had been in the department for the longest and was tasked with leading it left because of burnout, which is common in this type of positions. SMCC employs 106 full-time faculty and 335 adjuncts. However, while many of the instructors may be constrained by the realities of being an adjunct, a number of the faculty cited by students in the proceeding chapter are full time. Hila's instructor who offers students the chance to submit multiple drafts is one such example. She is not required to do this, yet it is something that she offers, but feels that she does not have to live up to her promise when it comes to Hila.

Educational institutions require teachers to label students either successes or failures; without failure, success is perceived as meaningless. However, educational systems can be designed so that the sorting of successes from failures upholds political and social divisions, instead of academic ones (Varenne and McDermott 1998). This begins at an early age, and continues through the system, often leading to a thickening of the identity of “un-ability”, if there is no intervention (Wortham 2004, Bartlett 2007, McDermott and Gospodinoff 1981). Through interactions with teachers who make them feel as if they are not worth teaching, combined with poor grades, and the focus on what they do not know, forced migrants are made to feel that they are not capable students. For many, this is what drives them to the academic support center, so that tutors can check their work that they have no confidence of being able to complete well on their own.

Audette has a bachelors degree from Rwanda, and Sadia talks about how much she had

excelled at math in Iraq. They both had experienced success in school before arriving in the US, yet Audette now encounters a teacher who is telling her she is not capable of succeeding. It remains to be seen what effect this will have on her aspirations to become a dentist. If other teachers reinforce the message of her unability, it will only make it more difficult to persevere. She is not being given failing grades, but she feels, given the teachers comments, that she is on the cusp of being labeled a failure at any moment.

All the forced migrant students function in an English-speaking realm. They have jobs where they are understood by both co-workers and the public they serve. However, their written English skills, both productive and comprehensive, present difficulties when viewed by their teachers. Some students like Amina who attended high school locally struggle with comprehending texts in order to give satisfactory answers on content. There are also other students who are being held back because their writing does not conform to the standards of an academic native speaker of American English. This includes students like Audette and Hila who communicate clearly but may misuse prepositions or may use a slightly non-standard word order. These are not barriers to comprehension, but rather an insistence on nearly native fluency in high education, even more epitomized through the types of vocabulary found in the English sections of standardized tests.

Many studies point to early arrival in the US being a factor for success (e.g. Portes and Rubaut 2001), as it helps them learn English and have a consistently American educational background. However, this can also lead to more time for the thickening of a minority “failure” identity. Some Somalis who arrived very early are able to acquire the skills on par with mainstream students. However, those who came in late childhood still have weak basic skills, reading at less than an eighth grade level, for example, to the degree that it makes it difficult for them to get the most out of their educational experience. This can be why many of the recent African immigrants with high educational backgrounds, meaning they arrive in the US at a later age, are doing better, even when they are unable to use their past credentials. Even Angelina,

who temporarily at least stops taking classes, does not feel that she is unable to succeed, but rather pointed to racist administrative factors.

Migrant students are being kept from realizing their schooling aspirations. The local high schools graduate a large number of students who are not able to read and write English at a very basic level. The community college, however, still accepts them, albeit in many cases provisionally requiring either English or ESL remediation first. SMCC accepts the majority of their students with the condition that they complete some remedial education. However, for the majority of students (80%), where their high schools failed to adequately educate them is in math, not English. This study does not look at the subsequent success of mainstream students who need math remediation, so I will not comment on this further. For the forced migrants placed in ESL classes, they are allowed to take regular education classes, which the college itself has determined they are not ready for, yet has them pay for classes that they are not equipped to succeed in. Even after going through all the remedial courses, many of the students are still not able to operate at the necessary level of academic English reading and writing. Many teachers are either hostile, unavailable, or uncaring, and push the forced migrant students to rely on the support center, and in some cases on private tutors, which they personally finance. Many students continue to struggle in this system for years without reaching their goals. They readjust their goals lower in response to the marginalizing pressure felt in classrooms.

SMCC and the greater US schooling system function to teach forced migrant students that they should not aim so high. As immigrants, and minorities – the school is expressing downward assimilative forces to preserve the dominant position of whites in US society as a whole (McDermott and Gospodinoff 1981). They act as gatekeepers, barring access to credentials. They participate in the financial exploitation of the students, by allowing them to

take classes that they are not prepared for, and the majority of teachers do nothing to remedy this.

