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Negotiating Formal Schooling, Multiple Identities, and Community Advocacy: (Counter)-Narratives of Somali Bantu Refugees in the United States

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Abstract

Negotiating Formal Schooling, Multiple Identities, and Community Advocacy: (Counter)-Narratives of the Somali Bantu Refugees in the United States examines the educational experiences of Somali-Bantu refugees resettled in Upstate, New York. It explores how they negotiate their multiple identities - race, gender, class, religion, culture, language, accent, and immigrant status - within the formal school setting and environment. Additionally, it highlights the role of the Somali Bantu community organizations in advocating and implementing resettlement services and academic resources for their people. Using critical race theory as theoretical lens and methodology, a qualitative research was conducted to collect data from nine Somali Bantu participants. The findings suggest that the participants experienced both successes and challenges while negotiating formal schooling. Their multiple identities subjected them to bias and discrimination within the schools and the society. Nonetheless, the community organizations play a significant role in supporting their children's academic achievement as well as sustaining their cultural values and language. Based on the findings, the study recommends strategies and reforms that are conducive for equity in education, academic achievement, and cultural tolerance for a successful transition and integration of the Somali Bantus and other refugees in the United States.

Negotiating Formal Schooling, Multiple Identities, and Community Advocacy: (Counter)-Narratives of the Somali Bantu Refugees in the United States

By

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THESIS

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Dedications

This thesis is dedicated to my mother, Rose, without her I would not have been where I am today. Her dedication and hard work as a single parent has inspired and instilled in me the importance of education and self-empowerment. To my siblings, extended family and friends; you inspire me.

A heartfelt gratitude to the Somali Bantu community for allowing me to enter into their homes, organizations, lives, and spaces so that I can tell their stories.

I dedicate this thesis to all the immigrants who have been displaced and forced to become refugees or asylum seekers in other countries. Despite all the hurdles and bureaucracies of the host country, never give up on achieving your dreams.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Background of the Study

The 1991 civil war in Somalia contributed to mass displacement of the people, forcing them to flee to the refugee camps in Kenya or to other countries (Besteman, 1999; Hollenbach, 2008; Waters, 2008). Arriving from the refugee camps in Kenya, the population referred to as Somali Bantu began resettling within the United States cities from 2003, as part of the resettlement program of 12,000 Somali Bantu implemented by the U.S government. As a result of the U.S Refugee Act of 1980 that opened the borders for refugees and the assistance of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and refugee resettlement agencies, these humanitarian resettlement programs have screened, admitted and resettled thousands of refugees from all nations in the United States (Besteman, 1999; Newman & Selm, 2003; Roberts, 1982; Smith 2012). Education is a human right, as stated by article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations), and as one of Pan Africanism's tenets, this study explores the educational experiences of the Somali Bantus refugees resettled in Upstate City[1], New York.

The Somali Bantu group which includes several sub-groups, are descendants of people taken from Southeastern Africa - Mozambique, Malawi, Zanzibar and Tanzania - during the 19th century Indian Ocean slave trade, to work as farmers and plantation workers (Eno & Van Lehman, 2003; Omar Eno & Mohamed Eno, 2007; Lewis, 2002). After slavery ended, they settled in Southern Somali as rural farmers. They were discriminated against by being denied educational and economic opportunities, social and political representation. Despite living in

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[1] From here henceforth, the name of the city is a pseudonym for confidentialities purposes.

Somalia for decades, the Somali Bantus' history, language, and physical differences has subjected them to oppression as a marginalized minority group (Eno & Van Lehman, 2003).

The term Bantu is used to refer to a family of languages spoken in eastern, central and southern Africa (Besteman, 1999; Hollenbach, 2008; Watters, 2008). Somali Bantu originate from the Bantu ethnic and linguistic groups while the ethnic Somalis belong to the Cushite group (Eno & Van Lehman 2003; Stephen, 2002). As a practice of racialization, ethnic Somalis referred to the Bantu as either *Gosha* (forest people), and as *Jareer* (rough or kinky hair). Derogatory terms such as *Ooji* and *addoon*, which translate as "slave" were also used by the ethnic Somalis to describe the Somali Bantu. However, the Somali Bantu refer to themselves as Bantu, *Wazigua* or *Mushunguli* depending on their origins and clan affiliations (Besteman, 1999; Eno & Van Lehman, 2003; Hollenbach, 2008; Watters, 2008).

Once in the Kenyan refugee camps administered by UNHCR and other nongovernmental agencies, the humanitarian agencies assigned the Bantu language speaking Somalis the label 'Somali Bantu' to differentiate them from the ethnic Somalis. The marginalization and victimization of the Somali Bantu by ethnic Somalis was still present in the camps, as they were subjected to violent attacks, rape, and hostilities. Therefore, the UNHCR recommended their urgent resettlement (Eno & Van Lehman, 2003; Besteman, 2012). It is important to recognize, the implications of the label 'Bantu' has served to exacerbate the concept of "otherness" thus justifying inferiority and difference of the people (Besteman, 1999, 2012; Eno O. & M. Eno, 2007; Hollenbach, 2008; Watters, 2008).

Prior to arriving in the U.S, many of the children and their parents had either not attended school or had interrupted schooling (Besteman, 1999; Roxas, 2011; Roy & Roxas, 2011; Watters, 2008). Institutional and systemic racism in Somalia ensured that the rural

Somali Bantu community had little access to formal educational institutions. According to Eno & Van Lehman (2003), "the lack of schools in Bantu residential areas, along with the unfamiliar language used as the medium of instruction, are among the obstacles to education faced by the rural Bantu. Those who can afford to send their children to a city to earn a high school degree face discrimination against pursuing higher education" (p. 22). Hence, once they resettled in the U.S, they were faced with academic obstacles which could affect successful integration and transition in their adopted country. Additionally, cultural shock, different climate, language, trauma, and health issues are challenges they are bound to experience as new immigrants (Besteman, 1999, 2012; Hollenbach, 2008; Watters, 2008). Clearly, for one to be forcefully driven out from their daily routine and environment, it would take a considerable amount of time to acclimate into the new environment.

Situating the Context

Upstate City, New York, is among the many cities where Somali Bantu have been resettled in the U.S. Because of the low cost of living, affordable housing, and job opportunities refugees are often resettled in urban spaces (Onondaga Citizens League, 2013; Roxas & Roy, 2012). According to the U.S. refugee admissions program, from the 313,098 Africans resettled in the U.S., the largest group are the Somali as more than 100,000 have been resettled in large cities in the U.S., including Upstate City (Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, 2014; Refugee Admissions by Region, FY 1975 - 2015).

Since 2001, Upstate City has received refugees for resettlement from all nations in the world. The report by the Onondaga Citizens League (2013), note that there are approximately 12,000 refugees and former refugees from all nations living in Upstate City. Some are

'secondary migrants' as they relocated to other cities and or states after initial resettlement. Upstate City "has welcomed a steady wave of Somalis [and Somali Bantus], making them the third largest refugee group resettled since 2001" (Onondaga Citizens League, 2013 p. 9). Other refugees resettled were from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bhutan, Burma, Sudan, and Congo. The demographic statistics of the city (2013 estimate) are: 144,669 with 29.5% identifying as Black[2] or African American, and 56.0% as White, the rest are other races (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015).

Most of the Somali community live on the Northside and the Southside of the City. Refugee resettlement agencies assign houses based on the ability of the refugees to pay the rent and utilities once the funding and support from the federal government ends (Onondaga Citizens League, 2013). Usually these houses are in poor working class neighborhoods and also have members of the same ethnicities who provide social support to each other. As Eric Uslaner (2012) writes, "new immigrants seek out people like themselves to ease their transition into a new country" (p.75). The tendency to segregate themselves in a residential area is also based on the residential segregation patterns in urban spaces. These residential neighborhoods in the inner city of Upstate City are also predominantly Black - eighty percent Black or African American -, and has the highest poverty and employment rates (Stamps & Stamps, 2008; Social Explorer, 2015).

Who are the Somali Bantu Refugees resettled in Upstate City?

According to the Somali Bantu community organizations in Upstate City, the population of Somali Bantus is estimated to be; 150 to 200 families and over 1,500 individuals

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[2] It should be noted that African immigrants are counted within the Black or African American category in the U.S. Census reports.

living in Upstate City, NY (Community leader Baraka, 2014; Somali Bantu community organizations). Additionally, there are some who are still arriving either from the refugee camps or as secondary migrants. It has been challenging finding the exact number of Somali Bantus living in Upstate City, this is mainly because census reports and resettlement agencies categorize Somali Bantus with ethnic Somalis. Nonetheless, many of their families are large and "the largest family can have 15 people" (Community leader Baraka, Personal interview, 2014). The languages spoken by the community are: Somali, Kizigua, Swahili, Maay Maay, and Arabic, and they practice Islam as their religion (Onondaga Citizens League, 2013).

Due to the language barrier and little or no formal education experience, most of the refugees have trouble finding employment especially in the current economy (Onondaga Citizens League, 2013). Those who find employment are usually employed by the agricultural sector, manufacturers, construction, healthcare, food industries, and domestic labor. Several Somali owned businesses are established in Upstate City, and are situated in the neighborhoods of the Somalis. These include: a halal food market, clothing stores and a restaurant that caters for the needs of the community (Personal observation, 2014).

There are three Somali Bantu ethnic-based community organizations in Upstate City that bridge the gap by providing support network for the Somali Bantu and other resettled refugees. They provide resettlement services for successful integration of the community, while enhancing a sense of belonging (McMichael & Manderson, 2004; Cordero-Guzman, 2007; Hopkins, 2006; Newland, Tanaka & Barker, 2007). The community organizations provide translation and interpretation services, tutoring and educational services, liaise with the school districts, employment assistance, citizenship services, and engage in advocacy and promote cultural continuity. Despite limited funding and structural constraints, the role of the

not-for-profit organizations are significant for the community's integration, networking, political and economic self-sufficiency. It should be noted that "immigrant organizations differ from other social-service providers in that they explicitly incorporate cultural components, and a consciousness of ethnic or national-origin identity, into their mission, practices, services and programs" (Cordero-Guzman, 2005 p. 894). In addition, they serve as representatives of their people in the society they are now living in.

Context of the Public School: Upstate City School District

The Somali Bantu students attend the public schools in Upstate City. Enrollment data from the-New York State Education (NYSED) reveal that Upstate City School District has a total of 20,328 students, 2,890 of the students are classified as English Language Learners - ELL (NYSED Public school district data for 2013-2014 school years). The graduation rate for 2014 was 51 percent, a slight improvement from the 49 percent in 2013, but still below the New York State standard of 80 percent. The dropout rate was at 19 percent in 2013 and 17 percent in 2014 (NYSED, 2014). Table 1 highlights the demographics of the students attending the district public schools.

Most of the Somali Bantu have been classified as English Language Learners (ELLs) since they arrived in the U.S. with little to no proficiency in English. The English language learners are students who are eligible for English language support services in the public schools. Upstate City school district tests and evaluates ELLs before assigning them to relevant English as a Second language (ESL) classrooms. The school accountability process, however, expects the Somali Bantu students to achieve at the same level as native born English speakers regardless of their challenges.

Table 1: Upstate City School District: Enrollment 2013 - 2014

K-12 Enrollment: 20,328

Students	Total	Percent (100)
Gender:		
Male	10,500	52%
Female	9,828	48%
Ethnicity:		
American Indian or Alaska	260	1%
Black or African American	10,078	50%
Hispanic or Latino	2,689	13%
Asian/Native Hawaiian/Other	1,515	7%
White	4,973	24%
Multiracial	813	4%
Limited English Proficient Students	2,890	14%
Students with Disabilities	4,067	20%
Economically disadvantaged students	15,601	77%

Source: New York State Education Department Data, Public School District

Statement of the Problem

The problem this study addresses stems from the insertion of a historically marginalized population into a society where institutionalized and systemic racism are ingrained, thus leading to inequity in education, economic, social and political representation of minority populations (Bell, 1992, 2004; Crenshaw et al. 1995; Delgado, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Dixson & Rousseau, 2005, 2006; Kozol, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1994; Matsuda et al 1993; Milner, 2013; Roxas & Roy 2011, 2012; Wing, 1997). As already mentioned, prior to arriving in the U.S, the Somali Bantu refugee

children and their parents have either not attended school or had interrupted schooling, with limited English language proficiency (Roxas, 2011; Roy & Roxas, 2011; Watters, 2008; Besteman, 1999). Once they are in the U.S, they are required to enroll in school and are placed in classrooms based on their age, irrespective of their prior experience with formal classrooms (Besteman, 1999, 2012; Hollenbach, 2008; Watters, 2008).

The transition and resettlement of the Somali Bantus has been met with challenges; their multiple identities - race, culture, religion, class, immigrant status, and the language barrier - can impact successful settlement and academic achievement (Bigelow, 2008, 2010; Ghong, 2007; Roxas & Roy, 2012; Suarez-Orozco, 2013). Furthermore, color-blindness ideology (Bonilla-Silva, 2003) in the American society may deny them their right to equal educational opportunities. Additionally, school and residential segregation in the 21st century defy and defeat the implementation of equal educational opportunities for all races, including immigrants, and others of low socio-economic status (Suarez-Orozco, 2013; Roxas, 2011; Lee, 2005; Bigelow, 2010; Kuscera & Orfield, 2014). Hence, Somali Bantus are likely to face educational obstacles for successful academic achievement and integration in their new community and to the American cultural norms they are expected to assimilate into.

Racist practices such as micro aggressions, stereotypes, and deficiency ideologies are often used by educators to justify the poor academic achievement of minorities (Roxas, 2011; Roxas & Roy, 2011; Harris, 2011). Problematic stereotypes that the minorities face, including the Somali Bantu, are: that the minorities do not value education, that they are lazy, that parents do not value teacher-parent conferences, and that they are linguistically deficient (Gorski, 2012; Roxas, 2011, 2012).Yet, there is limited research that voices the challenges and limitations Somali Bantu students experience in academic settings.

Significance of the study

By placing the experiences of the Somali Bantus in Upstate NY at the forefront of this study, I hope their voices will be heard and that this qualitative research will fill the existing gap. Their voices and experiences will provide information that would contribute to the literature on the less researched immigrant population. The findings from this research will be conducive in implementing relevant teaching and academic resources for this group, and a successful resettlement and integration into their new homes.

To the educators, refugee resettlement agencies, and policymakers, it is my hope that this research will provide better understanding on the academic and societal issues that Somali Bantus as Muslim immigrants experience in formal classrooms. Through critical race theory, the analysis, discussion and debate on race and racism will be brought to the center of discourse thus creating an opportunity for equality and social justice for the minorities.

Drawing from Pan Africanism perspectives, the Somali Bantus' forced migration and movement has been a result of slavery, colonialism, imperialism, xenophobia, and civil wars that Africans have been subjected to and oppressed by the western societies. Their movement to the U.S. and their blackness has become the defining element in their new homes, as their multiple identities has defined as well as constrained their humanity and self- consciousness. Therefore, this study is significant as it contributes to the Pan Africanism principles that positions all human beings as equal, and deserve to be equally educated and treated. Lastly, the study is significant as it highlights the Somali Bantu community's advocacy, identity and cultural formation in their new spaces.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to explore the formal schooling experiences of the Somali Bantus resettled in Upstate City, New York, their formal school experiences while attending the city public schools. A second purpose is to explore the effects of race, class, gender, religion, and culture on their academic achievement. Another purpose is to highlight the Somali Bantu community organization's role in providing services for the education of their children.

Few research projects have been done on the Somali Bantu educational experience (Roxas, 2011; Roy & Roxas, 2011; Kapteijns & Arman, 2008; Hussein, 2012). Other studies have focused on health and healthcare issues (Jaranson et al, 2004; Beatson, 2013; Deckys & Springer, 2013; Gurnah et al, 2011), and cultural and traditional practices (Upvall et al, 2009). Scholars have argued that the academic achievement of immigrants, especially students of color does not differ to that of African Americans educational experiences (Ladson-Billings, 2001; Kozol, 1991; Harris, 2011; Kuscera & Orfield, 2014). Therefore this study intends to fill this gap in the existing research by illuminating the experiences of the Somali Bantu students, parents and community leaders. Additionally, there is little evidence that the experiences of Somali Bantu in the Upstate New York area has been conducted and reported.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the experiences of Somali Bantu refugees in formal schooling in Upstate City, New York?

2. What role does race, class, gender, language, cultural and religious practices play in their academic achievement?

3. What role does the Somali Bantu organization contribute to the academic success of the community?

Definition of Terms

Somali Bantu

For research purpose this study uses the term 'Somali Bantu' to refer to the participants. The term Bantu is used to refer to the family of languages spoken in eastern, central and southern Africa, where this population originated while the ethnic Somalis belong to the Cushite group (Stephen, 2002). The label 'Somali Bantu' was assigned by humanitarian agencies in the refugee camps (Besteman, 1999; Eno, 2008).

Refugee

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) defines refugees as someone who because of "well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country" (UNHCR). It should be noted, once the refugees are resettled, their status changes to permanent resident after a year, and after 5 years in the U.S they can apply for the citizenship (Newman & Selm, 2003). In this study, the term is used to emphasize their previous status as displaced persons and to differentiate them from voluntary immigrants.

Forced immigrant

These are immigrants who have been forced to flee their homes based on fear, conflict or natural causes, their reason for migration differs to those of voluntary immigrants. Voluntary immigrants, on the other hand, freely migrate to other countries for employment, education, or family reunification purposes (Wepman, 2008; Massey et al, 2005).

English as a Second language (ESL)

English as a Second language services (ESL) are provided for the English Language Learners (ELLs) until they test at the "proficient" level. ESL students "are typically pulled out of their regular classrooms for specific periods during the school day to receive these services. In an ESL class, specific methodologies and instructional materials that allow students to learn English systematically and cumulatively are used" (NYSED). Students normally receive ESL instruction for 6 years or as required, those who receive the services after the sixth year are identified as Long Term ELLs (NYSED). For this study, the term ESL will be employed to refer to the services they receive.

Organization of the Study

This study is organized in five chapters. Chapter one includes the introduction to the study, background of the study, statement of the problem, purpose and significance of the study, definition of terms and research questions. Chapter 2 explores the review of literature which includes critical race theory and critical race feminism as the theoretical frameworks, literature on educating students of color; segregated schools, multicultural spaces, race and unequal education, and educating Somali Bantus and other refugee students, educating Somali Bantu women.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology applied for this case study. It covers the research design, data collection, and selection of participants, the demography of the participants, theoretical framework and data analysis method. Chapter 4 highlights the voices of the participants based on the three research questions, which are analyzed, interpreted and presented by three major themes and several subthemes. Chapter 5 provides a critical interpretation and discussions of the findings, the implications, suggestions for future research and recommendations.

Chapter 2: Conceptualizing Race, Forced Migration & Education

Introduction

This chapter reviews literature pertinent to the education of students of color and forced immigrants, since the Somali Bantu are students of color as well as forced immigrants. It analyzes how race and the systemic and institutional racism, marginalization, oppression, inequity and discrimination are ingrained in the American society. Also, it considers how this institutionalized racism is upheld by the education system, government institutions, policies, and legal practices and how it undermines the humanity, social mobility, and academic achievement of minorities.

Educational researchers, social scientists and legal scholars have studied the interconnectedness of race and inequality in the American society. Therefore, this chapter analyzes, problematizes, highlights, and critiques race relations; specifically, the effects of institutionalized racism and color-blindness ideologies on the education of students of color. Literature reviewed conceptualizes race and racism, immigration, and education through the lens of critical race theory (CRT) and critical race feminism (CRF). To understand and question the impacts of race, gender, class, language, culture, religion, and immigrant status of minorities. This review is organized into two major sections with subsection: a) Race matters and b) Race, forced migration, and education.

A. Race Matters: Theorizing Race & Education

The analysis of literature and research vis-à-vis race and education draws from critical race theory (CRT) and critical race feminism (CRF) to highlight the intersection of race, class, gender, immigration status, and religion (Bell, 1992, 2005, 2008; Crenshaw et al. 1995;

Delgado, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Dixson & Rousseau, 2005, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1994; Matsuda et al 1993; Milner, 2013; Wing, 1997). According to Delgado & Stefancic (2012) the critical race theory "movement is a collection of activists and scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism and power" (p. 3). CRT as a framework originated in the 1970s, when legal scholars, lawyers and activists realized that the new forms of racism emerging required new theories and strategies. As Tate (1997) says, it is "a product of and response to one of the most politically active and successful eras of social change in the United States" (p.197). Civil rights activists and scholars, Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, Richard Delgado, Mari Matsuda, Kimberle Crenshaw, Charles Lawrence, and Angela Harris to name a few, are considered the principle figures of CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). CRT has since merged to various disciplines and research, legal studies, social sciences, and increasingly in education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, Ladson-Billings, 1996; Solórzano, 1997, 2002).

The foundation of critical race theory in education has been laid by Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate's article (1995) "Toward a Critical Race Theory in Education". They argue that race has been under-theorized in education and suggested that scholars and researchers should implement critical race theory in education to analyze school inequity. Although race is an important factor in determining school inequity, previous research has exclusively concentrated on gender and class. They note, "by arguing that race remains untheorized, we are not suggesting that other scholars have not looked carefully at race as a powerful tool for explaining social inequity, but that the intellectual salience of this theorizing has not been systematically employed in the analysis of educational inequality" (p. 50). They contend that "critical race theory in education, like its antecedent in legal scholarship, is a

radical critique of both the status quo and the purported reforms" (p. 62). Noticeably, race is a significant factor in examining inequity in education, along with gender and class. Increasingly, immigration status and immigrants should be included in the study and analysis of education inequality, not only for voluntary immigrants but also for forced immigrants and the undocumented.

Educational scholars and researchers have since theorized race in education through CRT and its methodological tools (Bell, 1992, 2005; Delgado, 1995; Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1998, 2005; Solórzano, & Yosso, 2002, 2001; Smith-Maddox & Solórzano, 2002; Tate, 1997; Yosso, 2002, 2006). Furthermore, Solórzano & Yosso (2002), to advance the efficacy of CRT, have developed critical race methodology, a tool that gives voice to the marginalized. It allows them to have voices through counter-storytelling thus empowering them to challenge the hegemonic ideologies. The theory upholds that race matters, voice matters, and justice matters. For my study on the Somali Bantus, the CRT methodology of storytelling is significant as it will give voice to the marginalized community.

In addition to the CRT methodology of giving voice and counter-storytelling (Duncan, 2002; Fernandez, 2002; Solórzano, 2001; Yosso, 2006). Other scholarship in education include the critique of the colorblindness ideology (Taylor, 1999; Rousseau & Tate, 2003), Whiteness (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), critique of liberalism (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), critique of education policy (Gillborn, 2005), critique of meritocracy and achievement gap (Love, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Harris 2011). A discourse on feminism - critical race feminism (Wing, 2000; Crenshaw, 1989), Latino/Chicano experiences - LatCrit (Yosso, 2006; Solórzano & Yosso, 2000), and Indigenous/Tribal critical race theory - TribalCrit (Brayboy, 2005; Writer, 2008). Noteworthy, there is a dearth of scholarship on the African

immigrant educational experiences, as researchers tend to analyze their experiences collectively either as students of color (black-white binary) or as immigrants. Immigration policy racializes and institutionalizes the concept of otherness, 'citizen' vs 'alien'. Therefore, it is important to note that the experiences and struggles of all immigrants are not similar, a refugee might not have the same struggles and experiences as a voluntary immigrant.

Race as a Social Construction

Race is a social construct, it is a construction and ideology that labels, dichotomizes, classifies and differentiates whites against blacks, majority against minorities, and superior against inferior (Alexander, 2010; Bell, 2005; Collins, 2005; Curry, 2008; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ritterhouse, 2006; Solórzano, 2002; Wright, 2004; Yosso, 2002). Racial construct and racism originated with the European imagination of the Middle Ages, thus forming three major races: Caucasoid, Negroid and Mongoloid while excluding others (Lopez, 2013). The concept of 'otherness', racial differences/categorization, and hierarchies introduced by European scholars and explorers, justified colonialism and the oppression of the black race which was then relegated to the margins of society.

