

The University of San Francisco

## USF Scholarship: a digital repository @ Gleeson Library | Geschke Center

---

Doctoral Dissertations

Theses, Dissertations, Capstones and Projects

---

12-2019

### Community Leader-Scholars With Refugee Experiences: Collective Hope, Healing, and Multi-Generational Resistance

Jane Pak

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.usfca.edu/diss>



Part of the Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education Commons

---

The University of San Francisco

COMMUNITY LEADER-SCHOLARS WITH REFUGEE EXPERIENCES:  
COLLECTIVE HOPE, HEALING AND MULTI-GENERATIONAL RESISTANCE

A Dissertation Presented  
to  
The Faculty of the School of Education  
International and Multicultural Education Department

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Education

by Jane Pak  
San Francisco  
December 2019

**THE UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO**  
Dissertation Abstract

Community Leader-Scholars With Refugee Experiences: Collective Hope, Healing, and  
Multi-Generational Resistance

Through a Critical Refugee Studies (CRS) lens that inherently challenges power, encourages multi-disciplinary approaches, and centers refugee epistemologies, this study centers ways of knowing and being among a group of ten Community Leader-Scholars (CoLS) with refugee experiences. This dissertation posits that CoLS offer critical perspectives that introduce new logics that disrupt traditional spaces and power dynamics. I frame CoLS as undergraduate or graduate students (or recent alumni) with refugee experiences who have self-identified and illustrated a commitment to community well-being in one or more of their transnational communities. This study employed qualitative research methods that included 10 interviews and four focus groups with a subset of participants. CoLS resided in the United States at the time of the study and come from diverse places of origin, including Burma, Iraq, Eritrea, Rwanda, Nepal/Bhutan, Afghanistan, South Sudan, and Somalia/Kenya.

Data revealed three main themes that make up a seemingly impenetrable barrier for CoLS. The first is the notion of being locked out of or severely constrained in a global capitalistic society. The challenge of accessing resources strains the movement away from survival mode and limits CoLS' efforts toward collective uplift. Second, power dynamics manifested in contemporary neocolonial ways also limit forward movement. And finally, situating CoLS' inherent collective way of being within a neoliberal,

individualistic society in the context of the United States reveals notions of feeling stuck between two systems, isolation, and dehumanization.

Centering CoLS' epistemologies inspire a sense of *collective hope*—a participant-coined term—through the beginning of a new collective of CoLS that provides a space for belonging, learning, and the harnessing of multi-generational resistance. Theoretical and future research implications of this study include re-imagining frameworks based on the collective, and further exploration of a multi-generational resistance framework. Practical implications include a call for service providers, educators, and policy makers to contemplate the existence and manifestations of the three underlying themes named above in their work; and encourage the opening up of spaces to learn from and be guided by epistemologies of those with refugee experiences.

## SIGNATURE PAGE

This dissertation, written under the direction of the candidate's dissertation committee and approved by the members of the committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

Jane Pak  
Candidate

December 6, 2019  
Date

Dissertation Committee

Dr. Monisha Bajaj  
Chairperson

December 6, 2019  
Date

Dr. Shabnam Koirala-Azad

December 6, 2019  
Date

Dr. Marco Tavanti

December 6, 2019  
Date

## **DEDICATION**

To families separated and displaced.

To sisters—mine, who left this world too early and  
my mother's, who never made it out of North Korea.

To my father who through his words and actions taught me the meaning of justice.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation is a manifestation of community and the result of a collective effort. I am deeply honored and grateful to community members and friends who participated in and contributed to this study. You opened my eyes to a deeper meaning of community and understanding of a collective way of being. I hope this dissertation helps to share that understanding more widely and create more spaces for community uplift.

To my committee—first my chair, Dr. Monisha Bajaj, I'm so grateful for sharing tea with you that afternoon years ago and to have learned from you ever since. Your brilliance and capacity are unmatched. My gratitude extends beyond what words can express. To Dean Koirala-Azad, I applied to the program for many reasons, including needing a place to heal after my sister's passing. Your presence helped me to channel the pain of loss into an even deeper commitment to this work. Through your eloquence and brilliance, you light a path forward. Your reflection of this dissertation as an effort to create new meaning and structure within the tension that arises in a space of counter-hegemonic forces and a neoliberal order, is a gift and validation for me to continue in this direction. Thank you. To Dr. Marco Tavanti, you have been a consistent and proactive presence of support and guidance. Thank you for opening up spaces for me to enter, for entrusting me to explore within these spaces, and supporting me as I push boundaries. I am truly grateful.

To the incredible faculty and fellow classmates in the International and Multicultural program at the University of San Francisco, you model what education can and should be. I have learned so much through your brilliance, depth, critical leadership,

resistance, courage, humility, compassion, and love. Thank you for all that you do in this world.