INTERLUDE- Teachers Who “Care” – the Ones Who Don't Follow the Rules

One afternoon Mat spends a free tutor block with a student discussing what classes the student would take in the summer, and how the classes fulfill certain requirements. Mat also helps the student navigate the webpage to get him registered. Part of the discussion includes the student mentioning a class he heard recommended by a migrant friend. The advice includes not just which class, but perhaps more importantly, which professor. My participants all tell me that they get the best advice about which classes to take (with which teachers) coming from friends, and many mention the tutors as well. Tutors are not trained to be advisors, but the peer tutors had personal experience with certain professors, and many had heard about others from the students they worked with. With one exception, the forced migrants expressly say that their assigned advisors are of no help.

Forced migrants also help alert each other to scholarships that they can apply for. Once a good contact person is found, they guide others to that individual. I observe one woman from advising stop and check in with Fatuma and Khadija as she passes through the academic center on another errand. After talking for a few minutes, she advises both of them to come meet with her, and they try to find appointment times. Their schedules are not compatible for the next week, so the woman makes sure that both have her phone number. She tells them to check in with her once they both have their schedules in front of them, or they can at least talk on the phone about future classes and scholarships. As the woman turns to leave, Fatuma mentions a friend whom she also wants to connect with her, because Fatuma thinks she could use some help. The staff person invites Fatuma to pass her phone number on to her friend in need so that they can connect as well.

Teachers who also work as tutors in the academic support center are universally seen as being very supportive by their forced migrant students. Two of the writing tutors have especially close ties to many of their current and former students. Past students stop by to visit with them, show them pictures of new babies, and just generally chat about life. They are always greeted with a hug, and current students, though not necessarily still in their classes, make a point to say hello when they are passing through. These tutors and instructors are familiar with many aspects of their students' lives that have nothing to do with academics. They ask about jobs the students are applying to, family members, friends and significant others. Forced migrants report how they help them with aspects of their lives outside of school, on job applications, access resources, and at times just by providing a sympathetic ear.

Amina mentioned how her anatomy teacher has been especially wonderful. Because she is also a tutor at the center, Amina could go see her every week, and she helps her understand whatever she is struggling with on the assignments. This teacher is mentioned by other forced migrant women for her availability, and willingness to work with her students as long as it takes (not holding herself to the allotted 30 minute intervals) for them to feel confident with the material.

A few other teachers are also specifically mentioned as being migrant-student friendly. When I ask what this means, the women respond that they are sympathetic to the kinds of challenges they face, having educational backgrounds that are outside of the US and language barriers. Some teachers are also cited as being more sensitive to cultural differences, asking questions instead of making assumptions. This helps them come across as respectful when students are hesitant to engage in activities that are counter to cultural or social practices from

their countries of origin.

For the instructors and staff who are mentioned as being helpful, the unifying characteristics are their availability, their willingness to be personable and work through the migrants' struggles. The writing tutors who are so popular with these students all give out their phone numbers, as does the woman working in the advising financial aid office. By doing so they signify a willingness to step outside of the official roles of their jobs, to work outside of their official places of work, as well as outside the official work times. This kind of flexibility is similar to how the Somali support workers operated who I observed during my previous work.

The bureaucracy of SMCC sometimes stands in the way of students getting what they need from teachers and staff. The rules about professional distance and business hours mean that teachers are not available to students in the way the students report as being the most helpful. However, the community college does not acknowledge how its strict adherence to a bureaucratic system that is supposed to make it more efficient means that many students are not getting the help they need. The community college employs a large number of different staff members to fill certain functions, and has guidelines about what is expected for each. Staff taking calls after hours on their' private phones, teachers and peers advising students as opposed to designated advisors, and tutors deviating from protocol are all instances of failures of the bureaucracy. Luckily for the students served by this failure, there is enough discretion in the system that the staff failing to follow the rules and tasks set out for them go unrecognized. However, having to rely on a failure of the system to have it work for forced migrant students is problematic.

CHAPTER 9 CONCLUSION

For the women in this study a part of their plan for gaining social mobility is taking classes at SMCC. They believe that in the US, with its emphasis on equal opportunity, they will be able to overcome some of the conditions they had faced that have left them low on the socio-economic scale, and often with interrupted formal schooling.

SMCC has a mission to provide post-secondary education to those who might otherwise not be able to access it. Many do get access to some schooling but only around a third are leaving with credentials from the community college. Some of those who leave with a degree are forced migrants, and there are also many migrants who continue to take classes with no clear path towards graduation. The community college benefits from their tuition dollars, without granting anything tangible in return.