The black race, at the margin of the society is dichotomized against the white race, the center of the society. As Michelle Wright (2004) notes, "in order to posit itself as civilized, advanced, and superior, Western discourse must endlessly reify Africa and the Black as its binary opposite" (p. 26). This is portrayed by the Eurocentric writings of 18th and 19th century, as Western philosophers such as Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Count Arthur de Gobineau (Father of Modern Racism) justified and reified the concept of racial hierarchies and ideologies (Wright, 2004; Lopez, 2013). White supremacists ideologies relegated the

black man at the bottom of the racial hierarchy (Wright, 2004). Additionally, they used pseudoscience and historical narrations to validate the inferiority of the minorities.

In the United States, racial relations is a consequence of slavery. As Alexander (2005) states, "before democracy, chattel slavery in America was born" (p. 25). Chattel slavery guaranteed the ownership of the black body; a commodity, and work force for the white master (Collins, 2005; Alexander, 2010). Furthermore, as Lopez (2013) argues, "human fate still rides upon ancestry and appearance. The characteristics of our hair, complexion, and facial features still influence whether we are figuratively free or enslaved" (p. 239). Thus, the black race was considered as 'other' 'savage', 'primitive', 'uncivilized', 'barbaric' and 'lacking intelligence', all these justified imperialism, colonial rule and the Atlantic slave trade. Similarly, in Africa, the Somali Bantus' racialization was a consequence of slavery and displacement (Eno & Van Lehman, 2003; Besteman, 1999, 2001).

Curry (2008) asserts, "in America, white-Black race relations are systemic, and reproduced culturally, institutionally, and socially from generation to generation" (p. 40). On the other hand, Patricia Hill Collins (2005) notes "social formations that kept African Americans impoverished and virtually powerless – chattel slavery, labor exploitation of the Jim Crow Southern agriculture, and the continuing growth of urban ghettos – all sparked organized African American political protest" (p. 93). Therefore, civil rights movements, social protests, and activism challenges the institutionalized racial relations. For the Somali Bantu resettling in the U.S, years after the civil rights movements commenced, the racial relations and racism will still affect their successful transition and integration within the new spaces.

Racial relations and identity in the Horn of Africa assumes a different perspective to the U.S. race relations, hence an analysis of the social construction of Somali Bantu identity formation is also significant for this study. Somalia was a homogenous society, however, colonialism and the partition of Africa (1884-1885 Berlin Conference) divided and dispersed the predominantly Muslim Somali people across the modern day Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, and within Somalia. Notably, a desire for nationalism and a Greater Somalia is embedded in the five-pointed star symbol on the Somali flag which represents the Somali-speaking people dispersed within the five nations (Besteman, 1999; Chau, 2010; Lewis, 1963). However, the Somali Bantus in Somalia are considered 'the other' therefore not a part of the Greater Somalia (Besteman, 1999, 2012; Eno & Van Lehman, 2003).

Anthropologist Catherine Besteman's (1999) historical narrative *Unraveling Somalia: Race, Violence, and the Legacy of Slavery* explores the history of slavery, identity formation and domination of the people living in the Jubba Valley in southern Somalia. The ethnographic research was conducted in Somalia in 1987 within the Gosha (Bantu) communities in the Jubba Valley. The Arab slave trade in Africa, specifically in Somalia, begun during the nineteenth century (Besteman, 1999, 2012; Eno & Van Lehman, 2003; Lewis, 1963). Slave labor was required for the domestic, livestock, textile, and agricultural industries. During the agricultural revolution, the people were taken from Mozambique and Southern Tanzania and transported by sea to southern Somalia to work at the plantations (Eno & Van Lehman, 2003).

Agricultural revolution contributed to various labor groups and hierarchies, one of these are the client cultivators who included former slaves. Once freed, the ex-slaves moved to the valleys to continue with farming, one of these places is at the Shabelle valley in Southern Somalia. According to Besteman (1999) the Shabelle Valley cultivators were the Bantus who

were "designated the "lower" occupational castes" (p. 53) by the ethnic Somalis. Their distinctive physical features, - hard, rough, or kinky hair, skin color - contributed to their 'otherness' and persecution. Similar to the enslaved in the U.S., the Somali Bantu slave descendants became marginalized and relegated into the racialized spaces and racial hierarchy of "otherness", people of low status. As Besteman (1999) states "over the course of the twentieth century, the convergence of Islamic ideology, colonial policy, and state practice contributed to a construction of racial categories which defined the Jubba valley as a racialized space within the Somali society" (p. 114). Clearly, this research that culminated into a historical narrative of the descendants of ex-slaves in Somalia is imperative for my study, as it elucidates the identity formation and subordination of the Somali Bantus while living in Somalia and how they navigate their identity in the almost similar racialized American society.

Additionally, in "Translating Race across Time and Space: The Creation of Somali Bantu Ethnicity," Catherine Besteman (2012) examines the emergence of the term 'Somali Bantu' by humanitarian organizations and the implications of the construction of identity in the American society. For resettlement purposes, "the term 'Somali Bantu' had emerged from the refugee camps as an umbrella term for Somalia's southern minority farmers" (p. 289). However, once in the U.S this label has been disputed by ethnic Somalis as well as some of the Somali Bantus, especially students who "are uncomfortable with the Somali Bantu label because they experience its use by fellow Somali refugee students as pejorative" (p. 290).

The term Bantu, which refers to both linguistic and ethnic group, was applied by humanitarian workers (Besteman, 1999, 2012) while the media spread it. Literature and scholarship on the ethnic group also apply the term to define this population. A label that

might have been harmlessly created and intended for resettlement purposes, for identifying victims of subordination, has contributed to the racialization of the ethnic groups both within their society and in the diaspora. Hence, the knowledge of their ethnicity and identity formation is noteworthy for understanding the people in the diaspora and their history of marginalization.

In the same vein, Ludwig's (2013) ethnographic study "Wiping the Refugee Dust from My Feet: Advantages and Burdens of Refugee Status and the Refugee Label," explores the concept of identification, and labeling of forced immigrants as refugees. Ludwig conducted an ethnographic study on the Liberian refugees in Staten Island, New York. The data was collected during a three year study through 50 semi-structured interviews and participant observations from the Liberian refugees and immigrants.

From her findings, the label 'refugee' is temporary used, however it is considered problematic and limiting. The label is problematic as it is stigmatized, and also it is a reminder of the past trauma. Those interviewed preferred the label 'displaced immigrant' or 'immigrant'. Furthermore, humanitarian agencies are using the label and images of refugees to raise funding and capitalize from the refugees. Consequently, "for Liberians, being constantly referred to as "refugees" is more negative – preventing them from leaving a difficult and painful behind [crises in Liberia and the civil wars], reducing their sense of self-worth, and making them into perpetual long-suffering Others" (p. 2). Similar to the Liberian refugees who fled the civil wars in Liberia and resettled in the U.S, the Somali Bantus view the term refugee negatively.

Separate *and* unequal Education

At a Negro summer school two years ago, a white instructor gave a course on the Negro, using for his text a work which teaches that whites are superior to the Blacks. When asked by one of the students why he used such a textbook the instructor replied that he wanted them to get that point of view. Even schools for Negroes, then, are places where they must be convinced of their inferiority.

Carter Godwin Woodson - The Mis-education of the Negro

None of us was sure what an integrated reunion would be like. Those periods in our adolescent lives of racial desegregation had been full of hostility, rage, conflict, and loss. We black kids had been angry that we had to leave our beloved all-black high school, Crispus Attucks, and be bussed halfway cross (sic) town to integrate white schools. We had to make the journey and thus bear the responsibility of making desegregation a reality. We had to give up the familiar and enter a world that seemed cold and strange, not our world, not our school. We were certainly on the margin, no longer at the center, and it hurt.

Bell hooks - Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom

The above quotes from Historian Carter Godwin Woodson (1933/1990) and scholar bell hooks (1994) depict the effects and experiences of Eurocentric and segregated education that students of color were and are still subjected to. The collapse of slavery and the declaration of the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 by President Abraham Lincoln paved way to a new form of racial order, the Jim Crow System and its "separate but equal" doctrine. Institutional racism embedded in American public education has been supported by the Supreme Court decisions and endorsed by the Jim Crow system (Alexander, 2010; Bell, 2005; Ritterhouse 2006; Wright, 2014).

Historically, African American's education has been unequal, segregated and ineffective. While the segregated black schools lacked resources and adequate infrastructure for effective education of black students, the white schools were afforded better infrastructure, resources and even the best teachers to educate their children (Kozol, 1991, 2005; Patterson,

2001; Woodson, 1990; Bell, 2004). The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was established in 1909 by activists concerned with the discrimination and oppression of the supposedly free and equal black people (Bell, 2004). The organization fought for political, educational and legal rights of black people. It also supported members of black communities in fighting for their rights. Boycotts for better school facilities and supplies were organized in various towns in the South. Hence, when in 1950, Linda Brown was denied admission into the nearby all-white school in Topeka, Kansas and forced to travel an hour and twenty minutes to the nearest all-black school, her father, Oliver Brown, filed a lawsuit (Hine et al., p. 574). The class action lawsuit led to what is now known as the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* (Stamps & Stamps, 2008; Bell, 2004; Patterson, 2001). Four years later, the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision, legally ended segregation in public schools.

Legal scholar Derrick Bell's (2004) groundbreaking book titled *Silent Covenants: Brown V. Board of Education and the Unfulfilled Hopes for Racial Reform* explores the steps taken by NAACP lawyers led by Thurgood Marshall during the landmark case (*Brown V. Board of Education*) that led to court-ordered desegregation of public schools. By applying critical race theory concepts, Bell analyzes the legal jurisprudence on segregation and desegregation of public schools. Desegregation was implemented "with all deliberate speed" (Bell, 2004 p. 18), however, the concept of desegregating schools appalled many white people, as none of them perceived Blacks as equal or deserving of equal educational opportunities. Furthermore, it assured civil rights activists of a difficult struggle to come. Perhaps many had foreshadowed the fact that ending the Jim Crow law would not mean the end of racial discrimination in the

U.S. (Bell, 2004). Notably, it took many years of struggle and several court cases for the initial court-ordered desegregation to be implemented.

Bell's interest-convergence covenant proposes that "perceived self-interest by whites rather than the racial injustices suffered by blacks has been the major motivation in racial-remediation policies" (p.59). He further argues, that the *Brown V. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision was made based on the foreign policy/political interests of the country's anticommunism. Therefore, "the continuation of segregation posed a contradiction for the self-proclaimed exemplar of freedom and democracy" (p. 60). America's race relations had to be in par with democracy, hence desegregation for the benefits of whites was imperative.

School desegregation in the 1960s became the main priority for civil rights lawyers and advocates. Derrick Bell notes that despite the Brown court decision, schools and officials were constructing barriers and tactics to challenge integration, while white parents offered opposition by leaving the school districts. White flight and busing became the norm during the desegregation process. In conclusion, Bell argues that the Brown decision has served its purpose for the white supremacists, "absent the barriers based on race, the history of public education during the last two centuries would certainly be a more positive story featuring a better-educated and thus a more enlightened citizenry. The *Brown* decision failed to remove these barriers" (p. 197). Indeed, the setbacks did not deter the activism for equality in education and social justice.

There is a plethora of research on the history of the Jim Crow South and segregated public schools. According to Patterson (2001), education officials and municipals made sure that they built schools near all- black communities so as to "ensure maximum separation of the races in the classroom" (p. 5). In addition, predominantly black schools were allocated

insufficient resources and "inexperienced and poor-quality teachers are usually placed at inner-city schools with the idea that poor and minority students can't learn anyway (Stamps & Stamps, 2008, p.135). Given this setting of building schools in black communities, they ensured that education remained as segregated as possible. Furthermore, black educators were denied jobs in the city schools attended by white students. The only place of employment available for black educators was in the low paying, underfunded, and segregated black schools. This analysis is imperative, as it offers the historical background on the unequal education of African Americans and the context of schools. In Somalia, the Somali government practiced segregation and unequal education by not building any schools near the communities of Somali Bantus, to restrict them access to formal education and integration with the ethnic Somalis.

Desegregating Upstate City School District

According to a historical report by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (1968), desegregation in the New York State city school district (Upstate City), began in 1963 when the school board "issued a statement recognizing school segregation as a problem and declaring racial balance to be an important educational goal" (p. 1). Most schools were segregated and as the local Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) challenged the school board to address the issue of segregation, the board retaliated by arguing that the housing situation was the issue. Stamps and Stamps (2008) note that "as the black population increased and residential segregation became an institution, the de facto segregation of schools resulted" (p. 133). Whether forced or by choice, the school is a part of the institution that participated in the subordination of the black society.

The Upstate City school officials took measures to remedy this racial imbalance. One of them included adjusting boundaries, which led to black students being transferred to the neighboring predominantly white student schools in 1963. There was no opposition to this change. The second measure implemented was "the voluntary busing of 58 Negro students from the overcrowded, predominantly white Smith Elementary school" (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Report, p. 4). As expected, opposition by the white parents were voiced. Other measures included the closing down of schools and students being reassigned to nearby schools. Changes in the school administration, grades and classroom setting, teachers, and most significantly, a revised curriculum to include African American history were implemented to accommodate the new students. It should be noted, the new elementary social studies curriculum was first taught in all schools starting in September 1966 (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1968). The history of African Americans seemed to become significant only after 1966.

Desegregation proved that the black students were more academically behind than the white students. However, they improved after a few years in the integrated schools. Significantly, desegregation brought new dimensions to racial relations. Interracial tensions were created between the white and blacks students, and white teachers who did not know how to teach the "resentful and defiant of discipline" black students (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights p. 13). White and blacks students self-segregated as each perceived the other as a threat. One black student interviewed said, "when we go outside, the white kids […] don't want to play with us; they call us all kinds of names. They call us ugly and tell us we came from Africa…" (ibid. p. 13). Years later, the situation changed as new racial relations

influenced by immigration led to African immigrants to be treated the same way by the African American students.

During the fieldwork, the Somali Bantu students I interviewed reported that African American students called them names, telling them to go back to Africa. The tension between the ethnic groups is profound. As new immigrants arrive in the U.S., the demographic changes and the shifting racial relations leads to tension among the minorities, as each group strives to be better than the other, strive to be at the top of the race hierarchy and be accepted by the white dominant group. Nevertheless, the Upstate City school district is still facing challenges in desegregating its schools and achieving high academic performance. This report, however old it is, shows how unequal public schools and segregation were in the past and the progress the district has been able to achieve in addressing the issues. This project is important as it explores the segregated school district and public education of African immigrants such as the Somali Bantus.

The historical context in public schools resembles the current 21st century situation. The only difference is the racial demographics of the students. This has shifted from the black-white binary to include white, black, African, Asian, and Hispanic. Sixty years after the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision, scholars Kuscera & Orfield's (2014) report titled "New York State's Extreme School Segregation: Inequality, Inaction and a Damaged Future," studies school segregation pattern in the East Coast. The findings indicate that there is an increase in segregation trends. New York State is the most segregated state in the country and within the Upstate New York region; Buffalo, Rochester and Syracuse are the cities with the most segregated schools. Data was collected from the National Center for Education Statistics and Common Core of Data of 1989 – 1990, 1999 – 2000, and 2010 – 2011 school years (Kuscera

& Orfield, 2014). They looked at enrollment patterns of the public schools, as well as charter schools, in the various regions.

The findings indicate a growing number of diverse students in urban schools, thus being problematic in the sense that it has increased segregation patterns. The higher the number of minorities, the more the school becomes low-income. According to Kuscera & Orfield (2014) in Upstate City metropolitan area, "the average black student attended school in 1989 with a third of students from their own race; twenty years later, the typical black student attended schools with nearly half black students" (p. ix). Indeed, as a report by *ProPublica*, "School Segregation after Brown" (2014) portrays, Upstate City School District is segregated, the 2009-2010 school year had a total of 21 thousand students and 54 percent of the total school population are Black students (Larson et al., 2014). Notably, the total population of Syracuse, Onondaga County in 2009 was 453,846, and Black or African American Alone was 45,140 (9.95 percent) (U.S. Demography 1790 to Present, Social Explorer 2015). Yet, fifty percent of the public school population are Black students. Factors leading to the high level of segregation included residential segregation of African Americans and Latinos, no desegregation plans, and choice schools —charter school— that increase segregation rather than lessen it (Kuscera & Orfield, 2014). The authors recommend implementation of effective policies that ensure equal opportunity for all students regardless of their race, class and socio-economic status.

Certainly, segregated schools are produced by class and race, white flight and the alternative schools ensure that education remains unequal for students attending the inner city public schools which have less resources and a curriculum that is challenging enough for the students. This study is relevant to the research on Somali Bantus in Upstate New York as

the students also attend these segregated inner city public schools. Because of their race, class and their immigrant status they are likely to face obstacles in their education.

Reforms are implemented to challenge the impacts of the current school segregation, which is reinforced by race, class, and power. Based on the reports on segregated schools, desegregation and court ordered desegregation laws have not been effective. In effect, re-segregation patterns are noticeable in many school districts, especially the North. As Crain (2014) explains, "a desegregation order is a federal court order put in place to enforce school integration requirements … [it] prescribes a remedy to ensure that schools within a district integrate and remain integrated" (2014). Indeed, some school districts are still under the desegregation order despite the *Brown v. the Board of Education* court order to end segregation sixty one years ago.

Similar, scholars Reardon et al., in *Brown Fades: The End of Court-Ordered School Desegregation and the Resegregation of American Public Schools* (2012), argue that schools, especially in the South, tend to resegregate once they get out of the court's oversight. They collected data from Common Core of Data by examining "all of the 483 districts in the country that enrolled at least 2,000 students and were under court supervision as of 1990" (p. 877). The schools examined were mainly from the South and "96 districts in non-Southern states (p. 877). Their finding suggest that schools became more racially segregated especially where the level of residential segregation was high. Furthermore, larger districts resegregated easily as well districts that had large number of black enrollments (Reardon et al, 2012). This trend can be justified by the fact that nationwide "from 1993 to 2011, the number of black students in schools where 90 percent or more of the student population are minorities rose from 2.3 million to over 2.9 million" (Larson et al., *ProPublica* 2014). Schools in the North,

as the Civil Rights project report mentioned above, are also resegregating despite the desegregation orders by the courts.

Clearly, based on the literature on racism and education, the Somali Bantus are attending the segregated public schools that are marginalizing and unequal. Because of their social class, they are most likely to live in the inner cities and take their children to those schools unlike middle and upper class African immigrants who can afford to move to the suburbs or take their children to private schools.

B. Forced Migration & Multicultural Education

Globalization has created an increase in immigration thus leading to urban spaces that are developing into diverse, bicultural, and multicultural global villages (Gordon, 1998; Graham, 2004; Katz et al, 2003, 2006; Leedy & Kane, 2012; Maly, 2005; Wepman, 2008). Industrialization, capitalism, technological advancement and immigration policies are all conducive for transmigration. Other factors include education, ecological changes, political instability and family reunification. As urban spaces are becoming more populated, multiethnic, and multicultural, challenges arise in implementing adequate and inclusive social services such as education, housing, and health care.

Natural or man-made disasters, political instability, armed conflict, and famine are among the principal elements leading to the massive displacement and forced migration of African people (Hollenbach, 2008; Maren, 1997; Watters, 2008). These ongoing disasters displace the people thus contributing to the creation of permanent refugee camps. Not surprisingly, the most populous refugee camps in the world are in Africa, with the camps in Kenya hosting the largest numbers of Somali refugees, as of January 2015 the total number

of registered refugees was 424,307 (UNHCR, Somali Refugees 2015). While the number of refugees and crises has declined, geopolitical economies and foreign involvement in the African countries hinders peacekeeping and reconciliation while exacerbating humanitarian crises (Maren, 1997; Bassey, 2011; Okonta & Oronto, 2003).

The U.S. immigration policies have been reformed to comply with the influx of refugees and voluntary immigration. The 1965 Immigration Act and the 1980 Refugee Act opened the door for African immigration to the United States. In addition to voluntary African immigrants, African refugees from Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan, Rwanda, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Liberia have been resettled in various cities across the U.S (Capps, McCabe & Fix, 2012). Nevertheless, reforms on immigration policies have been enacted to control the influx of transmigration and limit certain nationalities the access to migrate to the U.S. One could argue, the immigration policy is also embedded in institutional racism, which racializes and discriminates against immigrants as it racializes and distinguishes forced (refugees) against voluntary and 'illegal' immigrants. The new immigrants are confronted with challenges as they settle into the urban spaces. Their economic, political and social development are stunted by the political and racial climate that is based on racial discrimination, social injustices and institutionalized laws and policies.

Immigration contributes to the population growth as well as the demographic profile; for instance, based on the census report, it is projected that by 2050 Latin Americans will be the majority race (Passel & Cohn, 2008). African immigrants are approximately 1.6 million in the 2010 census, an increase from the 881,300 in 2000. The African foreign-born population accounted for four percent of all immigrants (Immigration Policy Center, 2012). The

significance of the increase of African immigrants into the U.S. lies within the U.S. immigration policies and globalization.

Deconstructing Multicultural Spaces

Demographic change due to immigration has affected historical urban structures, while racial relations have moved from dichotomizing white and Black to including Asians, Africans, Hispanic and others (Collins, 2004; Fong & Shibuya, 2005; White & Glick, 1999). Fong & Shibuya (2005) note that the experiences and history of Hispanics and Asians differ from the black-white historical racial relations. Therefore, because of the multiethnic racial dynamics, there is a need to expand the black and white dichotomy to a more diverse one to address the increasingly American race problem (Bell, 2004; Wise, 2005; Feagin & Sikes, 1994).

Similarly, urban spaces are racialized thus creating residential segregation and other segregated institutions in the neighborhood; the school is one of these institutions. As Collins (2005) puts it "for racism, segregation operates by using race as a visible marker of group membership that enables the state to relegate Black people to inferior schools, housing and jobs" (p. 95). With the demographic shift, from white-black to multi-ethnic and multicultural, what does this new group of minorities contribute to the historically segregated schools? Indeed, "the racial mix of a neighborhood and its public school population are also intertwined" (Maly 2005, p. 25). As noted elsewhere, residential and school segregation correlate.

Fong & Shibuya (2005) in their paper "Multiethnic Cities in North America" note that a number of studies conducted on group residential preferences are ineffective, if not

misleading. These studies show that whites preferred sharing neighborhoods with Asians, rather than with Blacks and Mexicans. On the other hand, Blacks preferred integrated neighborhoods, rather than living in predominantly all-white or all-black neighborhoods. Hispanics prefer sharing with whites rather than blacks, or living in integrated neighborhoods. Asians found that living next to whites was much better than sharing with Blacks or Hispanics. Fong & Shibuya (2005) suggest a multiethnic framework is fundamental for the interpretation of such studies on residential patterns and preferences. Clearly, racial relations are becoming more complex, and may lead to alienation if the American society does not eradicate racial injustices. Fong & Shibuya's study, however does not focus on the African immigrants' residential pattern and preferences.

With the current immigration trend and racial shift, African & Caribbean refugees end up with the same pattern of residential segregation. As Eric Uslaner (2012) writes, "new immigrants seek out people like themselves to ease their transition into a new country" (p.75). The tendency to segregate themselves in a residential area is culturally necessary for a successful resettlement and integration. On the other hand, Maly (2005) notes that integrated neighborhoods are evolving with the immigration trend, and that "the presence of multiethnic and multiracial metropolitan areas appears to be key to the decrease of segregated neighborhoods and the increase of integrated ones" (p. 32). Clearly, in agreement with Uslaner, immigrants are more than likely to form their own enclave or join segregated neighborhoods than to be the cause for integrated neighborhoods.

Educating Refugees: Children with Limited Schooling

Literature on the education of refugee children is largely growing, Charles Watters (2008) book *Refugee Children: Towards the Next Horizon* argues that challenges arising from

previous lack of education of the refugee children should be addressed. Prior to relocating, these children have had setbacks in getting adequate education as factors such as wars and civil unrest might have hindered their schooling. Thus refugee children are in need of educational measures that are conducive to a successful transition and academic achievements. Measures such as parental involvement, cultural mentors and community organizations are some of the resources that the refugee children need. Watters asserts the importance of special programs such as counseling, especially to those who experienced trauma in war-torn areas during the civil wars and conflicts.