Last but not least, to my family. To my parents who lead with love and justice, your ways of being, coupled with your life experiences inform and guide how I move through this world. Never forgotten, your resistance continues. To my partner, Lucian and our children, Justin and Kian, you embody light, justice, and peace in not only your names but in who you are. Don't ever stop. The world needs you. Through your support and cheerleading throughout this dissertation, you demonstrated love and compassion, selflessness and care. For all that you do and all that you are, I love you completely and always.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Dissertation Abstract</i> .....	<i>ii</i>
<i>SIGNATURE PAGE</i> .....	<i>iv</i>
<i>DEDICATION</i> .....	<i>v</i>
<i>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</i> .....	<i>vi</i>
<i>LIST OF TABLES</i> .....	<i>xi</i>
<i>LIST OF FIGURES</i> .....	<i>xii</i>
<b>CHAPTER 1. FOUNDATION OF THE STUDY AND RESEARCH PROBLEM</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Statement of the Problem</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>Background and Need</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>Purpose of the Study</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>Theoretical/Conceptual Framework</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>Research Questions</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b>Limitations</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<i>Numbers</i> .....	<i>12</i>
<i>Context</i> .....	<i>13</i>
<b>Significance</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE</b> .....	<b>17</b>
<b>Global Inequality, Displacement &amp; Critical Refugee Studies</b> .....	<b>17</b>
<i>Militarism and imperialism</i> .....	<i>24</i>
<i>Nativism and nationalism</i> .....	<i>29</i>
<i>Racialization of refugee and other-ing</i> .....	<i>35</i>
<i>Global capitalism and neoliberalism</i> .....	<i>38</i>
<b>Giving Back: Transnational (Forced) Migration and Giving Back</b> .....	<b>45</b>
<i>Framing the study population</i> .....	<i>48</i>
<i>How migrant communities give back</i> .....	<i>56</i>
<i>Motivations: why migrants give back</i> .....	<i>62</i>
<b>Conclusion, Implications and Inspiration for This Study</b> .....	<b>64</b>
<b>CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY</b> .....	<b>68</b>
<b>Researcher Positionality</b> .....	<b>68</b>
<b>Research Design</b> .....	<b>72</b>
<i>Knowledge claims, strategies, and methods</i> .....	<i>72</i>
<i>Levels of participation</i> .....	<i>78</i>
<b>Population</b> .....	<b>79</b>
<b>Purposeful and Chain-Referral Sampling</b> .....	<b>79</b>
<b>Data Collection and Analysis</b> .....	<b>80</b>

Validity and Reliability.....	82
Protection of Human Subjects and Ethical Considerations .....	82
Conclusion .....	83
<b>CHAPTER 4. COMMUNITY LEADER-SCHOLARS (CoLS) WITH REFUGEE EXPERIENCES: A DESIRE TO SERVE, HIGHER EDUCATION, AND COMPLICATING NARRATIVES .....</b>	
<b>84</b>	
<b>Community Leader-Scholars (CoLS).....</b>	<b>84</b>
<i>A desire to serve (versus aspirations) .....</i>	<i>88</i>
<i>Motivations to serve.....</i>	<i>91</i>
<i>Why higher education?.....</i>	<i>92</i>
<b>The Power of Narratives.....</b>	<b>96</b>
<i>Negative narratives in perpetuating barriers–reduced and othered.....</i>	<i>98</i>
<b>Participant Narratives.....</b>	<b>101</b>
<i>Undergraduate students .....</i>	<i>102</i>
<i>Graduates with undergraduate degrees.....</i>	<i>107</i>
<i>Graduate students (master level programs).....</i>	<i>113</i>
<i>Graduates with master-level degrees.....</i>	<i>119</i>
<b>Closing Thoughts.....</b>	<b>122</b>
<b>CHAPTER 5. A DESIRE TO SERVE BORN OUT OF A COLLECTIVE WAY OF BEING 123</b>	
<b>A Collective Way of Being .....</b>	<b>123</b>
<b>Collective Struggle .....</b>	<b>125</b>
<b>Collective Roots: Learning and Embodying the Collective .....</b>	<b>127</b>
<i>Modeling by parents and witnessing the struggles parents navigated.....</i>	<i>128</i>
<i>Multi-generational resistance in the face of injustice.....</i>	<i>131</i>
<b>It Takes a Village: Local to Global Community .....</b>	<b>137</b>
<i>Community values, attributes, and reinforcing nature.....</i>	<i>142</i>
<b>Closing.....</b>	<b>144</b>
<b>CHAPTER 6. AN IMPENETRABLE BARRIER FOR HEROES: FIRST AND ONLY ONES</b>	
<b>..... 146</b>	
<b>Situating CoLS as Heroes: Motivation and Challenges for <i>First and Only Ones</i> .....</b>	<b>146</b>
<i>Stuck in between systems.....</i>	<i>150</i>
<b>An Impenetrable Barrier .....</b>	<b>153</b>
<i>Global capitalism: locked out.....</i>	<i>154</i>
<i>Neocolonialism and contemporary power dynamics within refugee contexts .....</i>	<i>158</i>
<i>Neoliberalism and the dominance of the hyper-individual .....</i>	<i>170</i>
<b>Concluding Thoughts .....</b>	<b>172</b>
<b>CHAPTER 7. RAYS OF HOPE TO COLLECTIVE HOPE: CREATING SPACE FOR COLLECTIVE HOPE AND HEROES.....</b>	
<b>173</b>	
<b>Rays of Hope: Droplets .....</b>	<b>174</b>
<i>The feeling of luck and gratitude in having a mentor .....</i>	<i>174</i>
<i>Helpful droplets but need rain .....</i>	<i>178</i>
<i>Droplets land on individuals and don't see the collective .....</i>	<i>179</i>