The community college is not immune from larger social issues of racism and Islamophobia that create difficult conditions for the forced migrants. Not only are faculty, staff and peers engaging in overt and covert behaviors that work to disenfranchise forced migrants, but the structuring of the community college engages with their otherness in ways that uphold the current US system of stratification that leaves racial, linguistic and religious minorities at the bottom, while maintaining official policies of non-discrimination. The current emphasis on efforts to improve schooling outcomes is focused on the student and not the system as the problem. This allows SMCC to have official policies of equality and accessibility, while using bureaucratic mechanisms (the ACCUPLACER exam, for example) that systematically mark the foreignness of the forced migrants as problematic in an officially objective way.

The women in this study have largely already gained some social mobility, but not enough to make them no longer poor. However, this has not come through the community college. Because of the policies surrounding testing and understanding of English competency at SMCC, the forced migrant women face high barriers to the next level of social mobility, which requires post-secondary credentials that SMCC makes difficult for them to reach. These policies and understandings make the individual students responsible for their behaviors that are recognized as not fitting the standard set by SMCC. This creates a ceiling to mobility and preserves the current racial order, while maintaining a rhetoric of equal opportunity for all.

Bureaucratic Failure

Bureaucracies were created to be a “rational authority” not at the whim of a single individual, with rules and oversight to ensure that all receive the same treatment. SMCC is such a bureaucracy, with its admission policies and paper work. Everyone is supposed to perform in the same way to get admitted, and then, depending on their choice of major, follow one of the available trajectories. What is not examined is: Who are these pathways made for? What assumptions are they based upon? Who had the opportunities to learn the expected skills? How to account for differences in individuals not imagined in the creation of the pathways? The result is that differences are officially ignored in most circumstances, yet there is an undercurrent that reacts to those individuals as problematic. No data is gathered on country of origin, nationality or immigration status. This does serve to protect students who do not have regularized status from state and federal level consequences, but the differences are still made real in an unofficial way at the local level. Angelina's initial encounter, when she tried to register at SMCC and was told to go away because they did not take immigrants, is one way, and when Jenn, the ESL

teacher talks about how awful it is that the brothers of some of her Iraqi students accompany their sisters to class is another.

In the attempt to ignore differences in an official way additional obstacles are created for those for whom the pathways were not made. The difficulties in getting high school transcripts officially translated are not negligible, and they are difficulties unique to forced migrants. Most white Americans are also not contending with interrupted schooling or having to send remittances to family members in various countries around the world. But again, these differences cannot be acknowledged. However, because of the additional challenge of being a forced migrant, these students do have an unequal schooling experience.

ACCUPLACER testing is one way that difference is marked. Because the extra testing for ESL placement hinges on the answer from the students: “do you speak a language other than English at home?”, it is part of the framing of issues as originating within each individual who encounters the system, instead of a systematic way by the community college of making certain differences problematic. This identification triggers more testing, more opportunities for SMCC to label the students as a failure. The individual focus of the testing, and lack of aggregate data on the results by identification type results in separation of the forced migrant student from other forced migrants, and their past. For many, particularly Somali students, this disconnect hides the failure of their high schools in the Portland area to fulfill their educational duty to develop the students' academic skills. The accountability rests solely with the student.

When considering that over fifty percent of the students whom SMCC accepts require some sort of remedial coursework, it would appear that the failure to educate on the part of high schools is not restricted to forced migrant students. However, only 20% of all the students

required to take remedial courses must do so in English, yet the majority of forced migrants fall into this category, so this is an issue that affects forced migrants more than white Americans.

This is not surprising given that forced migrants are not primarily English speakers, but there are two concerns that must be considered. One is that many of the students in ESL courses have high school diplomas and spent many years in ESL classrooms at the primary and secondary level.

The other is that even after passing the requisite ESL course cycle, students are still not successful in regular education classes.

The first issue is epitomized in students like Hassan or Nadine. Both graduated from Portland area high schools at 18. Maine State Law allows students to remain in public school until they are 20 years old. Both Hassan and Nadine end up in ESL courses when they enroll in SMCC. If their English language skills were not yet up to the standard set by an inclusive post-secondary institution like SMCC, there is more that the high schools could have done to develop those skills, as high schools are expected to do. Instead of continuing to educate their students like Hassan and Nadine, the high schools graduate them, and push them to enroll in SMCC, where the students then begin to pay for their classes. The threshold set by SMCC for the ACCUPLACER test is not so high in the English portion that most white American high school graduates fail to meet it, as demonstrated by the numbers. However, the white students do not have the additional sections that they must pass. Presumably they would, at least that is the expectation, as they are not required to take them. Those students who answer that they speak a language other than English at home must pass two English sections in order to not be required to take remedial classes.