In addition, Nur & Hunter (2009) posit that with the immigration trend - voluntary and involuntary - and demographic changes, school districts should implement "successful learning experiences for these students that recognize their linguistic, psychological, socioeconomic, and cultural needs" (p. 31). It should be noted that some urban school districts have implemented programs and approaches that focus on educating immigrants. These include "newcomer programs" (Nur & Hunter, 2009) that nurtured new students and focused on "cultural orientation and connecting the home and school" (p. 32). The scholars recommend educators that are conversant with the students' cultural background.

Scholars Kapteijns and Arman's (2008) article, "Educating Immigrant Youth in the United States: An Exploration of the Somali Case" analyzes the limitations of research and case studies of immigrant youths in the U.S. The authors argue that "this literature is often so negative that immigrant status itself is presented as pathological - a disease - further exacerbated by being "visible", that is to say, non-White" (p. 37). In other words, more research should focus on the successes of the community despite the challenges of inequalities, poverty, and social injustices. They argue that the realities of the Somali youth in the U.S are

contradictory with the existing scholarship. They note that "due to interrupted schooling, they [youth] often had a serious education deficit" (p. 21), and the scholarly literature they reviewed concluded that the Somali refugee youth are bound to face challenges in U.S schools. Kapteijns and Arman disagree and state that, despite the challenges, immigrant youth still succeed academically as well as in the job market. Other positive realities of the Somali as explained by the authors include communal identity and cultural values, and resistance to American racism, in that the authors point out, that:

> Many Somalis have been caught unaware by American racial discrimination. They do not regard their black skin as the liability or handicap that mainstream society often insists it is […] generally Somalis refuse to accept the negative social categories and straightjackets U.S. mainstream society has readied for them. On the one hand, this can make them especially vulnerable in the face of institutional racism while, on the other hand, their rejection of racist stereotypes marks a positive communal identity and provides an opportunity for real change (p. 28).

Evidently, according to the authors, racism in the U.S. society should not concern the Somalis even though they have experienced it. Nonetheless, the Somalis perceive education as important, the community provides citizenship and English language classes to the Somali. Furthermore, the communities have established Quran schools and most notably is the establishment of their own school "the best known example is the International Academy of Columbus (AIC), a K-8 Charter school founded in 2002 that is publicly funded but privately run. The school has a Somali-speaking instructional assistant in every classroom, most of who

were teachers in Somalia" (p. 29). Indeed, establishing a school that is predominantly Somalis leads to questioning of self-segregation and the implications on the students.

Kapteijns and Arman conclude that studies on Somali immigrants should be focused on the "the wider structure of inequality - in this case, public education as a whole - as it affects all citizens" and not be based on the "otherness" framework (p. 38). This article is important for the study I am conducting, while I agree with the authors about the negative portrayal from the research and case studies on Somali immigrants in the U.S., my study intends to portray both the negative and the positive aspect of the Somali Bantu community in Upstate City. Furthermore, this article highlights the experiences of Somalis without distinguishing the experiences of ethnic Somalis and Somali Bantus. I intend to fill this gap by exploring the experiences of the Somali Bantus through the lens of critical race theory.

School choice and charter schools dominate the U.S. discourse on reforming public schools and academic achievement. For Somalis and other immigrants, charter schools offer them an opportunity to maintain their cultural values and educate their children amongst their own. Charter schools established by the Somalis entrepreneurs, employ educators and staff from the community, therefore they are in a better position to understand and tolerate the Somalis culture and religion. Farhan Hussein's (2011) study titled, "Charter Schools: Choice of Somali-American Parents?" explores the perspective of the Somali parents in Minnesota regarding charter schools. It should be noted the state of Minnesota hosts the largest Somali community in the U.S (Hussein, 2011). "More than ten charter schools have been formed that primarily serve Somali students" (Hussein, 2011 p. 150). And that "charter schools are nonsectarian, do not charge tuition and are open to the public" (p. 151). The study was conducted on one of the charter school in South Minneapolis, the Lighthouse Academy

of Nations, by interviewing twenty Somali parents whose children attended the school. "More than 60 percent of the students" are Somalis (p. 155).

The findings indicate that the parents were content with the charter schools because their culture and religion were respected and preserved. The communication and good service offered by the charter schools were also favorable. However, most parents were unaware of other school choices that offered better alternatives for their children. Preference for culture preceded academic achievement when choosing between the charter and public schools. Hussein recommends that parents should learn how to compare schools as "most of the schools where Somali parents enrolled their children were the lowest performing in the state" (p. 160). Clearly, charter schools in Minnesota are focused towards ethnic groups and preferred by the Somali communities, unlike the mainstream American schools which force their children to assimilate into the American culture. However, how does the different ethnic groups establishing their own schools, teaching their own curriculum, language, and culture be considered the best solution to school inequity? For this study, the research questions do not question choice schools for immigrants, however, it has led to an interest on further research on the effects of bilingual/ethnic choice schools.

Education and Linguicism: English language matters

The discourse on the intersection of education, immigration and language is discussed in various studies, policy reports and research. In "Maps to Interrupt A Pathology: Immigrant Populations and Education," Lisa Stevens (2009) critiques the discourses and perspectives of policymaking and pedagogical practices on multilingual education that propositions English Language Learners as deficient thus relegating them to 'otherness' and an 'underclass'. Stevens argues, "the ways in which education has framed immigrants solely as language

learners destructively obscures both their needs for educational and societal achievement and society's response to those needs" (p. 2). Drawing from ethnographic data, analyses of policies, and research on immigration, Stevens asserts that immigrants are solely conceptualized as English Language Leaners, thus "obscur[ing] the socioeconomic oscillations of power and capital affecting their lives" (p. 5). Clearly, immigrants are interested and motivated in learning the language and acquiring academic achievement, however, the way the concept of English language and acquisition is intertwined with power and capital undermines their literacy and critical skills. Stevens concluded by stating "what is needed are research, policy, and practice agendas that know and know well their students and their social contexts, making this a first and constant priority" (p.12). Somali Bantus are also defined and conceptualized as English Language Learners, therefore this classification as linguistically 'others' poses challenges in their academic achievement and identity.

With the same arguments, Kara Mitchell's (2012) research "Race, Difference, Meritocracy, and English: Majoritarian Stories in the Education of Secondary Multilingual Leaners," applies critical race theory in analyzing the education of multilingual secondary students through an analysis of empirical, conceptual studies, and databases. Multilingual learners are considered the 'other' as they are against the norm of the American society. That is, not hegemonic; White, monolingual, speaking standard-English and middle class (Mitchell, 2012). Instead, multilingual learners are faced with discrimination based on their race, gender, language, accent, class, and immigration status. "It is a sign of systemic discrimination at the intersection of racism and linguicism" (p. 340) as these students often struggle to succeed in the schools and are expected to perform well in the standardized tests and graduate high school. For instance, the No Child Left Behind Act accountability requires

an assessment of the immigrants' students that focuses on the English language deficit, yet, the conditions that lead to the underperformance of these students are not effectively implemented.

Mitchell critiques and challenges the hegemonic deficit ideologies and racism by focusing on four majoritarian stories retrieved from the literature. These include, "there is no story about race, difference is deficit, meritocracy is appropriate and English-is-*all*-that-matters" (p. 341). These majoritarian stories are challenged by CRT theorist, "as they often downplay the centrality of race and racism in social institutions like schools and promote deficit ideologies that blame social and educational inequities on non-dominant populations" (p. 342). Certainly, this article offers a valuable perspective on the deficit and meritocracy ideologies of the dominant society in regard to the academic achievements of multilingual students, including the Somali Bantus.

The policies and deficit concepts of language deficiency sets the multilingual students up for failure thus restricting higher education access and opportunities. Kanno & Varghese's (2010) "Immigrant and Refugee ESL Student's Challenges to Accessing Four-Year College Education: From Language Policy to Educational Policy," conducted a qualitative research in a public university to examine the challenges immigrants and refugee ESL students' face in accessing four-year college education (Kanno & Varghese, 2010). They interviewed 33 ESL students (from all over the world) and 7 staff members a public university by exploring their transition to college. ESL students are those who do not speak English as their first language, and their English proficiency is considered inadequate for undergraduate studies. The researchers applied Bourdieu's theory of cultural reproduction that purports, "schools contribute to the reproduction of existing power relations in society by privileging the cultural

background of students of the dominant class" (p. 313). Four challenges experienced by the ESL students interviewed were identified, and these include: "linguistic challenges, structural constraints, financial struggles and self-censorship - ESL students simply self-eliminate from applying to four-year universities because they assume that they would not be admitted" (p. 316). It is difficult and challenging for immigrants and refugees to gain access into a four-year university, however, their language proficiency is not the only constraints hindering them, policies and institutional factors contribute to the challenges.

The implications of English language learners (ELLs) and the academic background of refugee students, especially the Somali Bantus who have had limited or interrupted education are some of the challenges both educators and the students face. Educators Gahungu A, Gahungu O. and Luseno F (2011) conducted research on Burundian refugee families resettled in Chicago, Illinois in 2006-2007. They collected data from fourteen Burundian students in regard to their adjustment to the U.S school system.

The authors argue that classifying refugee and immigrant children as Students with Limited and Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE) is "limiting" and they propose to classify them as Culturally Displaced Students with Truncated Formal Education (CDS-TFE) (Gahungu et al p. 3). While refugees arriving from different countries have different exposure to education, once they are resettled in the U.S they are instructed as English language learners and are assigned bilingual and/or ESL teachers. However, the linguistic capabilities alone does not define their academic skills or exposure to formal education and institutions. According to the authors, "challenges for counselors, teachers and administrators can only amplify if one considers that most refugee children come from countries where, even without civil wars, education is already a scarce commodity" (p. 5). Therefore, assigning bilingual

teachers and classifying the students only as ELLs is not adequate for the academic success of these students. Moreover, students are assigned to a particular grade depending on their age and not previous academic experience, this causes challenges as students are likely to struggle in the classes.

The findings of the fourteen Burundian refugee students, nine were between seven to seventeen years thus school going age, show that the students are classified as ELL based on their English proficiency and age. The authors acknowledge the challenges of the educators, "the first issue facing school personnel working in school districts where these students were educated pertained to how to place these children in the appropriate grade level, primarily because in the refugee camps, none of the nine children were educated at the right U.S equivalent age level" (p. 8). Therefore, these students struggled due to the inappropriate grade placement, skipping grades, and grade retention which led to frustration and dropping out of school. Clearly this should be a challenge to both the educators and students, more importantly the child is set for failure if placed in a grade level too high or even have self-esteem issues if placed in a grade level too low.

Nevertheless, the authors recognize the challenges school officials and states have in assisting the refugee children successfully adjust to the U.S school system. They offer recommendations such as collaboration between teachers and the parents, and community; learning process; oral transmission; group learning and shared responsibilities. Knowing and understanding the culture of the students, and most importantly providing services that exposes the students to academic success. This study was conducted on the refugees from Burundi resettled and attending schools in Illinois, to fill the gap, the research on Somali

Bantu attending schools in New York State will provide an opportunity for comparison and contrast.

Education and Cultural Identities

Martha Bigelow (2010) *Mogadishu on the Mississippi: Language, racialized identity, and education in a new land* research is based on language, literacy and identity of Somali youth and their lived experience in the racialized American society. The ethnographic study was conducted over a period of five years using participant observations, case studies and field notes in the Somali community in Minnesota. Bigelow's goals were to highlight the Somalis language and literacy learning, and the effects of racialization, religion and gender relations in academic achievement. The author notes that Minnesota has the largest Somali refugee in the U.S, which has also led to conflicts with the local citizens. Ethnic identity for the Somalis in Minnesota is challenging as schools, communities, and the media tend to lump ethnic groups as one. Bigelow argues "it ignores the fluid of nature of identity and the ways in which students are actively creating and contesting what it means to be "Somali," "urban," "female," "student", or "Muslim" in U.S. schools and society" (p. 11). Furthermore, racialized xenophobia has labeled the Somalis as the face of Islam in Minnesota.

In relation to academic achievement, a number of the Somalis had challenges which Bigelow asserts it is due to their oral culture. The U.S' school curriculum which relies mostly on print literacy means that those who had limited formal schooling will have literacy challenges. Bigelow recommends bridging the gap between orality and literacy, support multilingualism, and implementing reforms to address educational disparities. This ethnographic study is relevant to my research as it elucidates the impact of language and literacy in academic achievement, identity formation and racialization of religion. Bigelow's

case study is significant as it explores the largest Somali population in the U.S. In contrast, my research intends to fill the gap by focusing solely on the Somali Bantus within a smaller community of Somalis.

Another ethnographic study was conducted by scholars Ghong et al (2007) titled "Teach My Child, Too: African Immigrant parents and Multicultural Educators Sharing Culturally Responsive Teaching Tips." The scholars argue "there is one group that continues to be "invisible" in our schools, and that group is students of new African immigrants" (p.61). The authors note that African immigrants have faced challenges in schools as teachers have no experience or knowledge on how to teach them, especially as they come from a different cultural background and are bilingual. To solve this problem, the scholars are offering culturally responsive teaching tips that are conducive to the teaching of the African immigrants. The findings show, because of their accent, the students are considered illiterate and are often rebuked, also it is "a common practice when students enter U.S. schools. Teachers […] equate limited English skills with special education" (p.65). This study is relevant as it offers a perspective from the immigrant scholars' point of view. These scholars are recommending culturally based education for responsive and equal teaching. However, the focus is on immigrant families who are well educated thus being able to understand the education system unlike the Somali Bantu families. My study intends to fill the gap by focusing on the forced immigrants, the Somali Bantu parents who have no means of opposing or voicing the unequal education of their children.

In engaging with the diverse culture and ethnicities, educators and researchers are increasingly becoming aware of the importance of understanding the cultural background of their students, however the approach on conducting educational research has drawbacks as

the theories applied are limiting the exact experience of Black immigrants. Awokoya & Clark's (2008) "Demystifying Cultural Theories and Practices: Locating Black Immigrant Experiences in Teacher Education Research," note that demographic changes has increasingly led to educational researchers to focus on the experiences of Black immigrants in the U.S. The researchers have conceptualized cultural background, identity of students, race and racism by applying Cultural Ecological Theory (CET), Culture-Centered Theory (CCT) and Critical Race Theory (CRT). According to Awoyoka & Clark (2008), "while these theories are promising in providing insight into the experiences of Black immigrant youth, none of them comprehensively capture the intragroup differences and identity processes that affect Black immigrant youth in social and educational settings" (p. 49). Clearly, it has been challenging to researchers to focus on group experiences than on a particular one. Because "studies focusing on these types of experiences often statistically group these children with African American children on the basis of "race" and the data compiled is rarely disaggregated on the basis of any other social identity dimensions" (p. 49). Therefore, for the African immigrants, their experiences and challenges are likely to be overseen as they are undermined by the racial categorization.

In addressing the gaps in the literature, their study sets out to identify the limitations and benefits of the theories while offering suggestions for efficient approaches for conducting research of the Black immigrants. Suggestions offered on future research include "focus[ing] on elucidating understandings of the intricacies of Black immigrant ethnic and racial identification. […] Further research must examine the social and economic positions of Black immigrants in their native countries, focusing on differences that emerge on the bases of national origin, as well as national origin vis-à-vis ethnic identity and gender norms, and then

link this research to that seeking explanations of Black immigrant experiences *within* the United States" (p. 56). Indeed, for a clearer understanding of experiences of ethnic groups, specifically for this research on the Somali Bantus, a study and an understanding of their community exposes their challenges and successes.

John Ogbu (1987) study, "Variability in Minority School Performance: A Problem in Search of an Explanation" applies an anthropological approach to understand the factors that contribute to the low performance of minority students. The social adjustment and difficulties in academic performance by minority children have been explained by researchers who argue that their cultural and language differences are the main factors to failure. However, Ogbu who has conducted numerous comparative studies of minority education in the U.S, notes that different minorities group tend to perform better than others despite facing barriers due to their culture, language and educational background. It should be noted that Ogbu classifies minorities as: a) *immigrant minorities* - those who have voluntarily immigrated for better opportunities, and b) *Castelike or involuntary minorities*, - these are people who "were brought into the United States society involuntarily through slavery, conquest or colonization" (Ogbu, p. 321). American Indians, African Americans and native Hawaiians represent the latter group of minorities.

According to Ogbu (1987), "it is evident that all minority children encounter social adjustment and academic learning problems, at least initially. For some minority groups the problems tend to persist and may even increase in magnitude and seriousness" (p. 317). Furthermore, he explains, "the main factor differentiating the more successful from the less successful minorities appears to be the nature of the history, subordination, and exploitation of the minorities, *and* the nature of the minorities' own instrumental and expressive responses

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to their treatment, which enter into the process of their schooling" (p. 317). Clearly, marginalization affects the academic achievement of the minorities, in addition, the society, school, and the community affect their academic performance.

In discussing immigrant minorities' academic performance, Ogbu argues that despite the cultural differences and language barriers, they still manage to do well in schools. Because they believe in the 'folk theory of making it', of being successful despite discrimination. They differ to the involuntary minorities in that "they do not perceive or interpret learning the cultural features of the school required for social adjustment and academic performance as threatening to their own culture, language and identity, but rather as an additive learning, that is, as acquiring another language (Standard English) and aspects of the dominant group culture that will help them succeed in school and later in the labor market" (p. 328). This means that immigrant students are taking education and success very seriously and are willing to overcome the barriers for economic well-being.

On the other hand, involuntary minorities are not as successful as immigrants in overcoming the barrier in that, "they perceive the cultural differences they encounter in school as markers of identity to be maintained, not as barriers to overcome" (p. 330). Ogbu's research is significant for the study on Somali Bantus as it highlights their perception of education and social mobility as immigrants. However, his framework and definition of immigrant minorities includes the experiences of voluntary immigrants and not that of Somali Bantu refugees resettled in the U.S.

Educating Refugee women: Doing Gender

The intersection of race, gender, and class is a significant aspect that needs to be addressed when looking at immigrant educational experiences in the U.S. (Solórzano, 1998; Wing, 2000). Critical race feminism (CRF) theory provides the lens in understanding the experiences of women of color and also immigrant women of color.

The triple burden that Somali Bantu women are subjected to: being black, female and immigrant are challenges that affect their position in the society (hooks, 1989; Collins 2000; Crenshaw, 1989). Legal scholar Crenshaw (1989) applies the concept of 'intersectionality' to illustrate the forms of discrimination women of color are subjected to. She argues, "black women can experience discrimination in ways that are both similar to and different from those experienced by white women and Black men […] Often they experience double-discrimination - the combined effects of practices which discriminate on the basis of race, and on the basis of sex" (p.63). Thus suppressing the voices of the women in the white supremacist's society by denying them equal educational opportunities impacts the whole community as well as colored women globally.

Adrien Wing's (2000) global critical race feminism (GCRF) draws from critical race feminism tenets but adds a global feminism analysis of the oppression of women globally. As Bell hooks (1989) states "there is the silence of the oppressed who have never learned to speak and there is the voice of those who have been forcefully silenced because they have dared to speak and by doing so resist" (p. 13). Indeed, for the women of color to be treated equally their voices needs to be heard, and by applying CRF, GCRF and CRT theories their voices are represented, heard and understood.

Religious practices & the Hijab

As discussed elsewhere, the Somali Bantu society in Upstate City practice Islam as their religion. Global critical race feminism (GCRF) theory illuminates the rights of Muslim women both in the U.S and in their countries. One could argue that, the Somali Bantu women in their community are often undermined by the patriarchal society based on their religion and traditions. In addition, as noted previously, they are faced with the same discrimination in the society, as women and as women of color.

Educator Pamela De Voe's (2002) research, "Symbolic Action: Religion's Role in the Changing Environment of Young Somali Women" was conducted in St Louis, Missouri and explores the social integration of Somali girls in middle and high schools. De Voe notes that "many Somali boys had their education disrupted by war and the refugee experience, but most of the girls had never attended a school since educating girls was not considered necessary or appropriate in Somali culture" (p. 235). However, once in the U.S, girls are encouraged to get an education. De Voe focuses on the wearing of hijab or veiling that the Somali women and girls are required to wear as a symbol of ethnicity and creation of traditional gender roles of the Somali women. She argues that "the clothing, hijab in particular made it more difficult for the Somali girls to intermingle with their fellow non-Somali classmates" (p. 236). Their clothing identified them unlike the Somali Muslim boys who blend in with the other students. Therefore, their 'visibility' as 'others' marked the Somali girls as victims of bullying and tensions. De Voe points out that "among the American students, particularly black American students, veiling is seen as a rejection of black American identity. Black American students and teachers do not differentiate between race and ethnicity; native black Americans in St Louis and recent African arrivals are seen as one racial/ethnic group"

(p. 237). Certainly, the Muslim girls' religious and cultural identity as portrayed by their practice of veiling are subjected to hostility in the schools. On the other hand, since it is a tradition and religious practice, not wearing the Hijab is frowned upon by their community. This study is relevant to the Somali Bantu girls in Upstate City, as they are also Muslims and wear the Hijab.

Educating Somali Bantus

In "Whose Deficit Is This Anyhow? Exploring Counter-Stories of Somali Bantu Refugees' Experiences in "Doing School"" scholars Roy & Roxas (2011) conducted two studies in South Texas and Michigan. By applying critical race theory they explored two qualitative studies with Somali Bantu communities. Using ethnographic methods, they explored how educators perceived the goals of the Somali Bantu community and how the refugee families considered the importance of education. They argue that the concept of micro aggression; the practice of discriminating and stereotypical thoughts on the ability of the Somali Bantu students hindered the success of the students. They "found that schools were unprepared to address families' psychosocial, linguistic, cultural and educational needs" (p. 524). Even though the students and their parents were willing to succeed, educators blamed their cultural background, lack of motivation and attitude instead of the school discriminatory practices. The authors challenged the educator's deficit-based model by employing counter-storytelling methodology to critic dominant societies' deficit concepts. Counter-storytelling gives voice to the Somali Bantus to challenge ideological construct on the educational achievement of the Somali Bantus. This study is important as the methodology applied challenges the conceptions while giving voice to the people to narrate their perspectives and experiences.

In the same community, Roxas and Roy (2012) study "That's How We Roll: A case study of a Recently Arrived Refugee Student in an Urban High School," focuses on Abdullah, a refugee high school student negotiating schooling in an urban public school. By applying the intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1991) "as a theoretical and analytical lens, holds that factors such as race, culture, religion, gender, etc are not independent of one another, rather they are a complex set of dynamic, overlapping markers of difference that are taken up in a variety of ways in the public sphere" (p. 470). While concentrating on one Somali Bantu male student, his challenges and successes, the researchers note that the advanced academic background of the student and his father set them apart from other Somali Bantu students. However, the student's grade started plummeting in the second year in high school.

The teacher's negative perspective on the student's success and seriousness in education was in contrast to that of the student. These stereotypes and deficit notions tend to reflect on the student thus leading to low self-esteem, "self-blame" and "self-doubt" by internalizing the concept that they can never be successful. As Roxas and Roy argue "systems that create a success or failure model allow for such conclusions" (p. 479). Unknown to Abdullah and other Somali Bantu students, institutional and systemic obstacles contribute to their challenges in schooling. "Abdullah adopted the meritocratic view put forth by his educators - that is, he internalized the "boot strap" metaphor, attributing his failures to himself rather than the intersection of factors including the lack of support in school" (p. 480). In the study, Roxas and Roy found that the education system dichotomizes failure and success and that the refugee students are bound to fail due to the institutional and systemic racism. As "no educators took into account the intersectionality of race, refugee status, previous experiences with schooling and language, and socioeconomic status when considering Abdullah's school

success or potential failure. Rather, educators maintained a meritocratic ideology about schooling, that is, 'students who help themselves are the ones who get help'" (p. 484). Clearly, this study offers a perspective of how the institutionalized racism affects the academic achievement of Somali Bantus. Since Roxas and Roy's study focused on a male student, my study intends to explore both male and female students' experiences.