<b>Building on Collective Roots: Collective Hope &amp; Heroes .....</b>	<b>181</b>
<i>Significance .....</i>	181
<i>A unique space of belonging, support, inspiration, and practice.....</i>	187
<i>A story of the beginnings of a formation of a new CoLS collective .....</i>	189
<b>CHAPTER 8. REFLECTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS .....</b>	<b>197</b>
<b>Researcher Reflections .....</b>	<b>197</b>
<b>Theoretical Implications .....</b>	<b>200</b>
<b>Future Research .....</b>	<b>201</b>
<b>Practical Implications.....</b>	<b>202</b>
<b>REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>205</b>
<b>APPENDIX I. CONSENT FORM .....</b>	<b>218</b>
<b>APPENDIX II. DRAFT INTERVIEWPROTOCOL.....</b>	<b>220</b>
<b>APPENDIX III. GROUP SESSIONS ANNOTATED OUTLINES.....</b>	<b>222</b>
<b>APPENDIX IV. IMAGES FROM GROUP SESSIONS.....</b>	<b>225</b>

## LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1 .....	28
TIMELINE OF U.S. MILITARY INVASIONS IN IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN, AND CORRESPONDING CREATION OF THREE SPECIAL IMMIGRANT VISA (SIV) PROGRAMS IN THE UNITED STATES, FISCAL YEARS (FY) 2006-2019 .....	28
TABLE 2 .....	57
WAYS IN WHICH TRANSNATIONAL MIGRANTS AND DIASPORA GIVE BACK TO THEIR COMMUNITIES .....	57
TABLE 3 .....	80
RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS AND FIELDS OF STUDY.....	80

## LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR STUDY. ....	10
FIGURE 2. “U.S. REFUGEE CEILING AND ADMISSIONS HAVE DECLINED IN RECENT YEARS.” .....	31
FIGURE 3. “U.S. TRAILED REST OF THE WORLD IN REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT IN 2017 AND 2018 AFTER LEADING FOR DECADES.” .....	33
FIGURE 4. MAP ILLUSTRATING MAJORITY OF REFUGEES LOCATION IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH. ....	36
FIGURE 5. MORE CHRISTIANS THAN MUSLIMS HAVE ENTERED THE U.S. AS REFUGEES SINCE FISCAL 2017.....	38
FIGURE 6. NUMBERS OF REFUGEES LIVING IN PROTRACTED SETTINGS AT YEAR-END 2018, DISPLAYED BY RANGE OF YEARS. ....	51
FIGURE 7. KNOWLEDGE CLAIMS, STRATEGIES OF INQUIRY, METHODS, AND DATA ANALYSIS.....	77
FIGURE 8. REINFORCING NATURE OF COMMUNITY. ....	144
FIGURE 9. COMMUNITY LIFTING UP H (“HERO”).....	147
FIGURE 10. ISOLATED AND STUCK BETWEEN TWO SYSTEMS. ....	151
FIGURE 11. IMPENETRABLE BARRIER: TRI-SUBTERRANEAN FORCES. ....	154
FIGURE 12. DROPLETS AND RAYS OF HOPE.....	179
FIGURE 13. MULTIPLE HEROES BEING LIFTED UP BY DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES. ....	183
FIGURE 14. COLLECTIVE HOPE. ....	186

## CHAPTER 1. FOUNDATION OF THE STUDY AND RESEARCH PROBLEM

### Introduction

[T]he community recognizes that not everyone can make it but if we send one person, that person would get there faster than the community and the hope is that you come up and help all. That's the expectation. But what we do not know when you're being pushed with this idea/desire is that you don't realize this system until you get up/out there. So when you get up there, you realize the system that is another weight.... So you're being pushed from here but you have another weight that is pushing you down, which is a big system and you are in the middle so depending on how hard you're being pushed by the system, you can either fall, which will be a disappointment to your community or stay there permanently. Sometime this transition never ends... it's like, you cannot go forward or backward, you're just there. (group session, Abhyas, April 2019)

The above statement was shared by Abhyas during our group sessions. Abhyas, like all participants in this study, is a Community Leader-Scholar (CoLS) with refugee experiences. At a time when the magnitude and persistence of forced displacement worldwide is the highest in history, we are witnessing limitations and fractures within a dated international refugee regime. As the following will show, contexts have changed, diversified and the protracted nature of displacement has spanned beyond anyone's earlier predictions. We sit at a moment in history where actors are starting to recognize the need for new voices and new logics, including from those with refugee experiences. However, the understanding of this is still new and early and as such, CoLS such as Abhyas continue to be caught between systems. This study argues for new logics, led by

those with refugee experiences; it unveils systemic barriers and opens a window of collective hope and practical suggestions for change.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The international refugee regime—the governing elements that organize international practices, identify roles of actors, shape policy and practice—has historically reflected a complex system of interactions between the “balance of power politics” (Barnett, 2002, p. 262), ideology, and economics. The Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees (hereafter referred to as the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol) (UNHCR, 2010) together serve as the international legal instrument that details the definition of a refugee, the rights of refugees, and the legal obligations States have to protect refugees. Responding to mass displacement following World War II, the 1951 Convention was developed in the context of Europe and responded to the immediate time period. The 1967 Protocol removed these geographic and time limitations in acknowledgement and response to the growing and persistent phenomenon of forced displacement worldwide. At present, 148 States have ratified the 1951 Convention and/or the 1967 Protocol. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the UN Refugee Agency, serves as the ‘guardian’ of these instruments of international law (UNHCR, 2011).