The second issue, that students are still found lacking in their academic English skills in

regular education classes after completing SMCC's ESL courses, builds on the first problem. High schools are not educating forced migrant students to the level SMCC expects, nor are the ESL courses at SMCC enough to break the cycle of the college determining that the forced migrant students' English is not up to its standard. This problem may begin in the public school classrooms where the failure is hidden, but once the students start paying, the failure is made theirs starting with the ACCUPLACER exam, ESL courses on their transcripts, regular education courses where teachers only document the failure, and can extend to the PAX exam for aspiring nursing students.

Many of the students in this study are in this type of limbo; they are taking classes and paying their tuition bills, but do not have a real path towards graduation or the degree they aspire to. Amina is a perfect example of how the structural failures in the Portland area schools lead to a situation where it seems very unlikely that she will eventually pass the PAX nursing program entrance test to get into the nursing program, which is her goal. If she struggles decoding a USA Today article, how will she score well enough on the English section that contains the kind of esoteric vocabulary found in these types of standardized tests? Amina is a SIFE student, and her high school graduated her, but did not develop her English skills so she could enter the community college ready to take regular course work. The required ESL courses that she took did not fill the gaps in her academic English in a way that would be recognized by her current teachers. She has declared that the nursing program is her goal, so SMCC tells her she needs to take a certain sequence of classes in the Pre-Health major. She is taking these classes, yet she is not given opportunities to develop the types of language capabilities SMCC requires for those seeking entrance to the nursing program. She has been taking classes for six years, and if she

does graduate but does not enter the nursing program, her credentials will not likely allow her to get employment higher up the ladder, and she will likely remain in the same auxiliary healthcare job she currently has.

Zaineb appears to be in a similar position, though she already recognizes that she will not be allowed into the nursing program and has adjusted her aspirations. Zaineb, like Amina, arrived from Somalia by way of a Kenyan refugee camp. She is also a SIFE student who graduated from a Portland high school and, when entering SMCC, was required to take ESL courses. Nadine and Marielle, though not from Somalia, are now also in this type of position. Their English skills are not recognized as being up to the academic standard of the community college, and so the nursing program will likely be out of reach because of the PAX exam. Marielle is still in ESL courses and concurrently taking regular education courses, where she receives failing grades. Her assignments are often not on topic because she does not understand what they are. Nadine, though no longer in ESL courses, is also not always able to fully complete her assignments because she does not understand all of the directions, and her written work does not meet academic criteria. Considering that the ESL courses the Zaineb, Amina and Nadine took did not bring their academic reading and writing fully to SMCC's standard, it does not seem likely that Marielle's ESL courses will do so for her. It seems more likely that she will become more frustrated and either cool or drop out before getting to the high hurdle of the PAX exam.

One could make similar predictions for Asfana, Sadia, Aman, Leila and others, though they come from different countries of origin and had more schooling prior to coming to the US than Amina and Zaineb. They are also SIFE students, which Marielle and Nadine are not. These

different backgrounds have produced unique individuals, but at issue is the structure by which SMCC deals with their difference. The sorting of students into ESL creates students who are at high risk for subsequently being labeled failures because of their other ways of using English. Like in the high schools, many students are officially successful in ESL classes. 41% receive As or A-s, yet this does not translate to success when the stakes are real, when the classes count towards graduation, which only 11% of those students reach. With so many students not completing their degrees, or cooling out like Zaineb, their social mobility will likely be restricted to what they reached through their credentialing in certificate programs outside the community college.

In regular education classes the teachers expect students to have a native-speaker like fluency, and facility with skills learned in mainstream US high school curricula as a baseline for entering their class. Forced migrant students, who are not native speakers and have not been in mainstream US classrooms, understandably fall short. But because of the expectations, teachers do not feel that they are responsible for filling in the gaps in the forced migrants' schooling. Therefore, they do not actually teach what the forced migrants need to know to meet the standards in the class, or the skills they need to perform well on standardized tests. Forced migrant students are sent to seek help from the support center, where tutors are not up to the task to bring forced migrants to native speaker fluency or get them to complete a high school language arts curriculum in thirty-minute drop-by appointments. It is not unreasonable for teachers to expect their students to have certain skills before they enter the classroom; it is, after all, *post*-secondary education. However, unless forced migrant students have access to some way of learning some of these skills, as the ESL courses are not having the desired results, these

expectations will continue to block social mobility and maintain current stratification. Requiring near native fluency for academic and economic advancement also is at odds with the understanding of multiculturalism in the US and multilingualism around the globe. Worldwide, it is much more common for individuals to speak several languages, and there is more allowance for some non-standard usage. The focus should be on the comprehension and comprehensibility, the aspects of functionality that are critical for performing social, political and economic activities.