In another qualitative study, "Tales from the Front Line: Teacher's Responses to Somali Bantu" scholar Kevin Roxas (2011) attempts to find out how teachers in an urban school district in Midwestern U.S interact with the Somali Bantu refugee students. Roxas notes that the students face difficulties and obstacles as they had limited or interrupted access to education prior to relocating to the U.S. He also argues that there are institutional obstacles that hinder the success of the students as the teachers' are professionally inexperienced or under-staffed. Teachers struggle with obstacles such as varying degree of English proficiency of the students, lack of previous education, the students' different cultural background, and lack of support from their school districts on how to handle these 'special education' students or additional classroom assistants. Teachers were understaffed that "[a] particular course was especially difficult to teach because guidance counselors were placing many special education students, ESL students, and recently arrived refugee students in [her] classes." (p. 526). This study is relevant as it researches on the Somali Bantu in another state thus offering a model for comparison and understanding of the problem.

Literature review: Conclusion

The literature review has covered aspects of race and racism, immigration, forced migration, public school historical, current segregation and desegregation trends, multicultural and multilingual education, refugee education, and Somali Bantu cultural and

identity formation. The first section of the review explored general research on race and racism and critical race theory as an analytical lens to analyze race and education. In regard to educating students of color, historical and contemporary segregated public schools which are clearly unequal has been discussed by scholars who have highlighted and condemned the racist education system that sets to fail the students of colors.

The second section specifically reviews literature that is pertinent to the educational experiences of forced migrants, especially the Somali Bantus. From this section, literature on migration, resettlement and multicultural spaces has been explored. In educating refugee children, literature and studies have been conducted on language skills, previous education - limited or interrupted, multicultural and multilingual classes, religious aspects, and educating refugee women.

The studies and research depicts that immigrant children are facing obstacles and challenges in schools. The educators are also challenged as the education system/school administration does not supply adequate resources for educating the increasingly diverse classrooms. Immigrant students are labeled English Language Learners and are expected to achieve English literacy to be able to successfully graduate high school. However, factors that might hinder or challenge their academic achievement are undermined by the institutionalized racism. They are often discriminated based on their race, class, gender, religion, immigration status, accent, and language. My study on the Somali Bantus in Upstate City, NY intends to add to the literature. To give voice to the community as well as critique, analyze, highlight, and disrupt the institutionalized racism and racial injustices. The following chapter 3, explores the research methods and design, and presents the participants selected for this particular study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter explores the qualitative research methods and includes a demographic profile of the participants - the Somali Bantus. The design is based on the research questions, which are:

(1) What are the experiences of Somali Bantu refugee in formal schooling in Upstate New York?

(2)What role does race, class, gender, language, cultural and religious practices play in academic achievement? And

(3) What role does the Somali Bantu organization contribute to the academic success of the community?

As a case study that explores the Somali Bantu community perspectives and experiences, qualitative methods and instrumentation have been employed; they include semi-structured interviews, participant observations and archival data. The theoretical frameworks that inform this study and offer analytical lens for understanding race and racism are critical race theory and (global) critical race feminism. The chapter is organized as follows: a) selection of participants, (b) the instruments used, (c) data collection d) theoretical framework (e) data analysis, and f) limitations of study.

Selection of Participants

Who: To be considered for participation one had to identify as a Somali Bantu and live in Upstate New York. The term participants is preferred for conducting studies using humans (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008), therefore it will be used interchangeably with Somali Bantus.

Since the study is based on the experiences of Somali Bantus, ethnic Somalis were not considered for the study. Eligible participants must have attended or still attending school, be at least 18 years of age or older. Both genders are eligible. Parents must have children who attended or are attending school in Upstate NY or they might also have attended or still be attending school. The Somali Bantu community organization leaders were also eligible. As this study examines the educational experience of Somali Bantu refugees, ethnic Somalis and other refugees ethnic groups did not qualify for participation.

How: The recruitment of participants for the case study was done through purposive sampling and snowball sampling (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008, Biklen & Bogdan, 2003). In purposive sampling, those students who had graduated high school, parents with children attending the schools and community leaders who have children as well as attended school in the U.S. fit the criteria and purpose of examining their educational experiences in the U.S. In snowball sampling, I approached one of the community organization leaders and explained to him the study and asked to be referred to other participants who fit the criteria. In addition, I placed flyers to recruit interview participants at the community organization offices, their ethnic restaurants and stores.

*How many***:** For qualitative research, the number of participants recruited depends on the intended in-depth perspectives and lived experiences of the participants, therefore "most studies have small samples" (Biklen & Bogdan, 2003). This study has a small sample of nine participants; two parents, three community organization leaders, and four students. The following tables 2, 3, and 4 highlight some of their characteristics.

Table 2: Students Profile

*All names are pseudonyms.

Name*	Age at Arrival in U.S*	Grades placed	Current	Comments
Amina	9	4	Community College – 2nd semester	Skipped 7th grade Attends ESL classes in college
Hawa	9	4	Community college – 1st semester	At the time of interview, participant had just graduated high school
Aisha	9	4	Community college – final year	Arrived in 2004 in U.S, moved to NY state in 2006
Yusuf	10	3**	Community college – 2nd semester	Only male student interviewed. Arrived in U.S. in 2004. Moved to NY state in 2007

*All arrived in 2004
** Age does not correlate with grade placed

Table 3: Parents Profile

Name***	Year arrived in U.S	Number of Children	Profession
Hussein	2004	6	Retired
Halima	2005	6	Domestic worker

*** They are the oldest participants, never attended school in Somalia.

Table 4: Community Leaders Profile

Name	Year arrived in U.S	Number of Children	Profession****
Baraka	2004	7	Community leader
Musa	2004	1	Case Worker/Counsellor
Abdi	2006	3	Community leader

**** All of them volunteer at the community organization while working elsewhere

Data Generation

For this study, the qualitative method of research (Biklen & Bogdan, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) was conducive for data collection. This method is relevant to this study as it allows the researcher to succinctly understand and explain the participants lived experiences and perceptions, it allows for the researcher to explore human behavior in their daily lives (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Hatch, 2002; Lunenburg & Irby, 2008). The research was conducted between the months of July and August 2014. The instruments in my study include formal and informal semi-structured interviews, participant observations and archival data.

Semi-structured interviews

Interviews generate information about lived experiences and descriptions, it is a conversation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Individual semi-structured open ended interviews were conducted. Semi-structured interviews allow the interviewer to ask follow up questions based on the participant's response while using prompts (Burnett, 2009; Lunenburg & Irby, 2008; Spradley, 1979). Also, the "approach allows the subjects to answer from their own perspectives" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003 p. 3). The individual interviews lasted one to two hours, follow-up questions and clarifications were conducted via telephone and emails, to clarify any information required. Three sets of interview questions were prepared, one for the students,

the second for the parents and the third one was for the community leaders (See Appendix A for the interview questions). The interview questions were based on the research questions that allowed the participants to reflect on their educational experiences.

Prior to beginning the interviews, participants were handed the informed consent letter (see Appendix B) that explains in writing the purpose of the research and that any information given will be confidential and protected. The interviews were audio recorded with the permission of the participants and transcribed verbatim. Pseudonyms have been employed to protect the identity of the participants and public places. Interviews were conducted in the participants' homes and stores, at a local Youth Center, and at the two community organizations offices. The participants' homes were located within the segregated public housing situated in the city. The Somali Bantu community organizations and the Youth Center are also located within the same neighborhood.

Participant observations

Participant observation was conducted to observe and understand how the participants negotiate their setting within their daily life and lived experiences (Biklen & Bogdan, 2003; Lunenburg & Irby, 2008). At the Youth Center, where immigrant students were attending tutoring programs, I was able to be a moderate observer as I interacted with the students as a tutor. My participation in their tutoring enabled me to understand their experiences; challenges, and successes in academic achievement therefore essential while analyzing and interpreting the data. At one of the Somali Bantu community organization, during the summer tutoring class that one of the student participant was holding, I was able to observe how she teaches and interacts with the young students attending the program at the

community organization. I was also able to observe how the community organization provides translation services to the members of the community who came in for assistance.

Additionally, I volunteered at one of the resettlement agencies in Upstate City, New York and observed how the resettlement process of the refugees was conducted, especially in regard to their education and school registrations of the children. My degree of participation was moderate, I interacted with both the case workers, government agencies, new refugees as well as refugees who have been living in Upstate City for a while. I sat in one of the English Language classes offered by the resettlement agency. With a case worker, I visited the homes of the refugees for orientation and grocery shopping. I also participated during the hospital visits, registration at the welfare services, at the DMV, school registration and airport pick-up of new refugees arriving. Because of the limitations on observations and taking field notes, I recorded the observations during the breaks or immediately after my work was done. Even though the refugees being resettled were not part of this study, the same process was administered to the Somali Bantus I was researching. Therefore, as a participant observer, I was able to experience what the participants are experiencing thus obtaining an in-depth understanding of their lived experiences.

Archival data

Various types of documents, journals, maps, projects, and periodicals were used to access relevant statistical data. Archival documents analyzed included the school district information such as report cards, academic resources and services provided for immigrants. Demography data was analyzed to highlight relevant profile of the participants. Moreover, immigration and refugees' resettlement data added to the analysis of the resettlement and services provided.

Data Collection: the fieldwork

The research was conducted between the months of July and August 2014, since the participants are Muslims, most of the interviews were conducted after the holy month of Ramadhan was over. At the beginning of July 2014, I approached one of the Somali Bantu community organization leader to discuss my research and purpose and also to assist in identifying members. Upon countless emails, I finally reached him at the organization's office and he was eager and willing to assist me. He promised to email me the contacts of eligible participants whom I was to call and ask for participation.

I also visited the grocery stores owned by Somalis in the city. I approached two of the stores and explained to the owners my research and purpose, they allowed me to put the flyers in their shops. Even though they were not Somali Bantus, they still agreed to assist me, however, they questioned the preference for Somali Bantus as participants. They did not understand why I could not just conduct the study on all of the Somalis in Upstate City. I explained to them that the history as a marginalized minority in Somalia and the discrimination in education are some of the reasons for highlighting their story. They disputed the claim that the Bantus were discriminated and argued that was the Bantus' lifestyle and they were not marginalized. The same argument was noticed by anthropologist Catherine Besteman (1999) when conducting research in Somalia and in the Somali communities in the U.S.

This led to another angle that I had previously not thought of and not read from the research studies, the identity issues and relationship between the ethnic Somalis and Somali Bantus. While approaching discernable Somali Bantus, their facial features and language differs from ethnic Somalis, some identified themselves just as Somalis whereas others as

Somali Bantus. Nevertheless, the Somali shop owner introduced me to a Bantu store owner whom I interviewed and from there I was able to gain access to the Bantu community in their neighborhood.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical and analytical frameworks this study adopt are the Critical Race Theory (CRT) and (Global) Critical Race Feminism (GCRF), as the essential approach to analyze race, gender, and class in the American society. Specifically, for this study the focus is on the institutionalized racism and inequity in the educational institutions (Ladson-Billings, 1998, 2005; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1994; Bell, 2005, 2008 Lawrence et al, 1993, Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). The concept of race and racism as a social construct is justified by white supremacist ideologies and institutions. Discriminative aspects based on race, gender, immigration status, class and religion might hinder the academic achievement of Somali Bantu. An important tenet of CRT for this study that, "challenges the traditional claims that educational institutions make toward objectivity, meritocracy, colorblindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002 p. 25) provides an understanding of the Somali Bantu experiences and their challenges.

Furthermore, CRT in education "challenges the dominant discourse on race and racism as they relate to education by examining how educational theory, policy, and practice are used to subordinate certain racial and ethnic groups" (Solórzano 1998, 122). Certainly by applying the theory in exploring the academic achievement of students of color, it challenges the dominant society's ideologies. Furthermore, institutional racism conveyed through micro aggressions practices by the dominant society is visible within the education setting. Micro aggressions practices as well as stereotype threats administered by educators are experienced

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by the minorities and immigrants students, as their teachers unconsciously or consciously stereotype or discriminate against these students' intellectual capabilities. The notion that, based on their race, the Somali Bantu are bound to drop-out of school or perform poorly is explained through the critical race theory analytical lens.

To give voice to the participants, Solórzano & Yosso (2002) notes that "critical race methodology in education challenges traditional research paradigms, texts, and theories used to explain the experiences of people of color. It exposes and challenges deficit-informed research and methods that silence and distort the experiences of people of color and instead focuses on their racialized, gendered and classed experiences as sources of strength" (p. 26). Hence, CRT relies on personal stories, experiences, and voices to convey the message that challenges the ideologies. Applying critical race methodology, such as storytelling, biographies and counter narratives offer significant critical measures against the ideologies (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Through counter-storytelling, students of color challenge biological and cultural deficits ideologies created by the dominant society.

(Global) Critical Race Feminism Theory

Stemming from CRT, critical race feminism theory (CRF) and global critical race feminism (GCRF) provide additional analytical lens for the understanding of the experiences of Somali Bantu women (Solórzano, 1998; Wing, 2000). As a branch of CRT, "critical race feminism in education may provide legal and academic stratagem for studying and eradicating race, class, and gender oppression in educational institutions" (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010, p. 19). Crenshaw's (1991) concept of "intersectionality" - the examination of race, sex, class, national origin, and sexual orientation and how their combination plays out

in various settings (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), also provides an understanding on the challenges women are subjected to because of their multiple identities.

Global critical race feminism is encompassed by the addition of the word 'global' to the CRF, thus global critical race feminism (GCRF) which "implies the embrace of strands from international and comparative law, global feminism, and post-colonial theory as well" (Wing, 2000, p. 1). GCRF theory also offers analytical framework on how women of color can challenge oppression, especially global issues affecting women of color such as immigration, multiculturalism among others. GCRF draws from CRF and CRT, however as Wing (2000) argues, CRF and GCRF are "a feminist intervention within CRT" (p. 7), and that the experiences of both males and females differs and matters.

Academic achievement, especially of women, defies the patriarchal beliefs of subordination not only in the Somali Bantu society but in other societies too. One could argue that, some cultural values undermine the struggle for women to be independent and equally treated. Therefore, Critical race feminism gives voice to young women, to find their voice in the educational institution and the society that is discriminative and biased, dominated by white supremacist ideologies, capitalism and a patriarchal system. According to bell hooks (1989), "once again, the idea of finding one's voice or having a voice assumes a primacy in talk, discourse, writing, and action" (p. 12). Certainly, critical race feminism challenges women of color to talk back, talk back and be heard by the patriarchal racist society.

Both CRT, CRF, and GCRF theories offer analytical lenses that highlights, critiques and challenges dominant ideologies, specifically the ideology of colorblindness and equal education experienced by the Somali Bantu community.

Data Analysis

For data analysis, this study implements emergent coding (Biklen & Bogdan, 2006; Spradley, 1979), the codes are to emerge from the data collected and related to the research questions. The taped responses were transcribed verbatim and the notes taken during the interviews assisted in clarifying any inaudible statement. The observational field notes taken during the participant observation and informal conversations were typed and stored in a separate file, any observation/comments recorded during the interviews or participant observations were also typed, filed separately and added to the analysis.

I developed and organized the codes by searching for patterns and frequencies of the way of thinking and words of the participants. First, I coded the interviews by adding or creating new codes. Those that overlapped or were redundant were either renamed or placed with other codes. Categories were generated based on the research questions, the responses frequency and also those that come up but are not related to the research questions. Themes were generated based on the three research questions and key words, they were then compared and interpreted for further analysis.

Limitations

As a novice researcher confronted with the opportunity to conduct field work and write a research paper, I went into the field mainly due to my interest for social justice and also that I can relate to the topic as an immigrant myself. My identities; a female graduate student, African, voluntary immigrant, Christian and researcher might have positively or negatively affected the interaction with the Somali Bantus.

I was confident that sharing cultural and racial identities with the Somali Bantus contributed to a positive analysis of the research. My subjectivities came into play as I was conducting the interviews. And I realize my biases might have impacted some of the analysis and interpretations of the data collected, these included my perceptions on the participants especially of the older parents. With that being said, I was aware of my role as the researcher and my subjectivities while interpreting the data and writing this research.

Another limitation was time constraint, as the fieldwork was conducted during the summer of 2014. Perhaps a longer period of conducting an ethnographic research and a larger sample of participants would have produced more significant data. Additionally, the interviews were conducted in the homes and the community organizations. While it allowed me the opportunity to observe their living situation and duties, we were often interrupted as the participant had either to attend to someone who needed translation services at the center or required to attend to the household chores at the homes.

Finally, I transcribed the interviews verbatim, nonetheless, it was challenging as I have been forced to edit some of the quotes to be understood by readers. The challenge was to control my voice as it is only significant here as the researcher and not as the participant. Therefore, by editing their quotes, choosing relevant quotes from the transcripts, and analyzing the information, I have impacted their voice. It has been a challenge to translate two of the interviews that were conducted in Swahili, as a native Swahili speaker I might have introduced my own thoughts while translating the interview into English.

In conclusion, this chapter presented the design of the study based on the research questions. The selection of the participants was based primarily on the research questions and the purpose of the study. Recruitment of a small sample of nine participants was conducted

through snowball and purposively sampling. Semi-structured interviews, participant observation and archival data were the instruments utilized for data collection. The theoretical frameworks, - critical race theory, critical race feminism and global critical race feminism - offering analytical lens and the procedure for data analysis through emergent coding and themes were discussed. The limitations and subjectivities of the research method have been critically examined. The findings and an in-depth analysis are presented in the following chapters four and five.

Introduction

In this chapter, I present the voices of the Somali Bantu community on their educational experiences in Upstate City. The findings are organized into three major themes and subthemes that emerged from the participants' interviews and observations in regard to the experiences in the public schools and higher educational institutes. The three major themes are in relation to the research questions which will then be discussed after each section of the findings. The themes are:

Theme One: Formal schooling experience - challenges: grade placement, ESL vs mainstream classes, communication barriers, drop-outs, suspension, labeling as Special Education, and teachers blaming students. *Successes:* resources provided by schools/colleges, parental support, high school graduation and college experiences

Theme Two: The intersection of race, gender, language, religion and culture. Subthemes: bullying, belonging and identity, silencing, assimilation, cultural clashes. Religious and cultural hostilities; islamophobia, gender issues and arranged marriages.

Theme Three: Role of Community organization. Subthemes: advocacy, integration services, ethnic and cultural preservation, academic resources and services.

To hear the stories from the nine participants - 4 students, 2 parents, and 3 community leaders- I first asked them questions on their life in Somalia and the refugee camps in Kenya to understand their background. I then asked them to tell me about their first day in school, to reflect on their memories of attending school in the U.S, from the elementary school to their current college experiences. For the parents who have not attended schools, I asked them to

tell me about their children's school registration and how they support their children's education.

While all of the students interviewed began schooling in the elementary level, in grade 4, upon arrival one of the community leaders was placed in high school. The other two community leaders had arrived in the U.S at the age of 25 years therefore they attended postsecondary education. It should be noted that the community leaders were interviewed on their role as community leaders, students, and as parents. The two parents had not attended any formal schooling in Somalia or in the refugee camps, upon arriving in the U.S they have attended English language and civic classes for citizenship purposes. The section below explores the main themes and subthemes based on the participants' voices.

Theme One: Formal schooling experience

Having had attended some form of schooling in the refugee camps in Kenya, it is important to note that, "while some Bantu children in the refugee camps attend[ed] primary and secondary school, only an estimated 5% of all Bantu refugees have been formally educated" (Van Lehman & Eno, 2003, p. 22). The desire to learn and academic achievement has been repeatedly mentioned by the participants despite the literacy rate. When asked to tell me about their first day in schools, some said it was 'difficult', some 'could not remember', while others 'felt different' and out of place. This is what they said:

> *Student Amina:* It was too difficult, I didn't know how to speak English. I started school late in September 2004.
>
> *Student Hawa:* I felt different and kind of awkward, I didn't know anybody, my dad and my little brother took me to school.
>
> *Community leader Musa*: The first day at school I had some difficulties, because of the certificate from the refugee school which they gave to me before coming to the U.S. When I came here I gave the school [the certificate] but they said

this won't work. We called the [refugee] school and they spoke to each other and then they placed me in 10th grade.

While all students recall most of their first day in school and the grade they were placed in, there appears to be a similar pattern navigating the classrooms and the new environment in the schools. Two of the students had started school in other States before migrating to Upstate City, New York. The secondary migration was due to "more family here that can support us, that were already here before us and they knew about here, about the American life" (Student Aisha). Student Aisha who started school in Georgia State seems to have preferred the elementary school there as opposed to the schools in Upstate City. Student Yusuf, who first attended school in Connecticut before moving to Upstate New York, to be near family members, seems to have resented the fact that he had to repeat third grade again once in Upstate NY.

I then asked the students what their favorite subjects in school were and any extracurricular activities they had joined:

> *Student Amina:* My favorite classes were English and Sciences.
>
> *Student Hawa:* I loved English and gym, I am athletic and I played soccer for my high school team, in middle school I was in the track team.
>
> *Student Aisha:* English, and I like social studies. Well, in high school I played volleyball I was in the basketball team, and I was a member of the student association.
>
> *Student Yusuf:* I liked math, I like working with numbers and was good at it too. I knew what I was doing and the teachers I had were good and helping me […] I also liked physics. I played soccer in school too, I also wanted to be a soccer player but I knew that was not going to work so I focused on my school work.

Based on the above quotes, these students reveal structural and individual challenges in the American classrooms and schools, however, the desire to learn is visible. This is portrayed by their willingness to adapt to the new environment, make the best of it and based on their

favorite classes and extracurricular activities, they have portrayed their willingness for academic achievement in a formal classroom.

Challenges in Education:

Challenges in education as voiced by the participants include English language, grade placement, suspension and drop-out rates, different curriculum, labeling mechanism as special education, and teacher's perception on the academic achievement of the students.

English Language matters

To borrow from one of the participants, "language is an important component" (Community leader Baraka) they all recognized the importance of English language for academic achievement and considered the English as a Second Language (ESL) services as a positive aspect, albeit the challenges and limitations.

ESL classrooms

English as Second language (ESL) services are supplemental for those students who are not English native speakers. ESL classrooms were preferred by the participants more than the mainstream classes, mainly because of the services provided and the contents taught. The services provided in the ESL classrooms are the "slower version" of the mainstream classrooms. The ESL classroom is also considered a "safe space" for the students. According to the participants, the ESL classrooms are "safe spaces", a place where they belong and are accepted:

> *Student Yusuf*: It was better for us, all of us are from different country and it was easier to learn from each other, it was easier to learn as a group too. [...] There was a lady helping me out and a couple other Liberian kids, we were in the same grade and we were friends.

This is because they are in the same room with people they can identify with. These people are immigrants from other countries, and often they will find the same people coming from their own countries. They were more confident in the ESL classes than in the mainstream classes.

The students find the mainstream classroom to be difficult as they require a considerable amount of time to catch up with the content taught. As "the [mainstream] class time is short, and these kids need more time [to learn English]" (Community leader Baraka). Furthermore, the ESL classrooms provide these services because:

> *Community leader Baraka:* So many kids do well in school but are below their grade level, you work hard but you perform below the grade level and building up is not an easy task for the kids to achieve. For example, there might be a child who is 10 years old and reads like a first grade student, or maybe a child is in 6th or 5th grade and doing same grade level as a 2nd grade kid. So many kids are below their grade level and that is why we need more services. Some kids speak very good English and are fluent but the language they speak is social not academic.

It is noted that some of these children are performing below their grade level in literacy and academic, thus most of the content taught is difficult for them to grasp. All of the students interviewed attended ESL classrooms from elementary to college level. They are provided with tests (listening, speaking, reading and writing) that determines the level of proficiency - beginner, intermediate, advanced and proficient - they are at, and if they require the services or attend the regular classes. The New York State English as a Second Language Assessment Test (NYSESLAT) is administered annually to the ELL students, "once the testing results come out they do the recommendations if you are eligible or not. If your performance is great you don't need ESL" (Community leader Baraka). The following students share their experiences in the ESL classroom:

Student Amina: I was [in ESL classes] until I was 16 years old. In the beginners classes they helped me a lot because I didn't know much, I was there for like 2 years. I was in intermediate class for two years and one year in the advanced class. I took a test and my scores were high so I was taken to the mainstream class.

Student Hawa: I was in ESL class until I tested out in 10th grade, I was 17 years old. After that I just started taking regular English classes.

Student Aisha: I was in ESL for 2 years…in ESL class you learn English and everything, you take your time, and the teachers help you really learn English […] I went from nothing to proficiency within 2 years and I got out so quick and [the teachers] were so proud of me […]. They actually took the time to help you learn English, if I had to take regular classroom I don't think I would have ever graduated.