Urgency to enhance international cooperation has grown significantly given the unequal distribution of refugee reception around the world. This has been exacerbated by the record levels of forced displacement in the recent past, reaching 70.8 million forcibly displaced persons worldwide in 2018, only 25.9 million of whom fall under the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol definition of a refugee (UNHCR, 2019).

In September 2016, member states of the United Nations gathered to make a commitment to further international coordination, responsibility and burden sharing. Named the New York Declaration, this launched the beginning of a two-year consultative process leading to the adoption of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration; and the Global Compact on Refugees in Marrakech and New York, respectively in December 2018. While the former experienced the high-profile withdrawal of several member states leading up to the adoption (Arbour, 2018), the latter passed through quietly. The prime goal of the latter was to provide more substantial support to countries that disproportionately host the majority of refugees and bolster responsibility sharing among nation states in providing aid to those who have been forcibly displaced. Of the ten countries that host the most refugees, nine are within *developing regions*<sup>1</sup> and host 84% of the world's refugees [UNHCR, 2019]). Further, 33% of the world's refugees are hosted by the “Least Developed Countries such as Bangladesh, Chad, DRC, Ethiopia, Rwanda, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda and Yemen” (UNHCR, 2019).

While the two Compacts are significant in their efforts to expand global support and investment, and further the coordination of international actors in recognition of the expanding issues related to forced displacement, there are two critical issues that continue

---

<sup>1</sup> The Global Trends Report 2018 (UNHCR, 2019) references the United Nations Statistic Division website (2019) for more context on the reference, *developing regions*. The site states designations for developing and developed countries were introduced in 1996 “for statistical convenience and does not express a judgement about the stage reached by a particular country or area in the development process.” It also states that there is “no established convention for the designation of ‘developed’ and ‘developing’ countries or areas in the United Nations system.” Yet, these distinctions are referenced as remaining relevant within the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2015a), which uses definitions found within the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) final report. On the second last page of the Millennium Development Goals Report (United Nations, 2015b), countries not included in developed regions, thereby inferred as being in developing regions are: Northern and Sub-Saharan Africa; South-Eastern, Eastern, Southern, Western Asia, and Caucasus and Central Asia; Oceania; and Latin America and the Caribbean.



to exist within the international refugee regime that this dissertation questions and further utilizes to frame the inquiries proposed in this study. First, as outlined above, the prime goal of the Global Compact on Refugees focuses on responsibility and burden sharing after forced displacement has taken place. As outlined in Chapter 2, Critical Refugee Studies (CRS)—an emerging body of scholarship—calls for an expansion in how to evaluate forced displacement, away from the responses of states *after* displacement and to the states in their role *leading to* displacement (Espiritu, 2014). Espiritu suggests that by further investigating the role of the state pre and post displacement reveals significantly different motivations. For example, in the case of the Vietnam War, a primary frame for the United States was that of a benevolent actor in providing humanitarian aid to refugees. However, expanding the lens of analysis reveals the role the U.S. played in forced displacement to begin with and the creation of what Espiritu (2014) terms the *militarized refuge(e)* given the role of U.S. military expansion in the Asia Pacific region and their intervention which led to millions of deaths, prolonged war and mass displacement. These seemingly contradictory actions and motivations merit further inquiry and analysis in general (see Chapter 2) but also in the tensions and competing interests that arise when these different frames are juxtaposed.

That is, within the international refugee regime, interests of different actors may compete with that of the well-being of refugee populations. For example, Barnett (2002) states that "short-term state goals often prevail over long-term collective interest" (p. 261). While goals for the recent Global Compacts are noble in their cause and monumental in the symbolic gathering of international actors, Barnett's statement suggests limitations to the global welfare of refugees and migrants when the collective

good competes with that of state interests. In fact, before negotiations even began for the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, the United States pulled out given stated concerns around impositions on state sovereignty (Gladstone, 2017). Further, with increased calls for private actors,<sup>2</sup> tensions and priorities between private interests and *collective uplift*<sup>3</sup> also necessitate a deeper investigation.

If states cannot assure the safety of refugees nor guarantee the rights of refugees after forced displacement given concerns over sovereignty, and if military interests supersede concerns over the instigation of mass displacement (Espiritu, 2014), one is led to question the limits and primary role state actors serve in the protection of refugees and forced migration in general. One might even posit that the policies and practices of current dominant actors can even *perpetuate* rather than mitigate forced displacement.

Framing this study utilizing CRS allows for a more meta analysis that may render visible other actors who may have competing interests. This dissertation thus argues for new logics and thereby challenges the dominant frameworks that have made refugee experiences two-dimensional, with native countries flattened as unredeemable and host nations as saviors. It explores non-dominant epistemologies and places of knowledge centering diverse refugee experiences. Challenging dominant ways of seeing and knowing can pose threat to dominant institutions and missions, hierarchy and power. This dissertation intentionally investigates these challenges and simultaneously shifts the dominant frame of refugees as victims to refugees as agents of change and creators of

---

<sup>2</sup> The the Global Compact on Refugees calls on greater investment from governments as well as private actors (UNHCR, 2018).