Even though SMCC is profiting from the forced migrants' getting stuck, there are some efforts to make reforms intended to help the forced migrant population be successful. However, because it is an individual approach, not a systemic one, the results are still not good because SMCC does not address the ultimate problem that is ingrained in the structure of the school that America builds. "The conceptual and political foundations that have made failure an integral part of schooling" perpetuate the racial stratification (Varenne and McDermott 1998:xiv). SMCC has dramatically increased services, which are intended to help the forced migrant students. While white American students are the majority of students who use the support center, forced migrant students are more highly represented in this space than they are campus wide. Sarah also attributes the increased writing tutoring staff to the increased forced migrant population, "responding to a need." In particular, the focus on hiring ESL instructors as the professional tutoring staff is intended to help the forced migrant population. The ESL department has also grown due to the higher numbers of eligible students.

SMCC is focused on retention and completion rates on total student body level, and the efforts are being extended to forced migrant students. However, all these efforts are geared

towards the individual student in need of changing, instead of recognizing the wider structural pitfalls inherent in the meritocratic ranking of students according to standards only certain demographics are likely able to reach; as exemplified by the low tolerance for minor non-native speaker variations in written English among teachers and the standards and policies of admissions departments' use of standardized tests. This results in sorting the population into the existing social hierarchy. The community colleges predominantly serve people who are not eligible to go to more elite post-secondary institutions, including lower class whites, who are also affected by perceptions of having difficulties succeeding ("at-risk") because of their backgrounds. These backgrounds are different from those of students used to create the standard. SMCC's interventions are aimed at teaching students to align their behaviors with this standard.

One program that SMCC began in response to its low retention and graduation rates was a three-day summer orientation program, geared towards making first-year students "college ready." This is a residential program: students stay in the dormitories and during the day attend workshops on choosing classes, study skills, and getting to know the campus. It is intended to make students feel more comfortable and better prepared when they start in the fall. Hila attended this program the summer before she started SMCC at the recommendation of her advisor at the adult education program. The students are not required to stay in the dorms overnight, but Hila told her father that it was a part of the experience and he allowed her to do so. It is hard to imagine how a student would be able to attend work while at these day-long programs. This type of scheduling reflects the low awareness of those planning these interventions of the reality of many of their students who cannot afford to miss even a few shifts.

Any student who tests into remedial coursework would by definition be included in a

population “at risk” in the view of the American schooling system, and SMCC also has run summer programs for two summers geared towards this population. Students whose ACCUPLACER scores are below the set threshold and who are subsequently required by SMCC policy to enroll in remedial classes are eligible to attend a two-week program. Here they receive instruction in the area in which they are being required to do remedial course work. At the end of the two weeks they retake the section of the ACCUPLACER to see if their scores improve. Peer tutors Jared and Tina both work in this summer program while I am in the field, and the following fall Jared introduces me to George from Angola, who was one of the students Jared worked with in the summer program. “He’s smart, way smarter than he lets on. He can totally do the work, but he’s really good at getting other people to do it for him,” Jared tells me about George. George did test out of his initial ESL placement into a higher level one. He comes to tutoring all fall. These efforts show how SMCC is responding to the current “best practices” research.

Assimilation - Resistance

SMCC adheres to a difference theory of education when it comes to forced migrants. This is anchored in the belief that cultural misunderstandings are at the root of the failure, and thus believes if they could just be more like white students then they could be successful. There is a lot of explicit instruction about how to be a good student, how much time should be spent on studying, how to access assistance, etc. and particularly the importance of English. The students are given a lot of feedback about how not to use English in that they are told they are doing it wrong. Instead they should practice all the time, leaving no time to maintain their first language(s). This pressure towards overwhelming assimilation is out of touch with the reality of

immigrants in the US today, as new waves adhere to multiculturalism and transnationalism rather than the assimilationist melting pot. Tsing (2015) argues that immigrants do not see assimilation leading to the same rewards that earlier immigrants did, hence they are less inclined to give up deeply personal identity markers that have roots in their countries of origin.