Student Yusuf: I didn't speak a lot of English [...] they put me in ESL, I was there the whole day.

Community leader Musa: (he started school in 10th grade) I didn't take the ESL classes, because my English was good.

These students arrived in the U.S when they were nine years old. As shared above some of them spent almost all of their school years attending ESL classrooms, while some only needed 2 years to be considered proficient enough for the mainstream classes. Only community leader Musa, who had a longer period of schooling in Kenya, arrived in the U.S aged 16 years old and he was placed in 10th grade. However, he spent 4 years in high school and graduated when he was almost turning 20 years old. New York State requires that ESL services must be provided to ELLs for at least 5 years or until the student is proficient.

The content of ESL classrooms and their relevance to the whole schooling experience are subject to research. Often there are questions pertaining to the 'pull-out' and 'push-in'

models[3], as students are considered to be missing class time when the pull-out model is used.

When asked what they were learning in the ESL classes, the students said:

> *Student Yusuf:* I started taking other subjects like English, math and science but I was still in ESL class. We learned the alphabets, spelling and how to pronounce words, like all the basics in English and multiplication.

> *Student Amina:* They teach us alphabets and how to say the numbers […] I liked the ESL class because the teachers explain everything.

> *Student Aisha*: Just English really, like sentences, how to write paragraphs, how to speak right. For math and sciences you go to regular classes. School starts at 8:30 and you go straight to ESL, the classes are like an hour. They teach you English, math and science but they teach it slow for you. [...]If you know a little bit of English you go to math or social classes but for English class you go to ESL.

These students attest to being 'pulled-out' of their mainstream classes to the ESL classes where they had language support from their ESL teacher. A few of the students preferred attending the mainstream/regular classes than the ESL classes, they felt that they missed a lot while in their ESL classes, other students had mixed reactions to both classes:

> *Student Hawa:* I prefer regular classes, because you learn more in regular classes […] but in ESL I think like they hold me. I would prefer to be in ESL classes for just one year, but they say you should spend 5 years in ESL classes before you can get out.

> *Student Yusuf*: I prefer the regular classes but ESL is good too. They give you time to do a test, but in regular classes they don't give you enough time [...] When the teacher says one hour to do the test, you only have one hour and then you feel pressured but in ESL there is no pressure. Sometimes I like the pressure because it challenges me.

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[3] Teaching models of ESL include: pull-out model; English language learners (ELLs) students are taken out of the mainstream classroom for some part (one to two class period) depending on the grade and proficiency level and receive language support from an ESL teacher. The second model; push-in model, is when the ESL teacher comes into the mainstream classroom and works with the general education teacher to provide language support to ELLs. (see http://www.nycore.org/newsite/wp-content/uploads/NYCORE-ELLteacher_handbook.pdf)

Because students were used to the ESL teachers' 'slower version' and any assistance they required, the mainstream classes were considered difficult, as there was no help given to them. In the regular classes they were on their own, and were not offered any support:

> *Student Hawa:* I took regular classes after I tested out the ESL classes […] it was kind of hard. There was no other help from my ESL teachers so sometimes I used to go to her even after I tested out so that she can help with my homework. ESL teachers helped a lot.

Once the students pass the tests they are considered proficient therefore they will not need the language support, however, the content in mainstream classes seems to be difficult for them.

> *Community leader Baraka*: If you test out of ESL that means you understand the teacher and are taken to regular class. If you know the language you don't need assistance. If you fail to understand the language there is no way you can learn other subjects like math, or science but language is important and that means you can understand the other concepts in different subjects.

As mentioned earlier, ESL is considered an important aspect for the refugee students and their parents. The academic structure and the time of classes hinders their successful academic achievement. The role of both the ESL and the mainstream classroom teacher are considered important.

Despite the students' proficiency in the English language some of them still have to attend ESL classes in the colleges. According to Community leader Abdi, "there was no ESL classes before but they started once they realized that kids were graduating from high school and still having difficulties in colleges." When asked why they still have to attend ESL classes while in college, this is what they said:

> *Community leader Abdi:* College is difficult, and for ESL they look at your high school transcript, if it is showing you have low scores or difficulty they will tell you to do placement test. […]Every kid who graduates high school and they don't have evidence that they can adapt well in college, they are put in ESL classes. I always tell them to take the ESL classes, when they come to me asking 'why do we have to take ESL classes?' I tell them to take the non -credit courses,

because that is where your [placement test] scores put you. If you do well in those classes then next semester you take credit courses. They feel like 'if I have to take non-credit courses especially ESL classes in college I'd rather go back home and start work'. Some of them would say so but we will always encourage them to go back.

Based on Community leader Abdi's response, there are mixed perceptions on the ESL classes. Students feel like they do not need to take those classes in college as almost all of their school years were spent in ESL classrooms. As Student Amina says, "we don't need it but in college if English is your second language you have to take the classes." These courses in college are non-credit, perhaps students feel like they are taking classes they do not require for non-credits or they consider their English language skills as proficient enough to be successful in college.

English vs Native language: Communication barrier

Because English language is considered important, both for academic achievement and integration in the dominant English speaking society, there is a communication barrier between the teachers/educators and the Somali Bantu parents. And also between the older parent and their younger children. The parents and their younger children are having difficulties communicating as the parents cannot or speak limited English and the children are becoming more fluent in English than in their native languages.

Notably, due to their parents' minimal literacy skills and the fact that "they do not understand [the] American culture" (Student Aisha), some of the students relied on older siblings, community leaders, guidance counsellors and teachers to discuss college applications and career:

> *Community leader Abdi:* The parents are illiterate about careers, if [a kid asks] "dad or mum what do you want me to be?" they will say 'become a doctor'. What the parent want is for their kids to become a doctor but the kids want to be something else […] A lot of kids don't discuss with their parents what they

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are doing, the parents just know where their kids are going for college or school. It is not about [not caring for] education, it is just that they are uneducated [therefore they wouldn't know about careers]…that is the only reason but they are proud of their kids.

Student Hawa: I tell them about the classes that I am going to take but I don't tell them what I want to do. I tell my older brother, I talk to him more [because my parents] wouldn't understand […] the thing is I don't really know Kizigua [native language] that well, I don't know most of the vocabulary so I can't talk to my parents about those issues.

Communication barrier between the parents and their children deters the parental support these students might need. Additionally, the children are increasingly unable to communicate with their parents in their native language. When I asked if it is a problem that their parents don't speak English and they cannot communicate about college application and careers, they said:

Student Hawa: No it is not a problem, at least my dad knows a little bit of English, my mum struggles a little so we teach her how to read [...] We have taught her how to spell her name but she's been here long enough like 10 years to be able to speak English.

Based on student Hawa's response, she criticizes her mother's lack of learning English despite being in the country for such a long time. In most of the students' conversations about parental support, most of them mentioned their fathers being involved in their school work more than their mothers, apart from student Yusuf who is raised by a single mother. He mentions the encouragement his mother provides despite her English language proficiency.

It should be noted that there is also a communication barrier between the teachers and parents, yet the participants mentioned visiting schools and attending parent-teacher conferences. Often the communication between the teacher and parents is through translators or at times the students themselves would be the translators:

Student Aisha: I think that is a big problem, because the parents never understand what the teachers are going through with the child and there's never

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> going to be a connection. But translating helps, […] And I would just say just go on and try, you as the parent try to learn English and keep on learning.
>
> *Student Yusuf:* [my mother] can't write, she didn't go to school in Africa. I kind of motivate her to go to school. She always has this trauma like after the war in Africa, she can't focus. She can't remember stuff like there's too much in her mind.

The schools are not the only places where the students act as interpreters, students are also in a situation where they have to translate for their parents, especially in the government offices, employment offices or hospitals. While translating for their parents in schools and other situations, the students often find themselves in reversed role. They become the adults and are assigned responsibilities. Perhaps this is among the reasons for encouraging their parents to learn the language, and to learn how to write and read. Most of the participants speak their native language at home, "we speak Maay Maay at home and at school we speak English" (Student Amina).

All the participants have revealed the importance of the ESL services provided and most importantly, the concept that the English language matters. The perception is that the English language matters more than their own native language, and that mastering the language is one of the elements of academic success and economic mobility. However, they are still facing difficulties in learning the content taught so they are still required to take the English language services in college. In addition, they negotiate, contest, and construct their language identities within the society, schools and at home.

Grade placement

Age is one of the factors administrators consider before placing newcomer students in appropriate classes, yet prior educational experiences are often not taken into consideration. Similar to the study conducted by educators Gahungu et al (2011) on the Burundian refugee

children in Chicago, some of the students were not assigned appropriate grade levels thus facing challenges. For instance, their findings revealed that a 14 year old Burundian student was placed in 9th grade despite not having attended any schooling prior to resettlement. Clearly, it is a challenge for both the administrators and the students in assigning appropriate grade placement. If not assigned appropriately, the students end up being affected by the inappropriate grade placement:

> *Community leader Abdi:* It is very difficult because some of [the Somali Bantu students] never had schooling background while others had interrupted schooling. When children come to this country, and if he/she is about 15 years old they would be put in 9th or 10th grade and expected to graduate. So that child has to catch up with English, the environment [formal schooling] and build relationship with teachers. The kid that starts at 7th or 8th grade is likely to be successful. Kids who are placed in 10th or 11th grade when they come to America would be expected to graduate in two years. Even though there are some kids who are smart, but that would still be a challenge. The kids that come from the refugee camps in Kenya will do well, especially those that really went to school […] but the other kids who come from Somalia, who had no schooling and English curriculum at all, will have difficulties. How do you start [teaching alphabets] ABC for a kid in 11th grade?

Comparable to the Burundian refugee students resettled in the U.S, the Somali Bantu students in Upstate City are facing the same challenges in regard to appropriate grade placement. Students interviewed recall their first time in school and grade they were placed:

> *Student Amina:* I never went to 7th grade they took me to 8th grade, I skipped because they told me I had average grades.

> *Student Yusuf:* I skipped 7th grade. When I got to middle school I went to 6th grade for the first and second semester and then I went to 8th grade because of my age. As when I started school I was put in 3rd grade and was retained in 3rd grade, I was like 10 years old going to 11 years then.

> *Student Aisha:* […] I changed, you know in Georgia the school year is different from New York State. We came here [Upstate City, NY] in April, I was about to finish my 5th grade, but when I come here I had to start 5th grade all over again.

Community leader Musa: It took me like 3 and a half years to graduate, I stayed in school for 3.5 years. They put me in 10th grade by the time I was to graduate they told me to stay one more year.

Based on the above quotes, each student had different experiences and challenges with the grade level placement. It is noted, the school administrator assigned a grade level for each student in regard to their age. For example, student Yusuf arrived in the U.S at the age of 10 years old. He was assigned the 3rd grade, a third grader in the U.S education system ages between 8 and 9 years old. Based on his placement test during the school registration, third grade level seems to have been the appropriate grade level. However, in order to catch up with other students his age, Student Yusuf had to skip one grade. Student Amina also skipped 7th grade because of her age and "average grades." Student Aisha's case is different, because she had started school in Georgia and the school year is different to the New York State one, she had to repeat the 5th grade because of the different terms/year.

Community leader Musa arrived in the U.S when he was almost 16 years old. He was placed in high school, -10th grade - and expected to pass the 5 regents, acquire the 22 credits and graduate by the age of 21 years old. Yet, "if you don't graduate high school by the age of 21 they let you go, then you can go to GED but for bilingual it is difficult for them to go to GED, unless you have previous education experiences" (Community leader Baraka). Even if you have previous educational experiences and certificate, you will still face difficulties:

Community leader Baraka: […] if you start from beginning while you are 18 years old, you will only have 3 years. So, in NY State you must have at least 4 years of schooling, in order for you to be able to graduate in time. They will say '3 years is too little [time] for you to graduate, for sure we know you can't pass the regent exams'. So why bother go to school and then you will leave school without a certificate.

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Hence, inappropriate grade placements and policies challenges the academic achievement of the older students, as they are pressured to either catch up in three years and graduate high school. Like what community leader Musa went through or for those starting at elementary level having to miss one year of schooling because their age does not correlate with their grade level.

In addition, those refugees resettled while at an older age, almost 21 years old or older usually have challenges in transitioning into the higher education institutions. Both Community leaders Abdi and Baraka arrived in the U.S at the age of 25, and they were motivated in pursuing postsecondary education. Even though they attended schools in the refugee camps and received transcripts and certificates, the school district did not accept their certificates. Taking and passing the General Educational Development (GED) test, which community leader Baraka advises the community to consider taking as an alternative for the high school diploma:

> *Community leader Baraka:* I went to high school in Somalia and before I finished the civil war took place, everybody fled to the camps. In Kenya, I went to school and did all the subjects. I was even working at the refugee camps for international NGOs. Then [when I came] here because my high school diploma from Kenya was not recognized here I had to start again. If you have never been in school here, they won't consider your overseas education. I started from the beginning and got my GED after a year of commitment. After getting the GED diploma I went to Salt City College[4] (SCC) for associate degree in general studies and then transferred to the university.

> *Community leader Abdi:* I went to school in the refugee camps up to form 2 [10th grade], when I came here I was 25 years old and I was not allowed to go to high school here at that age. I went to the refugee resettlement agency and I told them I needed help applying to school and they helped me get into the two year community college (SCC) for General studies.

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[4] All names of schools/colleges/universities are pseudonyms

Parent Halima arrived in the U.S with six children, aging between 3 and 19 years old. While the younger children were registered in schools, the 19 year old did not get registered in high school. "Because he was old they took him to a school in Westside and was given a teacher who helped him" (Parent Halima). It should be noted, for these students who are too old to attend school or even be able to successful graduate high school before they reach 21 years old, taking the high school equivalence test, the General Educational Development (GED) is an alternative, however they face challenges in passing the GED if they had limited or no formal schooling background and English skills.

Labeling Mechanism – Refugee students in Special Education

John Ogbu (1987) notes that "another mechanism with increasing significance is the labeling of minority children as having educational "handicaps". Because of this, a disproportionate number of minority children are channeled into special education, which is inferior education" (p. 319). Indeed, the labeling of the Somali Bantu students as in need of Special Education services has been shared by the community leader who also worked for the school district. The recommendation for Special Education placement of the Somali Bantus has been grounded on their low reading skills, language issues, and acting out. The deficit thinking ideologies and stereotypes practiced by administrators/teachers has seen a number of the Somali Bantu students assigned to these classes. When asked if there are any of their children assigned to the Special Education classes, this is what the community leader said:

> *Community leader Baraka*: Yes, we have. There are kids who are in need of special education but not very many. We have few kids who are in the program and those kids may need language services but most of them have learning disability, not language issues. It also entails the language, when the kid is struggling with reading or writing but good at speaking therefore lagging behind their grade level. […] They are put in small group of students, and they get extra services from home teacher. If they are also ESL students they get services from

ESL teachers, and if the child is in special education too they get services from their teachers.

A student had her regents appealed and was able to graduate high school despite failing one of her regents:

> *Student Hawa:* [High school] was hard, I only failed one regent and I passed the rest, [...] they wrote a letter to me and my dad to go to school. [The teacher] had to write a letter and I had to sign it and my dad signed it too, the letter showed that I had never missed school, I went to all my classes, how many times I took my regents and passed them, and that I was respectful. [...]So I graduated.

When I asked the community leaders to comment on this issue, if it is common for Somali Bantu students to be given pass marks in order to graduate high school. This is what they said:

> *Community leader Abdi:* That is the labelling [special education]. When the kid has been punctual, focused, disciplined, and does not fight with others then they try to label that kid as having some difficulties. Instead of him getting the required 65 in regents but because of the labeling in that category he/she is required to pass with only 50, and then that is a pass and they graduate. These are called special education kids, they lower the regent requirements so you pass and graduate [...] and then you will end up coming back here [at the community center for help].

Is this a concept of 'dumbing down' these students? If labeling them Special Education students as well as ESL and lowering the pass mark for them to graduate high school. As Community leader poses the question, "what will happen in college?" as mentioned elsewhere, that is why colleges require these students to take up ESL classes again. I asked the community leaders what the criteria are for 'labeling' these children as Special Education, and community leader Abdi says:

> I don't know what criteria they use, but from the experience working with them, if the kid is a troublemaker [...] because he is a troublemaker he is not going to sit still, so they just label him. Because they have difficult in reading and the language they label them special education student, lower the regent and pass them, when they go to college they are faced with challenges.

It should be noted these community leaders have worked for the school district at some point, and also acted as translators for the community in their centers. They have noticed that children are assigned the Special Education classes either because they are 'bad at reading', 'lagging behind their grade level' or are 'troublemakers', clearly these are the issues and challenges the community is going through and it has led to unnecessary drop-outs and suspension of some of these students.

According to psychologists Codrington & Fairchild (2012) "whether misdiagnosed or appropriately classified as special education student, the long term, detrimental effects of labeling, stigmatization, lowered expectations, inadequate instruction, limited access to enrichment opportunities, and spatial segregation can be debilitating" (p. 5). In support to Codrington & Fairchild's argument, Student Hawa who had received passing points and allowed to graduate high school despite having less marks for the regent, was skeptical of attending college. She was not sure if she was meant for college and if she was going to be successful in college. The whole experience caused her to 'self-doubt' herself. The New York State categorizes a student with learning disabilities based on mental, emotional and physical reasons; this include autism, learning disability, intellectual disability among others (NYSED, 2014). The Somali Bantus difficulties with the language and the formal school environment should not justify the 'inferior education' or limited access to education.

Drop-outs - The school districts' drop-out rate was at 19 percent in 2013 and 17 percent in 2014 (NYSED, 2014). In the Somali Bantu community,

> *Community leader Baraka*: We have had high school dropout back in 2004 and 2005 but since then we have not had any, everyone is on track. There are a lot of challenges but we have established community centers.

> *Community leader Abdi:* It is not that high, but you see there is some improvement as before. The reason that leads to drop out, is the 5 regent exams that they have to take to graduate from high school and it is the hardest of all. You have to pass that 5 regent exam to graduate, so if you pass the regent and your classes are 100% complete then you are set. The good thing is they give you an extended year until the age of 21 to pass, after 21 years you have to pass or drop-out.

While the drop-out rate of the Somali Bantu students has diminished, the students are struggling with passing the 5 regent exams that require a score of 65 and over to graduate from high school.

Suspension - According to the community leaders, they have had to deal with the high suspension rates from schools, mainly because of minor acts or sometimes wrongly blamed:

> *Community leader Abdi:* It is still high, even if the kid is not suspended there is a lot of time out, taken out of the class […] but that kid does not learn. A simple call to the parent will be easier […] if I talked to my kid he would not have to be in the timeout.

When asked what the major reason is for the suspension or time-out session for the refugee students, Community leader Abdi says:

> There is this conflict between American kids and the refugee kids, refugee kids are telling them 'we are the most disciplined kids in the world and we don't argue with adults'. The American children tell them: 'the way you dress is not right, your accent is funny' and when all the time the refugee kids answer a question in class or speak, the American kids start laughing. The American kids are initiating the fight and our kids are so hyper, they will retaliate with action.

> They will fight and when the teacher sees that they get suspension, they don't ask what happened but just suspend them. There must be some sort of mediation before suspension, call the parents before suspending. Sometimes they are suspended because they can't sit still and they have to go for time out and they don't like it, these are some of the stages the children go through inside the schools.

Mainly because of cultural difference and the fact that these children do not know how to sit still in a formal classroom, or they react after they are bullied. The teachers often chose to

discipline the immigrant students without finding out the source of the dispute. According to the culture of the Somali Bantus, mediating between the students before disciplining them is the appropriate way of doing it. Furthermore, they feel that the unnecessary time-out causes their children to miss the lessons, therefore affecting their academic achievement.

Teachers blaming the student for not wanting to learn

The concept that 'if you want to learn I will help you' has been mentioned by most of the participants. Similar to Roxas & Roy (2012) study on the experience of Somali students in U.S schools, they found that "educators maintained a meritocratic ideology about schooling, that is, 'students who help themselves are the ones who get help'" (p. 484). The notion that the student alone is responsible for their academic achievement and not the structural constraints, socio-economic status, gender and race is employed by the teachers.

> *Student Aisha:* I don't really say they do not care but teachers care for those who really want to learn. If you want to learn they will take care of you, they'll make sure you graduate but if you don't care and don't want to learn. They will say, 'I care about you if you want to learn but if you don't want to learn I can't teach you'.

Curriculum is different - the Somali Bantu children also have to deal with the difficulties of the Eurocentric curriculum and different resources in the classroom. Those who attended schools in the refugee camps often have challenges adjusting to the western style learning methods and resources as opposed to those immigrants who have actually attended structured schools that offered quality education. As Community leader Abdi notes,

> The curriculum here is different from the one back home, where there were no adequate books and resources. [At the refugee camps] teachers write on the blackboard and you have to copy the notes from the blackboard. But here the teacher will give you a bunch of paper and tell you read it, she will talk about

it when lecturing and when you come home your parents can't help you understand the reading.

It is important to note, there are challenges in implementing education in the Kenyan refugee camps. The schools in the refugee camps are usually overwhelmed with thousands of students, less resources and funding, infrastructures, and qualified teachers. The schools have approximately 1 teacher to 100 students (ratio of 1:100), more than the standard operating procedures implemented by the Kenyan government for quality education – the ratio of 1:45. Furthermore, there is a shortage of experienced teachers (Mackinnon, 2014). Therefore, even though these students attended some form of education in the refugee camps, the schools and curriculum in the U.S are new to them.

Do the kids get the education they deserve?

Despite all the challenges mentioned, when I asked the parents and community leaders if their children are getting equal educational opportunities, this is what they said:

> *Community leader Baraka:* Yes, they are getting the education they need and many people help them. But that's not always the point because there are many parents who can't do it. They don't have support as they depend on community services, so those are the parents we help.

> *Community leader Musa:* In terms of the education we had back in Kenya, there are a lot of opportunities here. Some kids don't want to learn […] some of them are Americanized, they want to put their pants down […] that's why we tell them to come to the community, so that we can stay together and we can focus on our culture more and also focus on the education.

> *Parent Hussein:* It is not the government's fault, they want everyone to go to school and be educated. The problem are the kids and not the parents. Parents know kids go to school, many parents I have seen are called to school because their kids have started fighting. That is the problem, they don't want to go to school they want to fight with teachers, what else do they want?

The community leaders and the parent acknowledge their children receive equal and adequate education but notice that they are in need of more support and services. They place the blame of school failures on them as a community and not the structural barriers. The community employs strategies such as the tutoring programs offered at the community organizations, 'to supplement' what the school system is not offering. They also offer cultural programs and teach their native language to their children.

Ogbu (1987) states, "school performance is not due only to what is done to or for the minorities; it is also due to the fact that the nature of the minorities' interpretations and responses makes them more or less accomplices to their own school success or failure" (p. 317). Consider the following quote from a parent:

> *Parent Hussein*: If you are sent to school, go to school and learn, my dad didn't go to school and didn't send me to school either, because he didn't have the means to take me to school. My older kids know that education is important and discipline is important too. If they want to learn it also depends on the parents. If the whole year they don't see you [the parent] go to school they can do whatever they want. The teacher can't beat him or do anything. They can be disrespectful to the teacher and do all they want. A kid who does that to the teacher doesn't want to learn.

Clearly, as research shows this notion is portrayed by a parent's perception that their children are solely responsible for their failure. The parent blames the kids discipline issues for failing in schools but does not realize it is the system that sets the kids to these challenges or failures. Most of the time, similar to other immigrants, the refugee community are appreciative of all the resources and assistance they get. They compare the life they had back in Africa, especially in the refugee camps, and learn to appreciate the life they have here in the U.S. (Ogbu, 1987). Their interpretation and perception of the U.S school system and the schools their children attend are obscured by the systemic and structural constraints. Nevertheless, the challenges

in education as experienced by the Somali Bantu has led to implementation of services conducive to their academic achievement, resources and services that would be able to address their difficulties and challenges.