<sup>3</sup> I use the term *collective uplift* very broadly to represent an effort to serve a collective societal good as contrasted with an effort towards individual or privatized economic gain. Collective uplift may take many forms, including community health and well-being, more peaceful and just societies, community economic sustainability, the key point being working towards uplifting a collective good versus oneself or a closed privatized group.

knowledge for the collective good, in this case through their roles as *community leadership scholars (CoLS)* (see Chapter 4 for definition). This study, then, questions what systemic barriers CoLS may face in pursuit of collective goals given the aforementioned power dynamics and wonders what strategies might arise if spaces for idea generation and cultivation are protected and cultivated.

### **Background and Need**

In 2018, I conducted two related studies to start capturing the phenomenon of refugee community leaders more formally. The first study looked at RIT's youth leadership/peer tutoring program at a high school in the Northern California Bay Area in which I attempted to understand the manifestation and effects of a humanizing and asset-based framework throughout the program. This resulted in the conceptualization of a new, non-hierarchical framework for youth leadership that challenges the dominant view of leaders as those who sit atop a hierarchy of positions in an organizational chart. Rather, this new conceptualization proposed a model of leadership in which like neurons positioned throughout the brain and transmitting information to/from other neurons, transmit information to other leaders distributed throughout a community. Connected to each other like synapses in the brain that collectively contribute to the working of the larger human body, the connections between these leaders collectively form a network that contribute to the working and resilience of the larger community. By their sheer existence, these collective networks—like synapses fired—light up pathways previously unused and in some cases unknown. These new pathways allow for new logics to be created and knowledge to be transferred. They ensure that members of the community that might previously be unseen have a light shined upon them, expanding the reach and

sphere of influence of each leader and collectively contributing to the greater resilience of the entire community.

The second study, which I co-conducted with colleagues at RIT, looked at the longer-term impact of RIT's youth leadership program as it relates to the hopes and dreams of former youth leaders, whether or not they continue to be engaged in community service, and if/how the program may have contributed to how they think about leadership. Within this group of former RIT youth leaders, the study found an overwhelming desire to give back and contribute to communities of origin, transit, and/or residence. In Chapter 2, I explore literature on immigrants and refugees giving back to their communities, whether it be communities of origin, transition, or residence. Coupling this literature review with the aforementioned study implies a potential furtherance of this notion beyond giving back and to a potential reformation of the ideas of how leadership can be defined and the role that leadership plays in collective uplift.

These studies inform this dissertation, in which I focus on a population of Community Leader-Scholars (CoLS) with refugee experiences who have self-identified and illustrated a commitment to giving back to communities they are connected to.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Working individually and collectively with a group of Community Leader-Scholars with Refugee Experiences (CoLS) in the United States (primarily in the San Francisco Bay Area), this study investigated the questions raised in the aforementioned sections. Acknowledging the diversity of experiences within populations who have lived through forced migration, this study worked specifically with active CoLS who have self-identified an interest and illustrated commitment to giving back to their communities.

Through a constructivist approach, this study aimed to understand and explore aspirations, hopes and dreams CoLS have in contributing to their communities; identify systemic barriers they face in their pursuits; and learn of strategies they have envisioned and/or enacted for community uplift. This study also explored what might arise when CoLS came together as a collective to engage in such dialogue.

Centering the experiences of CoLS explicitly acknowledged that knowledge resides in many places. This study thus challenges dominant ways of thinking and the expansive role of dominant actors; and inherently calls for other voices at the table informing policies and actions.

Inspired by the principles of Participatory Action Research (PAR), this study aimed to explore and center counter-hegemonic ways of thinking, and identify ways to support CoLS in their pursuits of community uplift. In addition, this study aimed to contribute to the emerging scholarly literature on CRS.

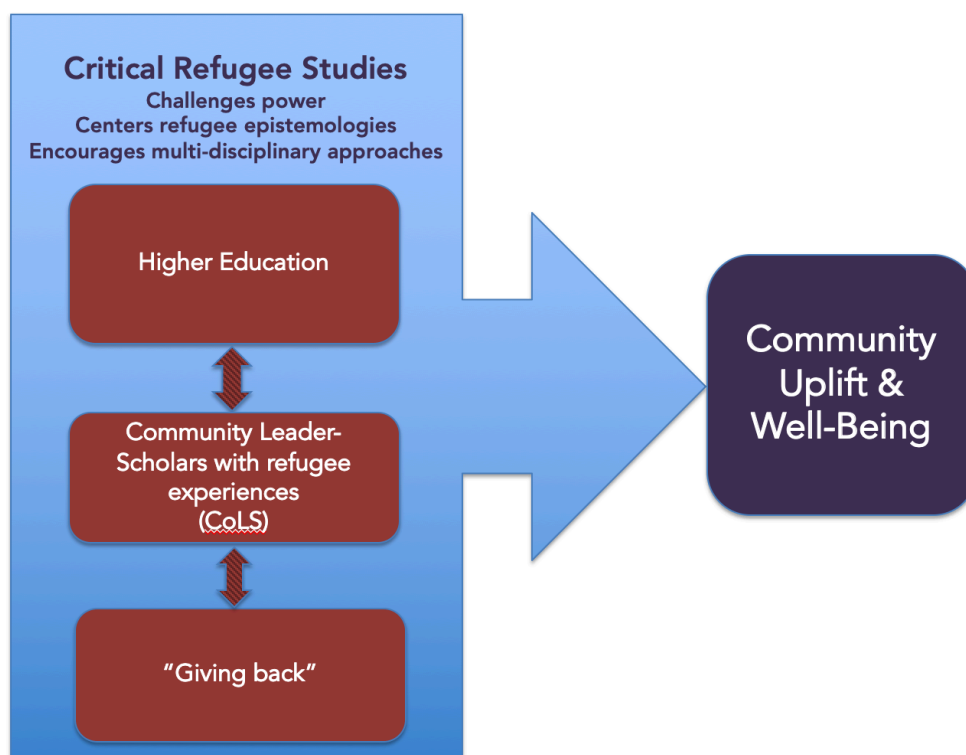
### **Theoretical/Conceptual Framework**