The forced migrant students both assimilate and resist. They find employment, learn English, defer to official sign-up policies when required, but also resist the assimilation through maintaining their difference, and supporting each other in these efforts. The unofficial actions of SMCC faculty and staff towards forced migrant students as others are reified through the social practices of the forced migrants as they draw a border between themselves and their white peers, while internally only maintaining boundaries that are regularly crossed. Asfana, Aman and their friends do speak English together, yet retain their markers of difference through veiling and other social practices, such as limiting interactions with men they do not know. Jeanette and her friends cook meals that remind them of home, share media, and speak shared languages other than English with each other. At the same time, Jeanette is engaged to a white man from Portland who is not a student at SMCC. She maintains her transnational ties to her siblings through her communication efforts as well as remittances, while also strengthening her ties to Portland. Dahabo and the many young Somali women she is friends with speak Somali to each other, but also code switch, use local slang, and Fatuma has a non-Muslim boyfriend, much to her parents' dismay. They wear clothing from Somali-owned shops, but pair them with pieces from more mainstream stores. Hila works hard to improve her English skills, and she and her friends often do practice together, but like Asfana and her friends, Hila also maintains her difference through veiling and restricting her friends to people she is not afraid will judge her when she is not able

to go out. She also refrains from discussing her religion with people locally, at the same time that she tells me about arguing with individuals from Afghanistan and Pakistan about increasing rights and education for women. In these myriad of ways, the forced migrants resist some assimilation, and instead react to being the target of such efforts to group together and support each other in their difference.

The variety found within just this sample of my study population shows how contested and complicated any assimilation may be. The students all made the decision to pursue safety in the US. Forced migrants face many factors driving them out of their countries of origin; this does not negate their agency in coming to the US. This means they are aware and accepting of the need to make some accommodations to their new place of residency. However, none are willing to completely assimilate, especially if they do not see it resulting in positive outcomes (Tsing 2015). SMCC operates as an assimilative force through the actions of the teachers, staff and students who carry out policies. Despite this, forced migrant students are helping each other reinforce their difference, even though this may lead to marginalizing treatment in some cases, either in the community college or the greater Portland area.

Success

While many of the students are not experiencing meaningful successes at the community college in the form of progress towards their desired degrees, they are successful at work. The rates of employment across all but the very newest arrivals are higher than Portland wide.¹⁷ The type of employment is also higher, as the majority work in low-skilled compared to unskilled positions. They have gained this through certification. This shows that there are some institutions

¹⁷ In my sample population, the rate of employment for those who had been in the country less than three years was 0%.

that can work for forced migrants seeking social mobility in some capacity – adult education, on-site training programs – but this is made possible only at a certain level. The hospitals are not offering to retrain Angelina as a maternal nurse, for example.

The community college's staff and teachers act toward the forced migrants as people in need of changing, and many of these efforts are geared towards time management, making sure they have enough time to do their work. The irony of these efforts is that the forced migrants who are working are clearly able to manage their time to meet their responsibilities, making sure that they allow for commuting, weather, child care considerations, etc. However, when teachers and staff talk about the forced migrant students working, it is seen as a distraction and not a successful demonstration of many of the skills the students are expected to develop at SMCC (problem solving, working with others, communicating in English, following directions, etc.). They may complain that the students are working too many hours and not leaving enough time to do their homework. The forced migrant students do their homework, and none admitted to missing assignments for their community college classes. However, teachers and tutoring staff feel that the time they devote is not enough. They feel the forced migrant students need to prioritize school work over economic work, ignoring the reality not only of paying bills (such as their tuition), but also the extra responsibilities that many forced migrants have to support family members in Portland (unable to work often because of the circumstances leading to their flight) and around the globe.

Identifications of Difference

Despite official rhetoric that everyone is supposed to be equal, the social and often bureaucratic reality is that everyone is being classified into different categories and there are

consequences to this placement. However, classifications are not absolute, and neither are the institutions and structures that reflect and uphold them. All of the women have to submit themselves to the pressures to assimilate, to be “developed” into acceptable quasi-Western subjects, though still marked by othering identities of race, religion and migration status. How the women take on such identities shows how they attempt to resist the social hierarchies currently established in the US, but they can only do this for themselves and cannot change how the mainstream society perceives and acts upon them based on such categories.

Like many black immigrants (Foner 1998, Kasinitz 2008, Ajrouch and Kusow 2007), the African forced migrants emphasize their *African* identities over blackness. This attempts to avoid the marginalization of African Americans. American racial classifications of white/black group individuals by phenotype, which ignores the reality of the disparate backgrounds that shape African Americans and African immigrants. This dichotomy positions immigrants against African Americans, reifying the pathologizing of African Americans, and the linkage between “acting black” and downward assimilation (Pierce 2004).

It is easy to make categories out of people, and SMCC and its students are constantly engaged in sorting people into various groups, but English level, major, gender, country of origin, and these groupings are the basis upon which people perceive “what they should do next” when they interact with these individuals. Yet this acting on the basis of classification erases the variety within the categories the classifications create.