<p align="center">**Success in Education:**</p>

Resources provided by schools and colleges

The school district, local colleges and universities, and teachers have offered support and provided resources for the academic achievement of the students. For college preparation, students mentioned various programs that were provided by the schools and referred to them by their teachers or guidance counselors. Two programs mentioned by the students are provided by the local colleges; Upward Bound Program[5] and Liberty Partnerships Program[6] which are funded by the New York State to support middle and high school students' graduate and proceed to college. According to the participants the following resources were available for them:

> *Student Hawa:* I was in the Upward Bound program, I started when I was in 8th grade. I applied and I got accepted, during the summer we spent time there. They helped us with college application, we also took college classes and got our homework done. […] It is for everyone as long as you have good grades.
>
> *Student Amina:* The Liberty Partnerships Program (LPP) teach you how to apply for college and how to review financial aid. The program was in the high school and a professor from the college came to advise us. One of my teachers told me to go to that program because I had the highest average in class. The program is for a year, you fill out an application and once they approve your application you can start the program. …They help you with anything, like if

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[5] Upward Bound "is a federally-funded program for high school students who will be first-generation college students. The goal of Upward Bound is to improve the academic performance, motivation levels, and self-confidence of the participating students so that they reach their ultimate goal of achieving a college degree" (http://lemoyne.edu/CONTINUINGEDUCATION/UpwardBound/tabid/2437/tabid/2461/default.aspx)

[6] LPP "is a state funded program whose mission is to support New York State middle and high school students so they can graduate from high school and continue on to higher education. The Liberty Partnerships Program works with students who may be at risk and or under-prepared for college and/or a career. The services provided are expected to raise the achievement levels of all student participants and significantly reduce achievement gaps. http://www.highered.nysed.gov/kiap/precoll/lpp/)

you have homework or need help with English, math, any kind of subject they have tutors that come from the colleges and they come to the high school to help us.

When asked if the resources and assistance for college preparation and applications are adequate, both parents and students interpreted that is what they deserved and it was adequate enough.

It is important to note that the school district is trying to address the cultural misunderstanding and the language barrier by hiring native speakers 'nationality workers' who provide services to the school administrators as well as the communities. The school district employs native speakers for the majority of ESL student's population:

> *Community leader Baraka*: I work as nationality worker for the school district. I provide bridging case management, like a liaison between the parents/children and teachers. I help teachers set parents/teachers conference, if they want to set up a home visit they contact me and I do that. I try to go to all schools, when I am there I visit the school nurses, ESL teachers and the school psychologist. I have to meet with them and if they need help communicating with the parents, they let me know. I also work with the ESL students, all those students in ESL classes even if they speak Arabic or Swahili. We are bridging the gap, not only by providing language services but also cultural gap too. We educate the service providers about the culture of the child too. We do cultural workshops, staff meetings and presentations. We provide the cultural workshop to help the teacher learn about the culture of the student they will be teaching.

The role of the nationality worker is significant as they provide language and cultural services to the school administrators and teachers. This service implemented by the school district is important, especially to the teachers as they will be able to know and understand their students' culture.

Parental support: 'parents want their kids to be successful'

When asked how they as parents support their children in their academic work, parents responded that they visit schools, attended parent-teacher conferences and also assisted with

home work for those who could. Those who could not because of their English language proficiency, illiteracy or work schedule, took their children to the community organizations where they had tutoring programs. The following comments were made by parents when I asked how they support their children:

> *Parent Hussein*: The teachers know me, I used to go to school every day and ask about my kids. If the kids see that you came to school today they know that they have to be in school and learning.
>
> *Community leader Baraka*: I help them with homework, we have writing time. If there is a study time at home, then every person [in the house] should study. We all learn together, both of us are students [parent is also a student at a university].
>
> *Community leader Abdi:* Parents want their kids to be successful. They have reward agreements with their children: 'I will buy for you a cellphone or a car if you graduate'. This is the kind of agreement between the students and the parents. It is not an African culture, this is one of the American culture and also kids know what their parents went through. It was a hard life in Somalia, the civil war and then the refugee camps. For the parents to adapt at the refugee camps was hard. So they had these kind of problems and now they have this opportunity, they can do better for themselves. [Because] the parent thinks 'all my life was like this, I don't want you to go through it'. So buying the cellphone might be an American culture because all kids here have cell phones, but it is not a privilege you have to earn it.

The parents have supported their children in all ways they could. For example, rewarding their children with a cellphone or money if they brought good grades home is considered an American culture, however they adopted it to ensure their children took education seriously and have a better life than the one they had back in Africa. On the other hand, students also revealed other methods their parents supported them with their school work:

> *Student Amina:* They used to come to school visits, every other day and at home they ask me 'how is school'? And I tell them and I show them my grades. With homework, I do it by myself because my parents don't speak good English. If I need help I go to tutors after school at the college.
>
> *Student Hawa:* My parents never finished school so that is why they feel like [they have] to encourage me to do my best [...] they tell me never to give up. They are always there for me. [...] my dad helps a little bit with my homework,

my mum cannot help with my homework [because] she does not know English that well.

Student Aisha: My parents don't speak good English, they don't understand the American culture, and they can't help me with the homework. They just inspire me to get an education, to make something out of myself in this life. So that is who I am and who I want to be, my parents have shaped me to be that [person]. They also came to the parents-teachers conference, and every time my dad goes to the middle school conferences they always said good things about me.

Student Yusuf: My mother is a hard worker, she doesn't know English but she encourages me to go to school and get good education.

All the students acknowledged their parents English language skills were not sufficient enough to help them with their assignments. Nevertheless, they do mention other support from their parents, for instance attending the parent-teacher conferences, visiting schools and also providing all the materials they would need for school. They also acknowledge how their parents' past life in Africa and the experiences they have gone through resettling in the U.S is a source of inspiration to be successful academically.

Beating the Odds: High school & College experience

The students have been able to successfully pass the high school Regents exams graduated, and are now attending college. The majority of the participants are attending the local two year community college, Salt City College (hereby SCC). When asked to tell me about their high school experiences and what led them to apply to college, this is what they students said:

Student Yusuf: It was good, I learned a lot of things from high school because when I started the freshman years I was taking many classes, compared to the 6th to 8th grade and then I had too much homework [...] I was also playing soccer and then my grades started going down, so I took time off from soccer and tried to bring my grades up. I passed my regents in my first year and then in 10th grade I did the same thing, I passed all of my classes took the regents I needed. [...] In 11th grade I started taking engineering classes. I started focusing on engineering because that is what I wanted to do. I talked to my counsellor and

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he asked me what I wanted to do, and then I told him and he put me in classes that will help me be successful. [...] I took physics, science and chemistry classes. In 12th grade I did the same thing, focused on the classes and I was done with all my regents in the 11th grade.

The transition from high school to college for the students went well. I asked the students when they had started applying for colleges and why they chose the colleges they are attending, this is what they said:

Student Hawa: I am going to Salt City College (SCC) because I didn't get accepted to the other colleges. I had applied to 5 colleges and I got accepted at the SCC and a community college in Rochester [...] I just wanted to see if I am smart enough to get into other schools. I am not sure yet what I want to do in college. I was thinking about criminal justice or psychology.

Student Yusuf: I started applying to Eastwood College [4 year college] and Salt City College [2 year community college] in 11th grade because I was interested in both of them and they had the classes that I needed. I got accepted to both but I went to the two year community college because of the classes I wanted to take and it has a better program for the degree I wanted, I had applied for mechanical technology. My counsellor in high school helped with the application, I asked other people and they said [the 2 year college] was great and the cheaper alternative.

Student Amina: I did not choose any four year university, I went to Salt City College and they told me I had 2 years of scholarship and then I can transfer to another 4 year college. I applied and I was accepted.

Student Aisha: I started in my summer of junior year, that's when I started planning. My guidance counsellor and English teacher helped me, some things [for the application] I did myself like the income tax of my parents. I applied to three four year universities and to the two year Salt City College. I didn't get accepted by the two colleges, I got accepted by one of the four year university [different city but still in New York State] and the Salt City College.

I started at the SCC in fall 2013, first I wanted to study psychology somehow I ended up in humanities and then I switched to human services and so now I am studying counselling. I just grew up a passion for counselling and helping people [...] I want to work in community centers, I want to help my people and with counselling I can help my people.

Despite applying to the colleges and getting accepted, not all of the students were confident that they will be able to perform better in college. The lowered expectations and stereotypes

by their teachers affects the students' perception to successful schooling (Roxas, 2011, 2012). Challenges ranged from the English language proficiency to the fear of not being able to be successful, and the perception that college was out of reach for them. However, Community leader Abdi says it is because "they don't have good foundation that prepares them to college".

> *Community leader Abdi:* we help a lot of kids go to college, but there are some challenges we are trying to address. Because most of the kids who graduated earlier came back home after the 2 year college, it was too challenging for them. They had challenges, for example, writing essays and doing research papers was difficult for them. We try to help them and guide them, give them some suggestions and guidance. I am confident that 2013 high school graduates will finish college, because they have not come back here [at the community center] yet. It is because they have had a lot of experience in schooling in America […] the others didn't have enough time in the American schools but I think the 2013 graduates have had a lot of experience in middle and high schools. We will know when they graduate.

> *Student Hawa:* I was scared thinking about going to college, I felt it was bigger for me, I am not sure if I can make it. […] my brother encouraged me and helped me fill out the application and my college essays.

Those who fear going to college, as student Hawa says college is 'bigger' for her, is because of the experiences of other students in the community who are having difficulties in the colleges and also the mechanism the school administrators and teachers apply when educating the Somali Bantu students:

> *Community leader Abdi:* they have seen how others fail because they all talk together and they talk about their failure or problems. I advise them to take the ESL classes, attend all the classes and do a lot of reading.

Most of the students initially apply to in-state colleges and especially those in Upstate City, while planning to transfer to a four year college after successfully graduating from their programs:

> *Community leader Abdi:* Most of them want to go further after the two year college, and I encourage them to apply to the 2 year college based on their

performance. I know how they perform and their capabilities, but if I see they are good I always advise them to go the 4 year college. However, if you are struggling in reading right now, the 4 year university is not an option so I would encourage them to start with the 2 year and transfer to a 4 year. Because I help them a lot I know them, for example one of them finished all his regents, got all A's, he is in 11th grade now and he can leave for college right now. But I won't tell him to go to the two year college, I will tell him to go to the university.

When it comes to transferring to a four year university or even to go to any other college, these students do not have an option. Often their parents and community leaders advise them to stay in Upstate City. Consider these quotes:

> *Community leader Baraka:* There are over 20 students in the 2 year college. Most of them are in their sophomores some of them will be finishing next year. I have advised them to apply to the colleges here. Since our kids finished high school in Upstate City, they are eligible for the State's program that offers fully funded scholarship when they stay at home or go to any school in New York State.

> *Community leader Abdi:* Some would say they want to go out, they don't want to study in Upstate City […] I don't want to discourage them but I know when 'you go out there you don't finish school and you become a burden to your parents'.

> *Student Aisha:* No, I am going to [transfer to the university here] I can literally walk to the university. I can't go far remember I am not married. I know it's a good experience but I have got to stay with my mum, if I feel like my mom is not alright or something I want to be closer. I wanted to go to a university for four years and I couldn't. Honestly, I am glad I stayed because I see some kids who are far from their parents and they struggle. I don't know I think I would have struggled [...] like I am so used to be around my family all the time and I don't think I can share a room with someone I don't know and I don't care for. I am so close to my family and I would have missed them so much, I would have become homesick and come back after the first week.

> *Student Amina*: I don't know where I will transfer to. But I will stay in Upstate City because my family is here, I have to help my mom because I am the oldest I can't go far away…

These students have reported various reasons for not going out-of- state for college, mostly because of their culture, which does not allow them to live outside their home and because they are family oriented. Nevertheless, successfully graduating high school and getting

accepted by the colleges suggests that they have beat the odds and have successfully navigated their way into the higher education institutions.

Discussion: Navigating formal schooling in Upstate NY

To answer the first research question - what are the experiences of Somali Bantu refugee in formal schooling? All participants portrayed their perceptions on the importance of education and their willingness to learn. A few scholars have noted, (Roxas, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Kozol, 1991, Harris, 2011) that some educators perceive immigrant students and their parents as not interested in attaining academic achievement, however these students' dedication to education depicts that they are indeed interested in attaining successful academic achievement. Students Amina, Hawa, Yusuf and Aisha all portrayed the desire to learn and be successful. They are all attending a two year college and are planning to transfer to a four year university, despite the challenges. Both parents and students maintain that they take education seriously and would like to succeed. Indeed, "kids really want to graduate, even if they have this problem or challenge they will come to you instead of going to the teachers, 'I have this problem, can you help me?' kids really want to pass, to go to school graduate and go to college and do well" (Community leader Baraka).

Structural constraints are the major obstacles in their academic achievement. As seen from the subtheme on grade placement. Appropriate grade placement especially for the Somali Bantu children who have had limited or interrupted formal schooling is both a challenge to the educators as well as the children (Gahungu et al, 2011; Roxas, 2012). For instance, the Somali Bantu students who arrived in the U.S at the age of 9 -10 years old, were placed in grade level based on their ages but not on their level of academic achievement. As Community leader Abdi points out, "that child has to catch up with English, the environment

[formal schooling] and build relationship with teachers" (Personal conversation, 2014). Indeed, these are the challenges they would face, not being able to understand the class content, curriculum, lagging behind their grade level because they are busy coping with the new formal schooling environment. Furthermore, similar to Mitchell (2012) study on meritocracy and language, she argues that schools do not provide equal education as the multilingual students cannot understand the curriculum, then that should not be considered to be an equal educational opportunity unlike the one afforded to the English-speaking students.

Somali Bantu parents and students blamed themselves for the challenges and failure (Roxas, 2012), similar to the study conducted by Roxas (2012) of a recently arrived Somali Bantu refugee student attending U.S high school. His findings mirror to the experiences of Somali Bantus in Upstate City. As Roxas says, students "attributed the recurrent news of low grades, teachers' low expectations, and the possibility of repeating classes by blaming themselves for their lack of academic achievement rather than recognizing that there were other factors at play in their academic development beyond their control" (p. 480).

The inability to recognize structural and institutional factors that contributed to their educational challenges. The Somali Bantus were oblivious of the fact that they might be attending inferior and segregated schools. It is important to note, the inner city public schools that the Somali Bantus are attending are segregated, over fifty percent of the students identify as Black or African Americans (Kuscera & Orfield, 2014; Larson et al 2014; Stamps & Stamps, 2008). The Somali Bantu and other immigrants who lack familiarity with the U.S. schools, they tend to:

Regard [that] the public schools are offering an education far superior to what was available in their homeland, so that even when they attend an inferior school in the United States they may not recognize it as inferior. Their frame of reference in evaluating their education is the quality of education in their homeland, not the quality of education in the white suburbs. [...] even when immigrants recognize, experience, and resent prejudice and discrimination in the public schools, they appear to respond in ways that do not discourage them from doing well in school. They rationalize the prejudice and discrimination against them by saying they are in a foreign land, they have no choice but to tolerate prejudice and discrimination (Ogbu 1987, p. 329).

For the Somali Bantus, the inequity in schools and resources remains invisible as they measure the quality of education with the one they had (schools in the refugee camps) or did not have access to while back in Africa.

Critical race theorists contend that race is the major factor in determining educational inequality (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Solórzano & Yosso (2002) assert that CRT "challenges the traditional claims that educational institutions make toward objectivity, meritocracy, colorblindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity" (p. 25). Certainly the dominant ideology of equal educational opportunity that the Somali Bantus believe in and internalize the stereotypes seems to contradict with the labeling mechanism of their children as special education, the drop-out and suspension rates, and teachers blaming the children for their failure. They would blame the educators on wrongly placing their children in the 'inferior education' or 'handicapped' (Ogbu, 1987; Codrington & Fairchild, 2012), yet they fail to acknowledge their race, class, language and immigrant status deters equality in education.

Placement of the Somali Bantus who are cultural as well as linguistic minorities in either the ESL and/or special education classroom often lead to "higher rates of dropout and arrests, lower status employment and wages" (Codrington & Fairchild, p. 5). In addition to the challenges due to their educational background, limited English proficiency, the structural barriers in the schools and discrimination in the American society, undermines the academic achievement as well as upward mobility of the Somali Bantus. Finally, despite the challenges, the students have beat the odds and graduated high school, which is the first hurdle. They are now attending higher educational institutions thus challenging the deficit ideologies of the dominant society.

Theme Two: Race, Gender, Language, Religion and Cultural Constraints

Society has a profound impact on the academic achievement or failure of the Somali Bantu community. Their multiple identities: race, language, culture, religion and gender are perceived to be inferior to the dominant society', sets them up for discriminative challenges. These are addressed by subthemes: bullying, belonging & identity, cultural differences, and silencing the minority language, gender issues, arranged marriages, and Islamophobia.

Bullying

The feeling of otherness can be best described by the bullying experiences of the Somali Bantus in the schools. Bullying is defined as "a subset of aggressive behavior characterized by repetition and an imbalance of power [... and] the victim cannot defend himself or herself easily, for one or more reasons: He or she may be outnumbered, smaller or less physically strong, or less psychologically resilient than the person(s) doing the bullying" (Smith & Brain 2000, p.2). Many students in American schools have been subjected to bullying experiences,

either as victims, bullies, or bystanders (Espelage & Swearer, 2004; Garrett, 2003; Hirsch & Lowen, 2012). For the Somali Bantu students who are just new in the country and adjusting to the formal schooling environment, their race, language proficiency, age, and dress codes set them up to a higher risk of bullying.

> *Student Amina:* [They were] bullying me because I did not know how to speak English. They abused and fought with me and I didn't know how to tell the teacher because I didn't know the language. One day someone took my earring and then I didn't know what to do, I was crying and crying and the teacher would ask me and I didn't know how to say it. […] after 2 or 3 years I learned the language and they tried to mess with me but I didn't let them because I [could] stand up for myself.

> *Student Hawa:* When I was in 4th and 5th grade, I was the smallest one in every class I went to so they took advantage of that and they would be pushing me around […] I used to cry and cry I never told anyone but when I got older I told my teachers and parents and they took care of it.

> *Student Amina:* Was I bullied because I am from a different country and I have different blood? They would be like 'oh look at that girl, look at that African, look at her dress, she's always covering her hair'. One day one of the girls, she had some boys with her they removed my headscarf and I [didn't do anything] after I learned the language I told them you can't mess with me anymore.

After becoming proficient in the English language, these students could 'stand up' for themselves by confronting their bullies, therefore, overcoming the long term effects of bullying, which could be feeling of isolation, rejection, otherness, depression and poor academic achievements. Some of the refugee students tried to employ other strategies of surviving the harsh school environment:

> *Community leader Baraka:* For example, when they are at school other kids make fun at them, and then bully them which leads to fighting. You hear words like: 'you are from Somalia, or from Kenya, or you don't know English'. Other bad words are said to the kids causing them to react by fighting, because they cannot express themselves.

Those 'bad words' mentioned from the above quote are forms of bullying. The racial and ethnic slurs that the Somali Bantu students are exposed to in the classrooms can be considered as a form of 'othering' and discriminative.

> *Student Aisha:* No one ever bullied me, why? Because I always walked in hallways like I am mad and no one ever bothered me. I had to be like that, because if you walk in the hallways all smiling you know people will face up to you [...] But if you are walking around always mad people will be like scared of you. If I see someone bullying someone else I will go and report it but I won't go in between.

Student Aisha adopted a strategy of looking 'mad' and 'strong' in other words, embracing the 'otherness' thus not subject to be bullied with the others who are considered 'weaker' that way none of the bullies would approach her. However she preferred walking away from any incident of bullying and she would rather report it than be a part of it.

Belonging & Identity

The Somali Bantu acknowledge their origin and ethnic identity as Somali or Somali Bantus, however the racialization of their people while in Somalia seems to be replicated while in the U.S schools and the society:

> *Community leader Abdi:* When you go to schools, they call our kids Africans. […] when I go there they will ask "are you here for the African kids" how will that kid feel? Can you imagine? I understand the bias in the world, I can deal with the discrimination but that kid who lived for a short time in Africa and now considers America as home, how will he feel?

Their children have spent more years in America than in Africa, some of them have been born in the U.S but are still labeled 'Africans' and not accepted as citizens of America. Despite the racialization and the feeling of 'otherness', the refugees resettled here take the U.S. citizenship as an important part of their life here in the U.S. They consider the U.S citizenship a component of upward social mobility. However, based on their interviews and other research

conducted on their identity (Bigelow, 2010), regardless of their U.S. citizenship they still identify themselves as Somali or Somali Bantus.

Belonging also entails sticking to their culture, language and family values, despite the cultural differences they encounter in the American society. The older Somali Bantus ensure their children do not become 'Americanized' and totally assimilate into the American culture,

> *Community leader Baraka:* Every Saturday we have tutors so that the kids can get one-on-one services and we also teach them our language. Some kids can speak English very quickly but they don't speak our own language. They can only talk to you in English, we ask them what does it mean in Somali or Maay Maay they say 'I don't know' but in English they know, so we teach them our language and the culture so that they don't forget. [...] We don't want them to say 'my parents originally came from Somalia, I am an American I don't know Somali,' we don't want that to happen. The reason why we established the community organization is to maintain our culture, while we learn other culture. We want to maintain our culture and our language so that way we are connected.
>
> *Community leader Musa*: We teach them the culture and language, by the time they grow up they know what to do with their life. But if the kids don't know what to do, the kids will be Americanized and do what they want. I have seen a lot of kids who have become Americanized and they don't want to listen [...] and that's what we don't want to happen.
>
> *Community leader Baraka:* [Advises students not go to out of state colleges] if they go to out-of-state colleges they are more likely to diminish their culture, so if they can stay closer at home it helps. Because they go home every day, they learn the culture and the mother tongue. I advise my children to not forget their culture, I speak Maay Maay and Somali to my kids and they understand everything I tell them.

By teaching their children their culture and language, the Somali Bantus intend to hold on to their ancestry and traditional values while embracing the culture of their new home. It should be noted, these are a group of minorities whose descendants were uprooted from their ancestral homes, due to the 19th century slavery in Africa, and are now resettled in the U.S. Their history of displacement and settlement lingers in their struggles for identity and belonging while in the U.S. racialized society.

'Accommodation without Assimilation'

  The Somali Bantu parents fear that their children are becoming 'Americanized' thus they will forget their culture and language. But when students were asked if they have assimilated into the American culture based on what their parents and community leaders are arguing above, this is what they say:

> *Student Amina:* I never try to be an American, I love the American culture but I never try to be one. I want to stay with my culture because I come from a different country [...] just because I live here it doesn't mean I have to change myself to assimilate.
>
> *Student Aisha*: I am kind of assimilated, you know if you live here for like 10 years you kind of get the culture. I still wear my tradition clothes and I speak my native language. But I think I am more into the American culture since I have been living here for a long time.

These students are not willing to give up their culture and language, but realize for them to be able to survive either in the classrooms or the society they have to assimilate into the majority's culture. Thus, as Ogbu (1987) points out regarding the strategy of 'accommodation without assimilation', these students are not willing to give up on their cultural beliefs or language but are willing to accommodate some of the dominant culture for their own benefit. These benefits are to succeed in school and be accepted by the society. Furthermore, acculturation or 'Americanization' as the parents perceive is a strategy for the Somali Bantu children to 'fit in' and avoid being bullied because they are Africans.

Cultural clashes - Parents have mentioned their parenting and disciplining practices conflicts with the American society. Neighbors and teachers have called the police and child protective services for them. Some of the cultural clashes coming into play in regards to disciplining the children because they are not attending school:

> *Parent Hussein*: One day the teachers called the police for me because I beat my son in school. He didn't want to go to school, for 3 days he was not going to school.

Despite the discipline issues among the Somali Bantu community, there is a tension between African Americans and Somalis, especially in the neighborhoods.

> *Community leader Abdi*: The fight outside the school is not happening a lot, and it's not coming from the school it's just in the neighborhood. Our kids were raised in an environment where they can go out, even if there are other kids outside your door you can still consider them as your son… And here there is this culture, if I stepped out onto your yard the neighbor would be like "that's my yard, get out" [imitating an American accent] and then that is where the conflict starts from. [...] That is where the tension comes from; it is about 'my space, this is my space'. Also the American kids call our kids 'Africans'! Even if they want to play with them, they still call them 'Africans', because their parents tell them so. The tension stopped, but we have to do a lot of educating the parents about what they need to do […] to know we are all Africans no matter where we came from, you are black I am black […] they are not superior to us.