Critical Refugee Studies (CRS) is a relatively new field of scholarship that offers a lens through which to unpack the aforementioned dynamics of power and the role dominant actors may have in contributing to forced displacement. Such scholarship implies a need to consider new actors and leaders. I argue that these leaders must come from those with the lived experiences and willingness to contribute to long-term collective well-being. Thus, this study privileges the voices of those most affected by global conflict and displacement, particularly those young people who have first-hand experience and also seek to carve new paths towards collective good.

The diversity of refugee and migrant populations merits explicit mention so as not to essentialize the notion that all are active agents of change. There are dangers to uni-dimensional single narratives (Adichie, 2009) that perpetuate stereotypes and risk further marginalization. While this study challenges the single narrative of refugees as victims and vulnerable populations, it is critical that it not then replace that with another single narrative. Human beings are complex with multiple dimensions and experiences at any given moment in time as well as throughout time. Perhaps some of the participants in this study may self-identify as victims—past or present—or not. This study does not negate that. And it does not negate the reality of the vast diversity of experiences and aspirations, or lack thereof. It is true that refugee experiences place people in extremely vulnerable contexts. It is also true that this can instigate trauma and struggle. Again, this study does not negate that. Rather, within all those complicated and diverse equations, this study also recognizes that there is a subset of this population, as there are in many populations, that have as a result of their experiences identified a desire to contribute back to their communities and find avenues for collective uplift.

My experiences through RIT (see *Background and Need* section) highlighted this within the high school level and beyond. This study attempted to take this a step further, and explored these concepts among those who have demonstrated longer-term commitment by specifically pursuing higher education to further their efforts. “Higher education nurtures a new generation of change-makers that can take the lead in identifying solutions to refugee situations” (UNHCR, n.d.). Unpacking power dynamics, and the potential to perpetuate or disrupt them through or as a result of education is worthy of exploration. Sassen (2014) states that “bits and pieces of technical,

engineering, biological, economic, and other forms of academic knowledge are increasingly repositioned to service dominant and domineering logics organizing economic space” (p. 220). She also states that universities are spaces “where differentiation is part of the traditions of teaching and learning that can (still) coexist with the reshaping of economic space” (Sassen, 2014, p. 220). There is a critical role here for higher education as it can serve instrumental function for individual gain as well as for the social good (Gladwell et al., 2016). While this study did not look at higher education formally, it did evaluate the learnings gleaned both through the explicit and hidden curriculum of higher education and the role that has played in the lives of participants.



*Figure 1.* Conceptual framework for study.

As Figure 1 illustrates, I explored the confluence of several areas of literature in combination with findings from my own studies to collectively create a conceptual framework for this study. First, a CRS lens inherently explored power dynamics (see

Chapter 2) and by extension opened the door for an argument for new leadership from the margins. Second, inspired by my earlier work and observations at RIT, I honed in on better understanding CoLS with refugee experiences. By centering CoLS (see *Population* section and Chapter 4), this study centered their lived experiences and positioned them as experts in the creation of knowledge generation. Third, and again inspired by my earlier work and observations at RIT, I furthered this past work by following CoLS later in their paths and deeper in their commitments as illustrated by their pursuit of higher education as a means to pursue their larger goals for community well-being. Fourth, I expanded upon the literature on giving back, social remittances, and civic engagement and wrapped that in my own conceptual model born from a previous RIT study that offered an alternative conceptualization to dominant understandings of leadership (see *Background and Need* section). And finally, I looked at the confluence of all of the above and explored through this study, the impact this had in furthering community well-being, as defined by participants themselves.

Centering the experiences of CoLS, this study aimed to highlight their aspirations, hopes and dreams; challenges and systemic barriers; the role of higher education for them; and ways in which they had worked towards community well-being. As an action project, the study was designed to mine for and explore ways in which CoLS could be supported in their pursuits, individually and collectively. The collective aspect was deeply explored through the research design (see Chapter 3) in which a subset of the full population of study participants were brought together for collective dialogue, reflection, and possibly action over multiple gatherings.



## Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study and are further detailed vis-à-vis the methodologies for addressing them in Chapter 3.

1. What aspirations, hopes and dreams do CoLS have as it relates to their communities and how have they been shaped? I define communities as encompassing one or more of a participant's transnational setting—in a place of origin, transit, and/or residence. The first part of this question—aspirations, hopes and dreams—is addressed in Chapter 4. The second part of this question—how have they been shaped—is addressed in its own dedicated chapter in Chapter 5 given the importance and unique lens participants reveal that addresses this question and serves as a foundation for this entire study.
2. Why do CoLS pursue higher education and what are their experiences? This is addressed in Chapter 4. Experiences that relate to barriers and challenges are explored in Chapter 6.
3. What challenges/systemic barriers to CoLS face that limit their ability in moving towards these aspirations, hopes and dreams? This is addressed in Chapter 6.
4. What are some unique benefits/outcomes/revelations/experiences that arise from the formation of a CoLS collective as modeled as part of this research study? This is addressed in Chapter 7.