Follow Up

I go back to visit SMCC a few times during the writing process to check in with some of my former participants. Most remain in limbo, taking a few classes, or taking a break for a semester. Jeanette is an exception. While she does not go to the top-tier school she initially wanted and was accepted to because of financial and personal reasons, she does end up enrolled in the University of Southern Maine. Attending a four-year college does show significant social

mobility from where Jeanette started when she arrived in Portland, but it is not as high as she initially aimed. Hila also graduates. She has changed her major from Pre-Healthcare to Liberal Arts, hoping to transfer to a four year school and possibly study sociology. Eventually she would like to go to Law School in order to become an immigration lawyer. I am unable to get in touch with her and see how her schooling is progressing post SMCC. Sarah was on maternity leave for over a semester and so she does not know more details or how to contact her.

Angelina emails me that “I am still struggling to get my nursing degree, but things are not going the way I planned. However, I did not give up yet. I am working very hard to make my dreams come true.” She does start taking classes again, and SMCC expands its ESL program to include semester-long combined ESL and professional credentialing classes for Emergency Medical Technicians. I pass this along to her, she fits the criteria for the applicants they are looking for, non-native English speaker with professional background in medicine. This represents a pretty large departure from maternal nursing “but I will try it, maybe I will like it,” she tells me.

During the time I am in the field, Amina consistently reports getting good grades. However, a year later, or seven years into her part-time career at SMCC, she is not closer to getting into the nursing program. She continues to take a few classes, but they do not move her forward. Amina and Angelina seem to be more representative of the overall outcomes for forced migrant students, though they take many paths to get there.

Though SMCC, like all community colleges, has an open admission policy and low tuition, it is not living up to its mission as a vehicle for social mobility for minority students of all kinds, at least not for forced migrant students in this study. Most students do not make it to graduation. Their progress is hindered by SMCC because of its mechanisms that evaluate them

as not doing it quite right. It can be anything from how they are students, to how they interact with others, but the most consistent and difficult obstacle to overcome is the identification that they fall short in the expectations for academic English, with the insistence on high level academic mastery without any non-native speech markers.

This sorting is a part of how American schools, in this case SMCC, function by evaluating some students as successes, and the success is made meaningful through the failure of others. Schools only make certain successes and failures salient, while ignoring other instances of students showing their abilities. While forced migrant students live, work and study with individuals who only speak English and are able to successfully communicate with them, the structures of community college require a type of English that the students have not yet reached and the community college does not offer any classes to develop such capabilities. The English level of the students, as well as the overall recognition of their foreignness mark them as others, and the main focus is on how students are different and falling short of a standard, rather than seeing what they can do. This serves the societal function of making their otherness problematic and blocking social mobility, preserving the current racial and religious stratification of the US. The forced migrants are being forced into a system that is not made for them, and thus they are coming up short. The system does not recognize its own failings, and places the onus on the students, justifying cutting off their pathways towards social mobility. In confronting this system that treats them as less than fully capable, the students retreat into social networks comprised of other forced migrants, who recognize the transnational nature of their lives, as well as the reality of being marginalized because of it in a context where the dominant view values assimilation.

In the current economic climate, with the best job growth projections in fields requiring

post-secondary credentials, there exists an urgency among education officials and policy makers in the US to facilitate the production of such a workforce. Because of their largely open admission policies and relatively low cost, community colleges face pressure to play a large role in this by making schooling available to populations who have been left out of higher education in the past, socio-economic, racial and linguistic minorities. In the continuing era of accountability, policy makers are able to leverage public funds for community colleges as a pressure to improve their numbers. Retention and graduation numbers, however, remain low, meaning that not enough qualified potential future employees are being produced by SMCC for the market place. Ethnographic research like this study can provide rich detail and description from the student level. These are the individuals they need to reach, and this data can inform policies that have the potential to be effective. By listening to the voices of the students in question, community colleges can implement targeted reforms that address the real hurdles the students face. What the stumbling blocks are will differ based on each individual case. This necessitates looking deeper into the experiences and perceptions of the students a school wishes to see perform better.

SMCC has a body of forced migrants already enrolled who believe in the promise of education. They are determined and willing to work hard with the current system. This is a basis from which the school can start making changes to more fully take advantage of the potential and capabilities of its current and future forced migrant student body actually making more upward social mobility available to them. As the ACCUPLACER often serves as the first official designation of problematic difference for forced migrant students, it can be seen as an indicator for the need to look for other ways to evaluate language capacity.¹⁸ Jeanette, arguably a SMCC

¹⁸This might include placing pressure on local high schools to have their diplomas actually indicate the mastery of

success story, failed the ACCUPLACER twice before convincing Jenn to let her demonstrate her capabilities through a piece of writing, which more clearly aligns with the type of work she would then be doing in college. If students still need fairly extensive English language instruction, adult education may be a more appropriate setting, given the financial reality of many forced migrant students. Another option would be to have ESL courses count towards foreign language credits, as Sarah suggests. The ESL program also needs to be restructured so that students who successfully complete the cycle are actually prepared to be recognized as capable in regular education classes. SMCC has a new, full-time ESL director who has done some overhaul of the curricula in this direction and has a multi-year plan on how to continue this work. He is the force behind the new, content-driven ESL/EMT certification course. A restudy is needed to look at the effects. Concurrently, for a more academic and social mobility advancing college degree, the teachers need to be more accepting of the non-native varieties of English. This entails focusing on key components of comprehensibility and comprehension.