> *Student Aisha*: The thing is, the African American kids are ignorant about Africans. They watch the movies and see Africans like they are poor, sick, so they see that perception and they think we are less than them [...] they think we are inferior.

Silencing the minority language

Mastering the English language is considered important for the academic achievement of the students. However, the perception that English only matters silences their cultural as well as successful integration in the society. Because of their accent, they believe that they should not be vocal or feel like their accent is a deficit, a negative aspect that has to be done away with to be successful in the American schools and society:

> *Parent Hussein*: I removed him from that school because the Bantu were many, he had a problem changing his accent. He was talking and the teachers were not understanding him. I saw it was going to be a problem.

> *Student Hawa*: If you have a lot of people from Africa in your class you wouldn't learn anything because you will just be talking and talking [in the native

language]. I didn't avoid them [Africans], they are my friends but inside the class I just tried to focus [learning English] and doing my work.

For the parent, his son's accent and the fact that the teachers told him that they cannot understand his son, led him to make a decision of separating the son from the other Somali Bantu children. Thus telling his son that being with the same group, the minority, does not help in learning the language of the majority and assimilating into their culture. This is silencing and 'othering' of the child whose accent is too strong for the majority to understand him. Student Hawa, has a similar interpretation as the parent, that if you want to learn English associate yourself with English speakers and not people from your country.

The challenges and obstacles in adapting to the American society and the school for the young immigrants is experienced differently. In the school environment, these students are always silenced based on their lack of English proficiency or their accents. Furthermore, their accents also places them in the special education classes, as the ESL services already provided is deemed inadequate for their accents;

> *Community leader Abdi:* Most kids are still not confident to speak up as people make fun of their accents. They think 'if I start talking other kids will start laughing.' The kids are smart but are affected by the reactions of other students and teachers.

> *Student Aisha:* In my regular classes I didn't talk to anybody, and I didn't say anything. Because you think that you will say something wrong, I didn't want to say something wrong, so I didn't speak to anybody until I went to 7th grade and they also didn't speak to me. [...] Of course I did talk to the teachers because they are supposed to teach me. If I said something wrong they will correct me but the students they will laugh at me. Towards the end of 6th grade I made a friend from Somalia and then I started talking to her only and nobody else, we spoke in my language, in Somali. If she wasn't there I don't know what would have happened.

Indeed, similar to the experiences of Somali Bantus in regard to accent being considered illiterate or a deficiency, scholars Ghong et al (2007) note that "language is used to bargain,

assert, affirm, negotiate, and to express one's emotions and thoughts. It is most embarrassing then when African children are rebuked because of their accents or told that they do not speak correctly and cannot be understood" (p. 67).

When asked if they have felt discriminated against because of their race, the participants denied any form of racism:

> *Parent Hussein:* No there is no racism, if someone is educated there is no racism at all. I have been to many interviews with my kids and there is no racism, it is all one's hard work and credentials [that matter].
>
> *Student Yusuf:* No, they [teachers] all loved me and they treated me with respect and I treated them with respect. Like if you treat people with respect they will do the same to you, it's like what you ask for is what you get.
>
> *Community leader Abdi*: No, I don't see it as racism, but I call it as illiterate […] because it's just that American teachers are not knowledgeable about where these kids are coming from, their culture and behavior. A lot of things are going on which you need to understand.

As mentioned elsewhere, the structural constraints and covert racism that the Somali Bantus are subjected to are often misinterpreted. They blame themselves for the academic failures and not because of their race.

Islamophobia and the Hijab

None of the participants mentioned any incidents in regard to their religion. However, for the Somali Bantu women and girls who wear the Hijab (headscarf/veil) thus visibly highlighting their religion and their nationality, they are subject to islamophobia and religious hostilities. Consider these quotes from the female students:

> *Student Aisha*: my 10th grade English teacher in high school didn't like me simply because I am a Muslim. Why? Because her brother died in the 9/11 attack so she felt like I was a part of that. [Laughs] She hated me because of that, because I am a Muslim. Like when she would ask a question and I raise

my hand, I will be the only one raising my hand and she would still not pick me.

That is the first time a teacher ever did that. But I don't understand, what do I have to do with the Taliban and al Qaeda, I didn't even know they existed? It's so stupid that she just blamed me for everything, for being a Muslim. I want to say it's stupid because honestly if you are grown woman, you are like 40 something years old and you know that when that happened I was like 6 years old. I had nothing to do with that and not all Muslims are alike...because if all Muslims were alike they would have bombs all over. You can't blame someone for one incident, like the KKK [Ku Klux Klan] what did they do? They hanged people and they were Christians, if I saw a Christian I don't run away ... so you should not demean a whole religion for what a few people did. ...I told my parents about it and they told me to just hang in because she's the teacher, she left school and I graduated.

Student Aisha felt that the teacher discriminated her because of her religion, 'for being a Muslim'. Since she wears the Hijab which was a visible marker of her religion and identity, she was subjected to religious discrimination and bias. "This discrimination is sometimes difficult to separate from racism" (Bigelow, 2010 p. 113) as islamophobia can be more profound based on the society's misconceptions on Islam and terrorism. Other girls interviewed narrate their experience on wearing the Hijab:

Student Amina: When I am in school I wear the headscarf, I just take it off when I am at home. But when people come to my house I cover my hair it's for respect, respect in my culture […] People ask me why I wear the scarf, I wear it because of my religion and tradition. Also people usually ask in school why do you cover your head, you don't have hair inside your head? I tell them I do have hair and I cover my head because it's my culture and religion.

Student Hawa: I wear headscarves when I am outside and at school. When I was in elementary I never used to wear it but I just started when I was in 8th grade. […] if people ask me and I just say it is because it is my religion.

For these girls, the Hijab is a marker that sets them up for discrimination, unlike the Somali Bantu men who are often perceived as African or black but not as Muslim. Similar to De Voe's (2002) study in an urban school district in St. Louis, Missouri, she found out that because of the Hijab the Muslim girls were subjected to hostility by fellow students.

Particularly, African American students perceived "veiling as a rejection of black American identity" (p. 237). Therefore, they inferred the veiling of the Somali girls as looking down upon blackness and/or the African American ethnic group. For the Somali Bantu girls in Upstate City, their Hijab subjected them to being bullied as well as discriminated against. What they consider as part of their identity and religion is sadly not accepted by the American society.

Arranged & early marriages

As one of the tradition of Somali Bantus and other cultures, I included this question during the interview to find out if the girls are forced to leave school earlier and get married. None of the female students interviewed were asked to leave school at young age and get married. Yet, during an informal conversation with one of the participants, she disclosed to me that there are cases of early marriages in the community. When asked what they thought of arranged and early marriages, this is what they said:

> *Student Hawa:* I don't like the arranged marriage tradition, I don't believe in that. [...] when my sister got married, I think she was like 18 and they came here and asked for her hand in marriage... but my parents want us to finish school first.

> *Student Aisha:* My mom got married [in Africa] when she was 15 or 16 years old. She wanted me to get married around that age but she wanted me to finish high school first. [...] No one in the community here has been forced to marry.

> *Student Amina*: One of my teachers asked me 'oh why are you people getting married at a young age?' or 'how come you aren't married yet? I said it depends if your parents are understanding [...] and most of the parents are understanding, they do not force us to get married.

I posed the same question the only male student, to get his perspective on early marriages, this is what he said:

> *Student Yusuf:* I think it depends, sometimes the parents chose for you and sometimes you have to find [a wife] on your own. I am 20 years old, my parents

want me to marry but they don't pressure me. I am focusing on school right now so that I can get a good job and I can support myself and my family. If I say I am going to get married right now and I don't have a job yet and a good education. I will have nothing for my family, and you don't want to do that. First it is school, good job and then family.

For the male student, his rationale was education first and then a good job that will enable him support his family. While the boys might consider pursuing an advanced degree, most of the girls are planning to finish the two-year college and then get married, because by then they will be around 20 to 22 years old. That is considered too old to be still single in their culture. In addition, the culture does not allow young girls to move away from the home and live alone unless they are married, these cultural clashes are conflicting with the assimilation of these students:

> *Student Aisha*: There are a lot of clashes, it's just so different. People think it is supper weird that I am still staying with my mum and I am in college. I can't leave home until I am married, it doesn't affect me and when they ask me that question, I just say I love my mom and she takes care of me […].
>
> When I go to school, I want to be able to join clubs and become a part of the college system and everything. But my mum says no 'you are going to school and you are coming back home' and I am like 'mom I need to do this, I am not even living in college or anything how will I make friends?' I need to experience the college life and I am 19 almost 20 I know the difference [knows what is wrong and right].

Based on student Aisha's quote, she cannot live outside her parents' home without being married, and when she is asked instead of explaining that it is their culture, she prefers saying it is her choice. She wants to assimilate into the American culture, and the college environment where students are members of various clubs and organizations. While most of the meetings for these clubs would be in the evening or after her classes, her mother still expects her to go back home as soon as her classes are over. Mostly to help with the chores or just to make sure that they do not misbehave or meet with boys. Student Amina says,

When I come home I clean, I do some chores […] before I go to school I help…when I come back I do the same. My parents are really strict, when I go out of the house I have to come back home after school and take care of my siblings.

For the female students, gender roles as prescribe by their culture expect them to help their mothers in raising their younger children and perform chores around the house.

Women as Breadwinners – *invisible in education, visible in domestic labor*

For this study, I have interviewed five parents and only one of them is a woman. The Somali Bantu women are invisible in their children's education and their own educational achievement. They adopt the role of breadwinners, once they arrive in the U.S, they search for domestic work and participate in bringing money into the family. Yet, they often are illiterate, have Basic English language proficiency or even none. They depend on their men and children for translation services. Critical race feminism and legal scholar Wing (2000) notes, "women of color may be simultaneously dominated in the context of imperialism, neocolonialism, or occupation as well as local patriarchy, culture, and customs" (p. 12). Clearly, the patriarchal society, both in the Somali Bantu and the American culture relegate the women to an inferior role. Their children have learned to blame their mother's lack of the English language despite being in America for 'over ten years'. The fathers do the same thing, consider Parent Hussein's quotes:

> *Parent Hussein:* She doesn't know anything, it's me who is doing the follow up and everything [in our children schools]. If you ask her [about their children's school performance] she doesn't know anything. My wife didn't go to Bob school [ESL classes for adults] she just started working. She doesn't need to speak English to work as a [building] cleaner. They don't need the English language, 'just do your work and you are okay'.

Notice that Parent Hussein accepts the concept that for domestic work, his wife does not need to know English, however he blames her for not participating in their children's education.

With Basic English language skills, the women are qualified for the low-paying jobs. Because these families need two incomes in the household to survive, the resettlement agencies and government offices often encourage them to find employment within the first six months they first arrive in the U.S. The interview with Parent Halima, who is a single parent of six children, was conducted at the Youth Center in their neighborhood where was assigned by the JobsPlus employment services to clean at the center. Before that she has been unemployed for a long period of time because of health issues, as a welfare recipient, she was assisted by the employment service to find a job. As the sole breadwinner, parent Halima is forced to find any kind of employment to help raise her children who are still at home. Other women who are married are also actively working despite their minimal English language skills or education. When I asked the community leaders that I had interviewed what their wives are doing in terms of getting higher education, this is what they said:

> *Community leader Baraka:* [when we came here] she had younger kids so she stayed at home and there was a literacy volunteer teacher who came to our home to teach her English. She does speak English but she is not ready enough to take the GED exam. So she is taking time to get her English proficiency level higher for the GED certificate.
>
> *Community leader Musa*: [my wife] is at home with my son. She went to high school but only up to 11th grade and I advise her to go back to school and finish. She's planning to go get her GED. She also came as a refugee four years ago.
>
> *Community leader Musa*: My sister doesn't have her GED certificate but she is planning to get one. She is now attending ESL classes at a school. She wants to improve her English first because when she goes to GED they will give her difficult assignment, so I told her to go to ESL first. When she came to the U.S she was 18 years old and she didn't go to school but started working.

While their men were able to attend school, get the high school diploma certificate and attend colleges, the Somali Bantu women were at home raising children and working as domestic workers or cleaners. All the men interviewed above admitted that their wives are now planning to get their high school equivalence certificate after living in the U.S. for a longer

period. They acknowledge the difficulties the women will go through in getting the diploma, based on their English language skills.

Discussions: Negotiating Multiple Identities

The findings of the second research question that examine the role of race, class, gender, language, cultural and religious practices in the academic achievement of Somali Bantu, suggest that there are challenging and marginalizing aspects based on their identities. The elements of critical race theory "acknowledges the intercentricity of racialized oppression – the layers of subordination based on race, gender, class, immigration status, surname, phenotype, accent, and sexuality" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2012 p. 25). Certainly, for the Somali Bantus the subordination is based on the intersection of their race, gender, religion, accent, and culture. These factors relegate them to 'otherness' within the schools, society and the community they live in.

In addition, as Mitchell (2012) notes "where biological race can no longer be an explicit, legal tool for discrimination, culture and language have become powerful factors in institutionalized discrimination and racist outcomes, especially for multilingual learners and their teachers" (p. 340). Stevens (2009) agrees and argues that English language learners are relegated to an 'underclass'. Since their race, ethnicity, religion, and accent are considered inferior, the students were subjected to discriminative acts such as bullying and silencing. Most importantly, because at the beginning their English language proficiency was minimal, most students suffered in silence as they could not express their feelings.

Forms of bullying that include physical, verbal, social or relational bullying has been experienced by some of the Somali Bantus students. Scholars Scherr & Larson (2010) define

'immigrant bullying' as "bullying that targets another's immigrant status or family history of immigration in the form of taunts and slurs, derogatory references to the immigration process, physical aggression, social manipulation, or exclusion because of immigration status" (p. 225). While none of the Somali Bantus responded to being bullied because of their immigration status as refugees, however their belonging in the perceived less powerful ethnic group justifies being the victims of bullying.

The consequences of bullying as seen from the Somali Bantu students and any other victim of bullying include academic difficulties and self-esteem issues, for example, because of their accent the students tend to be silent in class therefore the teachers end up thinking they do not understand the content taught and are thus labeled special education (Ghong et al, 2007). In regard to ethnicity and identity issues the Somali Bantu community perceive the importance of belonging, integration and assimilation in their new home.

In negotiating their identity and culture the Somali Bantu students often resort to 'accommodation without assimilation' (Ogbu, 1987) or 'biculturalism' (Kapteijns & Arman, 2008). This means "the development of bicultural competencies and relationships that allow them to draw support from their own ethnic community (parents and co-ethnic peers) as well as the host community (teachers, counselors, and mainstream peers. Such biculturalism allows them to avoid "psychological discontinuities" while developing high self-esteem and positive ethnic identity" (p. 25). Based on the findings of the students, fitting in to the dominant society's culture was a strategy for survival as well as academic success.

Critical race feminism analysis places the educational experiences of the Somali Bantu women at the center and not at the margins. It is mostly the Somali Bantu girls who were subjected to racialization based on their gender, religion and ethnicity identities. The identities

of the Somali Bantu male revolved around their race and ethnicity, while the women's visible marker the Hijab, justified discrimination. Similar to the study conducted by De Voe (2002) on the Somali girls attending schools in St. Louis, Missouri, the "visibility of the refugee Muslim girls drew hostile reactions from their classmates" (p. 237). The oppression of the patriarchal and capitalist society, islamophobia and racism undermines the progress of the Somali Bantu women, both academically as well as professionally. The Somali Bantu culture and gender roles expects the women to be child bearers and workers. The capitalist U.S. society expects the minority women to find work, raise their children while contributing to the economy.

Theme three: Role of Ethnic-based Community Organizations

Learning is a lifelong process that doesn't end… When we come together we tell the kids to learn because when you do, it is better for you, your family, and the community. That is why we are focused on education (Community leader Musa).

The community is the core of the society, if you are not involved you do not belong anywhere (Student Aisha).

The Somali Bantu community in Upstate City, NY has established ethnic-based organizations that provide additional resettlement advises and services for effective integration purposes. These services include literacy, social services, education for both youth and adults, conflict resolution. I interviewed three leaders of two community organizations in Upstate City. The role of the organizations has not only been in transitioning the resettlement of the community, but also ensuring that their children are provided with enough support to be successful in schools. According to Community leader Baraka, "the SB refugee community is an ethnic based community organization, helping refugees from Africa and all over the world, even though it is by Somali Bantus we help all refugees in order to bridge the gap"(personal interview). Gail Hopkins (2006) states that "the role of community organizations can be

influential in rebuilding community and belonging and providing a safe and empowering setting in which individuals and communities may regain confidence and begin the process of integration within the receiving society" (p. 362). The community organization is significant, as it provides social services as well as cultural components:

> *Community leader Baraka:* We established this organization to help the community members who are in need for services. Once the families arrive here, they know nothing. Even if you are educated, when I came here I didn't know anything despite the orientation we got while still in Kenya. It is very challenging if you don't know English, very challenging.

> When you come here you are resettled by resettlement agencies. And in Upstate City we are lucky we got two agencies, in some states they have one and others have more than two. The agencies help you from the first time you arrive here, normally the service they provide is for four months and the remaining 2 months they will leave you and see what you can do. The first 4 months they are committed to help you get a job, and if not they refer you to the department of state services. After 6 months you are on your own, nobody will help you with your medical or social services appointments. Nobody will help you fill out application forms, you can still go to the agencies for help but they may not have time for you.

The organization and the leaders serve as important representatives of the Somali Bantu community's integration and transition.

Educational Services & Advocacy

Because of the inequality in education and the difficulties in schools experienced by the Somali Bantu students, one of the community leader decided to be an advocate for the community:

> *Community leader Abdi:* I started advocating for the Somali parents [in Connecticut], I believed that the teachers did not have enough resources or training to teach the ESL kids. When I came to Upstate City, it was the same thing even though there was a large number of Somali, they did not have an advocate. [...] Instead of keeping quiet I decided to advocate for them. I got the whole Somali family to a meeting and I told them 'the only way to overcome this challenge and to move forward is to organize themselves as a group' and then we started the Saturday [tutoring] program at one of our houses. The reason we did that is they were lagging behind all of them, they had to repeat

classes and most of the time they had discipline issues. We thought that if we start a community organization and we tell our kids about the life where they came from. Invite the school administration to come talk to our kids that would alleviate some of the problems.

Most important, for this study are the educational services provided by community organizations, which include tutoring programs for the Somali Bantu children, citizenship classes for the adults, and translation services:

> *Community leader Abdi:* As a community we help [the ESL classrooms] to supplement those services. Especially those kids who are below their grade level. We get their report cards and look at the grade levels and help them at the center, we are very careful looking at their report card, that way we know what that child actually needs what services they need.

The tutoring programs at the community centers are also valuable for the children, despite challenges in relation to funding. The community has received assistance from the school district, teachers, professors and also the students attending the universities. At the time of the interview one of the community organization was planning to restart the tutoring program they had before:

> *Community leader Baraka*: We are working on restarting the Saturday tutoring program, we had support from the district and the university. We have had many kids graduate high school and are in college [because of the program]. We have received books which were donated by the school district and the teachers association. We have a lot of supplies, but we are looking for bigger spaces for the program. Once we get established we can accommodate over 100 kids. We are looking for a conducive learning environment for the kids. A professor from the university is helping us recruit more tutors and funding, she is a great asset for the community.

The students interviewed also participated in the community centers in various roles. As Gandara & Contreras (2009) argue, "students who beat the odds often possess a passion for helping their families and others in their community, based on the inequities or overt discrimination they have experienced in their own lives or witnessed with their parents" (p. 247). Indeed, Student Aisha who majors in human counselling, intends to go back after

graduation and work in her community, as a counselor to help her people overcome the challenges. She has started helping the community by volunteering at the organization:

> *Student Aisha*: I have been teaching kids here [at the community center]. I teach the Quran on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. And on Tuesdays and Thursdays I teach English. I also translate, I do job applications for people I help them when they come to the center. I do this from July to August during the summer.

Community leader Abdi who worked as a teaching assistant and nationality worker notes the challenges he went through while trying to advocate for relevant services:

> As a liaison, I talked to the teachers and the parents, sometimes I did home visits to talk to the parents. By visiting the homes it helped me understand what is going on so that I could talk to the school administrator and tell them what is going on with the community. I would also initiate a conference for the Somali students, talk to them about graduating requirements, school discipline and code of conduct. I advocated for conferences to at least be held once a week, for all the students to come to the cafeteria and talk about what is going on, and discuss everything with the principals. It was intended to be a mediation between teachers and the students, we have asked several times to be given time to speak to our kids, we pushed for it but it has never happened.

Through his role as community organization leader and a nationality worker for the school district, his advocacy for the community was constrained by certain barriers in the school system and administration. Even though the school district hired native speakers to liaise with the parents, his work was still undermined thus rendered ineffective.

Integration & Resettlement services

In addition to the education services, the community also provides services that the refugee resettlement agencies are not able to provide anymore because of funds. Funding for the resettlement agencies and the ethnic-based community organizations depend on non-profit and government grants or contracts (Cordero-Guzman, 2007; Hopkins, 2006). The resettlement agencies are obligated to assist the refugees resettle for a period of six months,

the ethnic-based organizations take over the responsibilities. If they can secure self-help grants then they are able to provide the services.

> *Community leader Musa:* We work with the refugee agencies together, they would refer people to us for help if they cannot provide for them. We help them fill out applications for social services, Medicaid, and other benefits they might need. We also help them with the school application, college applications and financial aids. All these services we try to provide because they cannot get them anywhere else. When they go to the refugee resettlement agencies, they would be told: 'because you came here 4 months ago we don't have funding to help you anymore so go find friends to help you.' Most of them will go to friends or family member for help, and they would be referred to me at the community. They would come to the community and we help them, we offer ESL citizenship classes for adults, we teach them so that they can help themselves and their children. That is how we help the community, we help them navigate the system.

> *Community leader Abdi:* We try to provide transportation services, because they are new to the country they don't know where to go. I take them where they want to go, if it is to the social services agencies or hospital visits they call me and I take them. I also do home visits, I show them how to use the kitchen, how to use the dishwasher, how to turn on the lights because at the refugee camps they didn't have these things. I show them everything. I also tell them what to wear in the winter or in the summer. I show them the grocery stores.

The above services that the community leaders have described are usually provided by resettlement agencies. During the participant observation at the resettlement agency in Upstate City, I observed how the case worker held orientation sections for the newly arrived refugees. Mostly these orientations are not adequate enough for these people who have just arrived from the refugee camps where the environment is totally different from the American one. Therefore, the ethnic-based organization run by their own people is imperative for the transition and integration of the refugees.

The importance of community advocacy and participating in the elevation of the community is perfectly summarized by Student Aisha:

My goal is to become a leader in my community and to be a global leader to inspire people to be a part of community, the community is the core of the society. If you are not involved you don't belong anywhere else. So I want to tell people to do community work, volunteer, be committed to where you live. I want to inspire people to go out there and do you, don't let anybody change you.

Discussions: Advocates of their people

In relation to the third research question- what role does the Somali Bantu organization contribute to the academic success of the community? As the voice of the people, the Somali Bantu community organizations provide significant services for the integration and upward social mobility of the resettled refugees within the new environment. In addition, the American way of life and cultural values differ to those of the Somali Bantus. Since they possess strong communal identity and cultural values, the organizations serve as the platform for the preservation of cultural values, beliefs and language. "The reason why we established the community is to maintain our culture, while we learn other culture" (Community leader Abdi). Clearly as Newland et al (2007) state, "as with other immigrants, refugees try to form a new identity by striking a balance between American values and ways of life and those of their countries of origin. While many adult refugees express a desire to preserve their cultural values, beliefs, and languages among their descendants, refugee children are often challenged to balance their heritage with the American values and culture to which they have grown accustomed" (p. 25). While they are providing these services, the educational services they provide for their children are also imperative.