## Limitations

### *Numbers*

Participants (see Chapter 3) all have direct higher education experiences as students. At the time of the study, they were enrolled in an undergraduate or graduate

program or had recently graduated from a program. Access to higher education for refugee populations is staggeringly low, hovering around 1% (UNHCR, 2014). Numbers for graduate studies are even less. The accessibility gap has been recognized by a growing body of donors and funders.

The study goal of identifying CoLS who have shown a commitment and had an opportunity to pursue higher education in order to contribute to community well-being (as opposed to for purely individual economic gain) further limits the numbers for this study. Yet the pursuit of higher education, in addition to other illustrations of community contributions, is one way to demonstrate long-term interest and pursuit of the collective ideals that this study aimed to investigate. While the numbers may be limited, this study posited that the investigation was worthwhile given the larger impact CoLS can have—individually or collectively—on communities.

### *Context*

In order to pursue this study, I had to conceptually design an ecosystem that pulls together various bodies of research and effective practices (see *Theoretical/Conceptual Framework* above). With the author's best efforts to find such works intact, I was unable to find any one body of work or study that represented this ecosystem. As such, the literature review provides pieces of this ecosystem from which I drew inferences to be explored, challenged, and evaluated throughout the course of this study. These pieces may be in the framing of a body of work i.e. civic engagement, remittances, giving back, and youth leadership that collectively assemble a new conceptualization of community leadership; or may draw from practices in vastly different contexts i.e. refugee and

migrant leaders in the Global South, San Francisco Bay Area in order to draw out overarching themes of motivations for collective uplift.

I recognize the risk in this in that it may dilute the deeper gaze of any one variable. However, by even the creation of such a design, this inherently pushes back at dominant norms of research and argues for the necessity of more holistic settings that draw from multiple bodies of work that when juxtaposed can reveal new discoveries (Espiritu, 2014). And yet, the proposed research design and methodology closely followed the rigorous demands of each type of methodology, ranging from the rigors of qualitative methods in individual interview design and practice, to principles of PAR and collaborative sharing in the context of the collective portion of this study.

### **Significance**

This study challenges power. Power that without its checks and balances risks the perpetuation of dominant ways of being; and policies that perpetuate power differentials. Such policies favor the voice of dominant actors—states and increasingly private actors. Whether causal or not, there are correlations with the continued dominance of said actors and the massive growth in forced displacement. This mandates a focused look at power dynamics and the need to explore other knowledges and ways of being and moving towards more stable, humane, and sustainable communities for all. By bringing in, centering, and exploring these other voices—specifically those with the lived experiences of forced migration as well as the will and commitment to work towards positive collective change—this study aspired to do just that.

In addition to the vast numbers of forcibly displaced persons worldwide, immigrants and refugees in the U.S. and California make up a substantial proportion of

the population. From 2013-2017 in California alone, 27% of the population was foreign-born as opposed to 13% in the United States overall (United States Census Bureau., 2018). Scholarship, policy, and practice related to immigrants and refugees is sorely needed to better understand and analyze the challenges and systemic barriers they face, as well as center the experiences of those young leaders seeking to affect change based on their individual and collective experiences and perspectives.

In addition to supporting CoLS in their pursuits, this study also aimed to contribute to scholarship on CRS, programs and policies locally; and offer alternatives to the dominant deficit-frames and narratives of refugee populations. I hope it also contributes to community uplift through the process of further cultivating CoLS individual and collective efforts.

### **Conclusion**

This study builds on many years of learning from and working with refugee communities—formally and informally—and many more years of reading and pondering about contexts of forced migration. It builds on and is inspired by these prior experiences as well as specific findings from recent research through RIT, honing in on a reoccurring theme of a desire among some refugees to give back and serve community. Guided by CRS, this study challenges power dynamics and dominant frameworks that have led to record levels of forced displacement around the world. Through a multi-disciplinary lens and corresponding ecosystem of multiple fields of literature, it also investigates and reveals tensions and dynamics that might not otherwise be seen through a uni-dimensional lens. Finally, this study argues for new logics, centering epistemologies of those with direct experience of forced migration and a will for collective uplift. Focusing

on and centering experiences of CoLS, this study highlights aspirations, hopes and dreams; the role of higher education; challenges and systemic barriers; and revelations that resulted from collective CoLS group sessions.

## CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this chapter, I review two *sets* of literature. In the first set—Global Inequality, Displacement & Critical Refugee Studies (CRS)—I review literature on root causes of forced displacement and explore the role dominant powers have in perpetuating this displacement. Further, I include scholarship that suggest that the dominant deficit narratives of refugee *bodies* align with the projects of Western powers that have led to forced migration (Espiritu, 2014). At the core of this study is the suggestion that those who have the lived experiences of forced displacement are uniquely positioned to inform unexplored avenues towards collective uplift, whether that be through peace, justice, sustainability, or other frames. Within this window of inquiry, I refer to a second set of growing literature in what I refer to as Giving Back: Transnational (Forced) Migration and Social Remittances. It maps together multiple bodies of literature that touch upon the notion of migrant communities giving back to their communities. This section pulls from literature on migrants and social remittances as well as civic engagement—both the motivations and ways in which this takes place. Given the range of references that make up this collective body of literature and to provide more context, this section is prefaced with an exploration of the various ways scholars have framed or refer to migrant populations. Collectively, these sets of literature set the stage for this dissertation study in which I build upon and explore the desire to give back among Community Leader-Scholars (CoLS) with refugee experiences.