SMCC could also do more to ease the financial burden on their students without cutting into their own budgets by pursuing more scholarships and grants for forced migrant students. These should not be loans, and not dependent on citizenship status. They would then need to increase awareness about these opportunities and the steps to accessing them. In addition, there needs to be more acceptance for students choosing not to follow the standard, full-time, trajectory. Studies have shown that taking a full course load increases the likelihood across all types of students that they will graduate, but that does not mean that it has to be the only path towards graduation for all students. Studying full-time is only feasible for a minority of the participants in my study. By not seeing this type of schedule as inherently “at risk,” the students

certain schooling skills, but that is another issue for another day.

are more likely to see themselves as potential successes.

De-emphasizing full-time status and having less stringent native speaker-like fluency expectations will require significant reorientation for faculty and staff. If SMCC can relay this new approach as bringing them more in line with supporting the values of diversity and multiculturalism found in US education policies, instead of a lowering of expectations, that highlights the existing diverse language capabilities, it may allow teachers to take a realistic look at what future professions need. This may be the most difficult adjustment, but also has the most potential for impactful change.

Lastly, the PAX English section should be abolished in favor of a metric of functional English reading, writing and speaking. This would open up the well-regarded nursing program to many already qualified forced migrants, allowing them to access an occupation that would allow them to gain significant upward social mobility. This would benefit not only the nursing students, but the state of Maine, as it is currently projected to face an increasing nursing shortage.

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APPENDIX – INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol

Interviews will be informal, though guided by the following questions. Depending on the flow of conversation, degree of detail offered, and time available, questions may be asked over multiple interviews. Questions are designed to elicit information on the following key areas of the research study: background/demographics, support system, other responsibilities, challenges, vision/aspiration for the future, experience at the community college, informal education about being a student, issues unique to forced migrant women (compared to mainstream Mainers).

*Questions to verify information in following sessions.

**Questions to be asked multiple times, as they answers may shift over time.

Where are you from? [Background/demographics]

How old are you? [Background/demographics]

When and how did you come to the U.S? To Portland? [Background/demographics, issues unique to forced migrant women]

Where did you go to school before SMCC (educational history)? [Background/demographics, issues unique to forced migrant women]

How did you learn English? [Challenges, issues unique to forced migrant women]

*How long have you been at the community college? How much longer do you think you have? [Background/demographics, vision/aspirations for the future]

Why did you choose community college? (did you know someone who already attended?) [informal education]

Do you qualify for financial aid? [Challenges, experience at community college]

*What are you studying? [experience at community college, vision/aspiration for the future]

**What are you planning to do after SMCC? [vision/aspirations for the future]

**What has your experience at community college been like? [experience at community college, support, challenges]

**What have been your greatest challenges? [challenges]

**Who/what has helped you overcome these challenges? [support]

**What are your relationship like with your teachers? Classmates? [experience at community

college, support]

**What has your experience been like with the academic support center? [experience at community college]

How did you find the academic support center? [experience at college, informal education about community college]

**Where else, and with whom, do you do schoolwork? [experience at community college, support, informal education about community college]

How do you pick classes? [informal education about community college, vision/aspirations for the future]

*Do you work? Where and how many hours/what is your schedule like? [other responsibilities]

Who do you live with? [Support, other responsibilities]

What is your relationship to your home country? [issues unique to forced migrant women]

Do you communicate with friends and relative still living there? [other responsibilities, issues unique to forced migrant refugee women]

Follow news, sports, music? [issues unique to forced migrant women]

Aspire to go back and visit? [vision/aspiration for the future, issues unique to forced migrant women]

Do you have a community of people from your country? [issues unique to forced migrant women, challenges, support]

**Have you experienced any culture clash? [issues unique to forced migrant women, challenges, experience at community college]

**Racism? [issues unique to forced migrant women, challenges, experience at community college]

**Conflict with other groups? [issues unique to forced migrant women, challenges, experience at community college]

**Gender barriers? [challenges, experience at community college]