However, to be able to provide adequate services, the community faces challenges that include inadequate or no funding, tension among the community, and absence of schools and educators support and cooperation. Limited funding and unfunded programs for the community organizations service providers affect the implementation of services. For

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instance, one of the organizations intends to restart Saturday tutoring programs, however, they lack a bigger space to accommodate the children due to funding or donations. The difficulty in acquiring funds leads to the frustration of not being able to implement services and programs. Furthermore, as the resettlement agencies shift the service they are supposed to be providing to the ethnic community based organizations, this is also "a shift to a diminished service, especially as funding sources are precarious and must be re-applied for at the end of each funding cycle" (Hopkins, 2006 p.367).

The absence of unity among the Somali Bantu community also contributes to the challenges in implementing community-based service provision. For this study, I interviewed two different Somali Bantu organizations which are situated right across the street from each other. While one of the organizations has a bigger office space that could accommodate large number of students or adults during the tutoring or citizenship classes, the other organization has a smaller space and less resources. Gail Hopkins' (2006) comparative study of the Somali community organizations in London and Toronto noted that there was lack of unity and communication among the community members. Hopkins (2006) notes that "the duplication of projects compete not only for the same resources but for the same target audience, and a lack of willingness to co-ordinate with other Somali organizations. [In addition] the presence of numerous small organizations reflects clan divisions and has resulted in a lack of united direction and objectives amongst Somalis which acts against wider representation" (p. 370) this fragmentation that leads to competing for resources amongst themselves can be considered as a result of ethnic and clan division that began while in Somalia and continues in the U.S. Certainly, the disunity among the Somali Bantu community is affecting their community development and integration.

Summary of findings

This chapter has provided an extensive presentation of the experiences of the Somali Bantu. Their voices are presented through the three main themes/research questions; navigating formal schooling, role of race, gender, language, religion and cultural factors and lastly the role of community organization. The subthemes are challenges in education: grade placement, ESL classrooms, labeling as special education, drop-out, and suspension. Success: academic resources, parental support, high school graduation and college. In answering the second research question, subthemes such as bullying, identity and belonging, silencing, assimilation and cultural clashes, religion and cultural differences, gender issues and islamophobia highlighted the experiences of the Somali Bantus. Their community organization provide services that are conducive to their academic achievement as well as integration and transition within their new homes.

The Somali Bantu in Upstate City have reported both positive and challenging aspects in relation to their education and academic achievement. Furthermore, their multiple identities- race, religion, gender, immigration status, language and accent have contributed to the challenges in education and in the society. Most of the discussions from the literature review conducted in chapter two support and extend the knowledge on the education of the Somali Bantu and minorities. The next concluding chapter highlights the implications of the findings and offers recommendations for further research and policy implementations.

Chapter 5: Challenging and Analyzing Inequity in Education

Critical Discussions and Analysis

Deconstructing research question one: What are the experiences of Somali-Bantu refugees in formal schooling?

The findings from this research suggest that there are some challenges as well as successes incurred by the Somali Bantus attending schools in Upstate City. There are challenges which arose due to grade placement, ESL vs mainstream classes, drop-outs, suspension, labeling as Special Education, and teachers/parents blaming students. Notably the Somali Bantus were able to challenge the ideologies of meritocracy, color-blindness, and equal opportunity limitations by beating the odds and graduating high school and beginning college. The resources provided by schools, colleges, community organization, and parental support have been conducive in the success of these students.

Critical race theory in education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) stress the significance of theorizing race in analyzing school inequity. Challenging the dominant ideology of color-blindness is one of the tenets of CRT, however, the Somali Bantus in Upstate City have failed to notice the colorblindness ideology thus suggesting that the form of covert institutionalized racism is functioning. As Bonilla-Silva (2010) notes, "compared to Jim Crow racism, the ideology of color blindness seems like "racism lite." Instead of relying on name calling (niggers, Spics, Chinks), color-blind racism otherizes softly ("these people are human, too"); instead of proclaiming God placed minorities in the world in a servile position, it suggest *they are behind because they do not work hard enough* [...] Yet this new ideology has become a formidable political tool for the maintenance of the racial order" (p. 3 *my emphasis*).

Certainly, my research has shown the Somali Bantu's obliviousness to covert racism and meritocracy ideologies as they blame their failure 'because they do not work hard' or as Parent Hussein says, "it is not the government's fault, they want everyone to go to school and be educated. The kids are the problem" (Personal interview, 2014). On the other hand, students acknowledge that the teachers do want them to succeed but they will only help those who 'want to learn'. Comparable to scholars Kapteijns & Arman (2008) research, they explain that "many Somalis have been caught unaware by American racial discrimination. They do not regard their black skin as the liability or handicap that mainstream society often insist it is" (p. 28). Unfortunately, this concept has been internalized by most of the Somali Bantus in Upstate City.

Michelle Alexander (2012) points out "our blindness also prevents us from seeing the racial and structural divisions that persist in society: the segregated, unequal schools, the segregated, jobless ghettos, and the segregated public discourse — a public conversation that excludes the current pariah caste" (p. 228). It is also important to note the inner city school district is segregated, fifty percent of the students identify as Blacks or African American, 13 percent as Hispanic or Latino and 24 percent as white.

The quality of the public schools is not important for the Somali Bantu, as they compare the schools in the U.S. to the ones they had in Africa and not the public schools in the suburbs (Ogbu, 1987). Indeed, "the immigrants often compare themselves with the standard of their home country or with their peers "back home" or in the immigrants' neighborhood. When they make such a comparison they usually find plenty of evidence that they have made significant improvements in their lives and/or that there are good prospects for their children because of better opportunities in their new country" (Ogbu, 1987 p. 328).

Similarly, Hussein's (2011) study of the Somali community in Minnesota regarding charter schools as choice schools, notes that the Somali parents are uninformed of the quality of the schools their children attend. In the case of the Somalis in Minnesota, the charter schools offered them 'safe spaces' for their children as they were grounded on religion and culture. However, they failed to question the success of the schools, as the schools they registered their children were the lowest performing in the State.

Despite beating the odds and graduating high school, these students are still facing challenges in colleges. As the schools they considered equal and adequate did not provide "good foundation that prepares them to college" (Community leader Abdi). They also internalized the lowered expectations their teachers had set for them and believed the micro-aggression and stereotype practices. They became the victims of inequity in education that are hidden by the dominant society's color-blindness and equal opportunity ideologies.

Deconstructing research question two: What role does race, class, gender, language, cultural and religious practices play in attaining academic achievement?

The findings of the second research question that addresses the implications of the multiple identities in education are highlighted through the intersection of race, gender, language, religion and culture. The subthemes include: belonging and identity, bullying, silencing, assimilation, cultural clashes. Religious and cultural hostilities; islamophobia, gender issues and arranged marriages.

Racialization in the American society undermines the education of the Somali Bantus as their multiple identities; race, religion, class, gender, language and accent, cultural values contribute to their 'otherness' thus reinforcing the marginalization they have been through as

a minority group in Africa. Eurocentric and Christian schools they attended and are attending do not offer a safe space for practicing their religion or cultural identities. In addition, the teachers as well as other American students negatively questioned their Muslim and cultural identities therefore contributing to their struggles in identity, assimilation, and self-determination. Islamophobia is experienced in the schools, particularly by female students, as "fitting in at school is promoted implicitly or explicitly by educators, peers and school policies, and often comes at a great expense to Muslim youth" (Bigelow, 2008 p. 30).

Similar to other Somali youth in the U.S., the students were torn between being Americanized in order to 'fit in' or maintaining their Somali culture and identities (Bigelow, 2008, 2010; De Voe, 2002; Basford, 2008). Instead they opted to the 'accommodation without assimilation' (Ogbu, 1987) strategy. This strategy allowed them to fit in as Americans while maintaining their culture, values, traditions and identity. As noted elsewhere, due to their multiple identities, the Somali Bantu have experienced discrimination in the schools and the society. Their race, gender, religion, culture, language and accent are considered the 'other' and therefore inferior to the dominant society. Somali Bantu parents are worried that their children are becoming Americanized, to fit in as Americans, thus losing their culture and language. However, similar to other research (Bigelow, 2008, 2010; De Voe, 2002), findings show that the youth identify strongly as Somali or Somali Bantu and Muslim regardless of how Americanized they might become.

On the other hand, their parents and community leaders acknowledge the significance of the U.S. citizenship as a means of naturalization, as Somali or Somali Bantu Americans and also a means to economic mobility the status affords them. However, their historical racialization in Somalia, in the refugee camps, and the racial hostilities they have come across

while in the U.S. underscores the significance of holding on to their culture, identity, and language.

Mitchell (2012) states that, "culture and language have become powerful factors in institutionalized discrimination and racist outcomes, especially for multilingual learners and their teachers" (p. 340). Indeed, the notion that English language matters and Standard English is the only language accepted as the norm in the American society thus the minority language should be silenced. The concept that Somali Bantu language and accent has no place in the schools has been accepted by a Somali Bantu parent. "I removed [my son] from that school because the Bantu were many, he had a problem changing his accent. He was talking but the teachers could not understand him" (Parent Hussein). He removed his son from a school that had other Somali Bantus because his son was only speaking in their native language thus not able to speak or learn English with no accent. However, the parent did not understand that the accent is part of the identity of his son, furthermore he let the teachers convince him to separate his son from others thus justifying 'intra-ethnicity' classification and conflicts. As already mentioned elsewhere, scholars Ghong et al (2007) note that "language is used to bargain, assert, affirm, negotiate, and to express one's emotions and thoughts. It is most embarrassing then when African children are rebuked because of their accents or told that they do not speak correctly and cannot be understood" (p. 67). The silencing of this child and others who speak with an accent is racist, demeans the child's self-esteem, negates his identity as well as sets them up for academic failure.

In gender identity issues, the Somali Bantu is a patriarchal group as well as the American society. (Global) Critical race feminism theories (Wing, 2000, Crenshaw, 1991), provides an opportunity to highlight the challenges of women of color to the center instead of

the margin. Wing (2000) notes that "women of color may be simultaneously dominated in the context of imperialism, neocolonialism, or occupation as well as local patriarchy, culture, and customs" (p. 12). Many of the Somali Bantu women have not had the same educational opportunities as their husbands. Once they arrived in the U.S, their role has been relegated to child-bearing and/or working as domestic laborers. They do not have a high school diploma or the alternative GED and their English skills is not at the same level as their spouses. The children blame their mothers for not being able to speak English despite being in the U.S for 'over ten years'. Yet, they fail to note the structural barriers that hinder these women to get out of the house and learn English, go to school, and join the professional world.

Additionally, the Somali Bantu women are required to be married at an earlier age. Although early and arranged marriages are traditions practiced by the Bantus, the participants in this study mention that they have not been forced to get married yet. The Somali Bantu women and girls wearing of the hijab/ veil and their dresses have subjected them to hostilities by the American society. The veiling is part of the cultural as well as religious identities, and it can also be a political and resistance tool against the islamophobia American society.

Deconstructing research question three: What role does the Somali-Bantu organization contribute to the academic success of the community?

The themes that highlight the findings of the third research question are; advocacy, integration services, ethnic and cultural preservation, academic resources and services. Student Aisha says "the community is the core of the society. If you are not involved you do not belong anywhere else. So I want to tell people to do community work, volunteer, be committed to where you live." Similarly as Hopkins (2006) states "the role of community organizations can be influential in rebuilding community and belonging and providing a safe

and empowering setting in which individuals and communities may regain confidence and begin the process of integration within the receiving society" (p. 362). Therefore, the community organization is imperative for the success of the Somali Bantu in resettling as well as a support system for their children. The organization educational services, presented the students and the parents the opportunity to learn as a community while maintaining their culture, traditions, values and language. This research shows the importance of the ethnic based communities; either culturally, educationally, or as advocates/political representatives of their communities.

Drawing from the Pan Africanism tenet of unity and unifying people of African descent, the Somali Bantu community in the diaspora advocates for self-empowerment of the people. In addition, through cultural events organized by the organization, they not only educate their children on the African culture, they are also educating the American society to appreciate their culture and traditions. Most importantly, the tension between African Americans and Somali Bantu in their neighborhood can be alleviated by the community mediation. One of the reasons the Somali Bantu in Upstate City and anywhere in the diaspora establish such centers, is to maintain their culture and language.

It is important to also note that the disunity among the Somali community stems from the historical background in Somalia; the division among the clans and the marginalization of the Somali Bantu by the dominant Somalis. These conflicts result in competition for resources among the people and hinders a unified political representation.

Implications

It is important to note that the Somali Bantu community take education as a very important aspect. There has been positive and successful schooling experiences and academic achievements based on the findings, and the challenges they have gone through has made them more determined to succeed. Research and studies on multicultural education have been conducted and policies have been implemented. Based on the findings of this study, there are implications for educators, policy makers, and the Somali Bantu community that need to be addressed.

For educators and administrators, appropriate grade placement for the newly arrival refugee children is conducive for an effective learning outcomes for the students as well as their teachers. The findings of this study, as well as others that are cited in this thesis, suggest that students are placed in a grade level commensurate to their age. However, they face challenges based on their prior educational experience, the English language, formal classrooms environment, different curriculum, and self-esteem issues. Therefore, this study offers insight into the challenges of assigning immigrant students into classes based on their age and not their academic achievement. Alternative measures such as pre-school orientation for newcomers, summer classes and extra classes should be offered for such students to successfully graduate on time.

For multicultural educators and school administrators, this study is useful in measuring the effects of ESL classrooms. The English as Second Language services are perceived by the Somali Bantus as well as other immigrants studied as a positive aspect and a 'safe space' for their learning. Students have mentioned that their ESL teachers have been helpful and they have taught them in a slower version than in the mainstream classrooms.

Yet, as this study shows the students are still required to take ESL classes while in college. The information this study obtained indicates that either the current ESL services does not provide enough resources for the students or it was not effective. Perhaps certain factors are influential for the challenges of the English language learners that need to be addressed for a successful ESL services.

In addition to the ESL services, the liaison/nationality worker hired by the school district is a positive aspect for easing the communication between the parents, students and the teachers. Therefore, for the educators and administrators, the role of the liaison worker is useful for the growing diverse classrooms and society. They serve as advocates and cultural ambassadors as they provide cultural services to the educators and the community. Research question two demonstrates the marginalization of the Somali Bantu students based on their race, gender, religion, language and culture. Perhaps the liaison workers can help alleviate some of the issues these students go through in classes. For example, to restrain islamophobia and bullying, the liaison/nationality workers can assist the teacher in educating all students about the Islamic religious values. This would be a great support for the school district and teachers, as they will be educated on the immigrant's culture, religion and values.

The school district should also try and encourage the parents to visit school more often and they should also go to the community organizations, reach out to them and connect with the community. Through these connections, the schools can learn the concerns and challenges of the students and be able to address them effectively. On the other hand, leaders in the community organizations should inform the parents of school choice, resources and services available for their children, not only the availability but also the efficacy of the services and resources.

For policy-makers and refugee resettlement agencies, financial and resource support for the ethnic based organizations is fundamental. The allocation of resources to these organizations can positively increase the academic success of the community. This study, has identified how the organization supports their children by providing educational services such as tutoring and after-school programs, ESL and citizenship classes. Furthermore, the organizations are providing important services that the resettlement agencies do not provide after six months of arrival. It is clear that the Somali Bantu community organizations serve as advocates and representatives of the community in effective integration. This information and other research on the role of ethnic based organizations should be influential during the resettling of the refugees and the services offered. Policy-makers should be able to finance the services provided by the community organizations.

Limitations of the Study

For a novice social science researcher, it has been an empowering experience conducting this research. As an African and an immigrant, the Somali Bantu community warmly welcomed me into their homes, stores, community organizations and accepted me as one of their own. The information I have included in this research is solely based from the participants' perspectives. With that being said, my sample did not include every Somali Bantu person living in Upstate city, therefore the nine participants interviewed do not represent the whole community.

The students interviewed had already graduated from high school and are attending college, therefore their recollections from the elementary to high school experiences might be distorted. However, due to limitations of the study period, I could not follow up on their

experiences in college to analyze how well their education in schools have prepared them for the college success and employment opportunities.

It is important to note, this study highlights the experiences of the Somali Bantu community and not of their teachers and administrators. Additionally, I did not collect any data from the schools/administrators or observed their classrooms and teaching practices. Any information that relates to the school setting or educators has been conveyed by the participants and/or supported by other research studies and literature.

Recommendations for further research

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of formal schooling of Somali Bantus resettled in Upstate City. And how their race, gender, language, cultural and religious practices affected their academic achievement. The study also explored the role of the Somali Bantu community organization in contributing to the academic success of the community. Data was collected through qualitative research methods and analyzed through the lens of critical race and critical race feminism theories.

This study applied the critical race theory and critical race feminism to analyze the experience of the Somali Bantu immigrants. The theory has been helpful in understanding the color-blindness ideology of the American society, the inequality in education, and racial discrimination. The theoretical methodology has provided the Somali Bantus a platform to voice their experiences while challenging the deficit ideologies. However, a theoretical framework that analyses the experiences of forced migrants is fundamental as their struggles differ to the minorities. Perhaps an African critical race theory 'AfriCrit' that relates to the

African immigrants is essential for the analysis and voices of the African immigrants in the U.S to be heard.

For future research, a study on the ESL services in colleges can perhaps shed the light on the effectiveness of the prior ESL services provided while still in school. In addition, this study focused on Somali Bantu fathers in relation to their role in the education of their children, albeit unintentional. To hear from the Somali Bantu mothers, who nurture their children and therefore are very important in their academic journey. It is relevant for a study to be conducted on how the Somali Bantu mothers support their children's education and the interaction with the educators. Women's invisibility in their children's education as my study has shown needs to be addressed, they have to be moved from the margins to the center so that they do not become alienated from their children, society, professions and the academia. Furthermore, a study addressing the Somali Bantu children and youth on assimilation and language barrier. From this study, the youth blamed their parents for not being able to speak English despite living in the U.S for over ten years. Perhaps a deeper analysis on this aspect is imperative.

While this study focused on the Somali Bantu refugees, other refugees from Africa and as well from other nations were not considered. To understand and compare the experiences of all refugees, a future comparative study is imperative. Additionally, the academic achievement of all the ESL students is significant in understanding how immigrant students from different countries perform in class and negotiate the school environment. Furthermore, a study addressing the academic achievement gap between African American and African students is significant in understanding their school performances and challenges in the public schools.

Final Words

In analyzing and deconstructing institutional and systemic racism, critical race theory provides a framework in challenging the racism and racial stereotypes in schools and in the society. By analyzing, highlighting, and discussing the concepts of race in education and the dominant ideologies of equal opportunity and equity in education, we are bringing the issue to the center of discussion and voicing the challenges of the Somali Bantus as well as all minorities. In highlighting, providing examples and counter-narratives of the consequences of institutionalized and systemic racism, we challenge the color-blindness ideology while advocating for equality, as all human beings are equal. The findings in this research suggest that racism is still manifested in institutions and that people, policies, and institutions unconsciously or consciously engage in racism.

As a Pan Africanism scholar, I decided to conduct a research of the Somali Bantu community because of the historical marginalization, colonialism, war and conflict, displacement and settlement in a different environment. This study adds to the Pan Africanism movement and philosophy of unity and unifying people of African descent, and restoring their dignity and humanity. Evidently, the Somali Bantu community in Upstate City advocates for self-determination, self-reliance, advocacy, unity, community formation and belonging. To alleviate the tension between the Somali Bantu and African Americans in their neighborhood, the organization leaders serve as mediators by representing their community and organizing cultural events that informs the American society of their culture and beliefs. Furthermore, Pan Africanism movement advocates for religious tolerance and condemns Islamophobia, by highlighting the challenges experienced by Somali Bantus due to their

religion and practices, it is my hope as a Pan Africanist that religion and cultural tolerance will be realized as part of social justice and human rights.

Additionally, anti-racist and imperialism resistance, equal educational opportunities and gender equality are some of the goals of Pan Africanism. The right to equal education regardless of race, gender, identity, language, or class is significant for restoring humanity and dignity of the Somali Bantus and all Africans and persons of African descent in the U.S and globally as well as a means to self-determination and reliance. African women and the youth are joining the Pan Africanism movement to portray their struggles as well as resist patriarchy and domination. For the young Somali Bantu girls in this study, the educational opportunities they are afforded, despite the challenges, not only empowers them but also leads them to be active participants in community development and self-determination.

Finally, as an immigrant, Pan Africanist scholar and an African, I can relate to some of the Somali Bantu struggles, however, what they are experiencing does not reflect my experiences. I hope their voices are heard and changes will be implemented to make their settlement, transition and integration into their new homes easier, equal, and welcoming. Education is a human right, therefore access to equal education is a right for the Somali Bantu refugees and for every human being regardless of their race, gender, sexuality, class, language, accent, culture, and religion and immigration status.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Questions
<u>Students:</u>

1. Can you tell me about your childhood, where and when were you born?

2. How was your experience in the refugee camps in Kenya?

> If not in Kenya, have you ever lived in a refugee camp elsewhere? How was the experience?

3. When did you arrive in the United States? Tell me about your arrival.

4. What grade were you placed in when you first arrived in Syracuse? Which school?

5. What were the challenges?

6. What was your favorite subject at school? and why?

7. How did you get along with the teachers and students?

8. If you were to go back to high school again, what would you like changed?

9. Did you pursue any further education?

10. Where and what did you do?

11. Tell me how your parents assisted you with school work?

12. Did you ever feel discriminated against while at school?

13. Tell me about the cultural clashes

14. What are your goals? Where do you see yourself in 5 years?

<u>Parents/Community leaders:</u>

1. How was your experience in the refugee camps in Kenya or elsewhere?

2. Tell me about your journey from the refugee camps to here.

3. How was the resettlement and transition to your new home?

4. Can you tell me about your educational experience in Somalia and in Kenya?

5. How did you support your child with his/her homework?

6. How do you support your child's academic/college goals?

7. Tell me about any educational services you are getting here

8. Do you think your children are getting the education they deserve?

9. What would you like to be changed?

10. How does the community support the children?

Appendix B: Informed Consent

INFORMED CONSENT

DEPARTMENT OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES
200 Sims Hall, Syracuse, NY 13244, Phone number (315) 443-4302 Fax: (315) 443-1725

Title: Exploring the Educational Experiences of Somali-Bantu community in NY

My name is Vivian Guetler and I am a graduate student at Syracuse University. I am inviting you to participate in a research study. Involvement in the study is voluntary, so you may choose to participate or not. This sheet will explain the study to you and please feel free to ask questions about the research if you have any. I will be happy to explain anything in detail if you wish.

I am interested in learning more about the educational experience of the Somali-Bantu in NY. You will be asked to participate in an interview, I will ask you questions relating to your educational experiences. This will take approximately 1.5 hours of your time. All information will be kept confidential. In any articles I write or any presentations that I make, I will use a made-up name for you, and I will not reveal details or I will change details.

I am requesting to audio record you during the interview for the purpose of documenting accurate information. The audio recordings will only be used for data analysis purposes, I am the only one who will have access to the recordings and they will be erased when the study is complete.

We will keep your study data as confidential as possible, with the exception of certain information that we must report for legal or ethical reasons, such as child abuse, elder abuse, or intent to harm yourself or others.

There will be minimal psychological, social or cultural risk and discomforts that might occur when I interview you about your childhood experiences. To minimize the risk and discomforts I will not inquire about the civil war in Somalia.

The benefits for participating in this research will ensure that the experiences, through the voices of the Somali-Bantu community will be published and publicly shared. Therefore, the published experiences will be fundamental for the policy implementation of refugee and immigrant education and also for the understanding of their experiences.

Contact Information:

If you have any questions, concerns, complaints about the research, contact Professor Roy-Campbell at (315) 443-8194. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant,

you have questions, concerns, or complaints that you wish to address to someone other than the investigator, if you cannot reach the investigator, contact the Syracuse University Institutional Review Board at 315-443-3013.

All of my questions have been answered, I am 18 years of age or older, and I wish to participate in this research study. I have received a copy of this consent form.

___ I agree to be audio recorded

___ I do not agree to be audio recorded

_____   _____

Signature of participant   Date

_____

Printed name of participant

_____   _____

Signature of researcher   Date

_____

Printed name of researcher

VITA

Name: Vivian Fiona Guetler

Place of birth: Mombasa, Kenya

Education: Alpen Adria Klagenfurt University, Klagenfurt, Austria

                                        Bachelor of Arts in English and American Studies, 2013

Graduate School: Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York

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