### **Global Inequality, Displacement & Critical Refugee Studies**

The world is experiencing levels of inequality never seen before in history (Oxfam, 2016; 2017). The disparity between rich and poor is growing while the

concentration of wealth is being shared by a fewer number of people each year. In 2015, for example, 62 people had the equivalent wealth as the poorest 50% of the world's population (Oxfam International, 2016). In 2016, this number dropped to 8 individuals (Oxfam International, 2017). Sassen (2014) critically frames the growth in global inequality as a "type of expulsion" (p. 15). She suggests that we are entering a new period of global capitalism that is driving expulsions "from life projects and livelihoods, from membership, from the social contract at the center of liberal democracy" (Sassen, 2014, p. 29).

In the context of the Global South, Sassen (2014) points to the growth of displaced populations as an acute form of expulsion. At the time of the writing of her book, Sassen (2014) reported "unseen levels of social expulsion" (p. 63). At that time, 42.5 million people were reported to be forcibly displaced around the world (Sassen, 2014). For 2018, UNHCR (2019) reports an updated figure of 70.8 million people who were forcibly displaced around the world, a remarkable 66.6% increase since the writing of Sassen's (2014) book. This includes 25.9 million refugees (including 5.5 million refugees from Palestine under the mandate of United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East [UNRWA]), 41.3 million displaced *within* their home countries and who have not crossed a national border (formally referred to as internally displaced persons [IDPs]), and 3.5 million people seeking asylum.

According to the Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees (hereafter referred to as the 1951 Convention) (UNHCR, 2010), the definition of a refugee "is someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality,

membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.” While providing protections, these protected groups “can still be critiqued as imbued with an exclusionary ethic; categories, after all, define out as much as they define in” (Zagor, 2011, p. 4). Further, refugee law can be seen as serving “an alienating gate-keeper function that operates to protect sovereignty and define ‘otherness’” (Zagor, 2011, p. 3). Inherent in the idea around national sovereignty or the nation-state is that there is a right to welcome or exclude persons from entry or citizenship. On the other hand, the democratic state is seen to be the body to uphold individual rights. This contradiction is brought to the fore in the case for refugees who seek refuge and the protection of rights and yet fall outside of the protections of the nation-state (Espiritu, 2014).

The UNHCR outlines international legal guidelines for refugees as defined in the 1951 Convention referenced above. The UNHCR (2019) further outlines three durable solutions for refugees: (1) (voluntary) repatriation to countries of origin, (2) resettlement into third countries, and (3) local integration in the (first) country of asylum. Espiritu (2014) states that all of these durable solutions “represent an aberration of categories in the national order of things” (p. 11). As such, CRS “challenge(s) the very viability of the nation-state” (p. 12) and the arbitrary nature of borders. Not only then can we think about this as political expulsion, Espiritu (2014) suggests this as an ideological externalization of refugees, “constituting them as objects of state suspicion, threats to security” (p. 12; Espiritu, 2006) (see *Nativism and nationalism* section).

Nation-states also place in the shadows any meaning and lived experiences that may exist “in the in-between social world that refugees-in-transit inhabit” (Espiritu, 2014, p. 64). The aforementioned types of exclusion or expulsion of refugee populations



mandate a critical lens within refugee studies that would shift the focus of study from the resulting expulsion of populations to a critical analysis of global and historical conditions and root causes of forced displacement to begin with. Such a shift, among other things, would complicate the simple and dominant frames of victimization put upon said populations. It is worthwhile noting the context from which Espiritu writes and her experiences as a Professor, previous Chair of the Department of Ethnic Studies at the University of California, San Diego and a founding member of the Critical Refugee Studies Collective, a group of scholars advancing more critical engagements as described earlier. She hails from Vietnam originally and draws heavily from this region of the world in her work, in particular as it relates to the militarized refuge(es) in the Vietnam War and related issues around violence, war, and race. She is a pioneer in the field of CRS and her work has been instrumental in shaping this study.

I often open my lectures related to forced displacement, whether as an adjunct professor or as a guest lecturer, by asking the audience to share key frames they hear in the mainstream media as it relates to refugees. Without exception these messages are almost always negative, framing refugees in victim or disempowered frames. A closer look at the process of refugee status determination reveals ways in which this victim frame can actually be encouraged not just within the mainstream media but also within the formal process of obtaining refugee status. Zagor (2011) “consider[s] the well-canvassed argument that ‘governing narratives’ and power imbalances operate to essentialise the refugee’s identity and undermine their narrative autonomy” (p. 2) within institutional settings related to the refugee status determination process. As such, refugee law itself, while well intentioned, may play a role in imposing states of passivity, thereby

guiding the direction of the refugee narratives (Zagor, 2011). While there may still be room for agency within this process, the argument of the deterministic nature of refugee law on self-narratives merit consideration.

Further, essentializing culturally-specific discourses into dominant narratives can have the effect of placing expected social scripts onto refugees. For example, “those making claims based on sexual orientation... are expected to express a culturally specific and *visible* type of sexuality in their country of flight” (Zagor, 2011, p. 13). In the case of Vietnamese refugees, there was encouragement of anti-communist sentiment (Espiritu, 2014). One could even posit that this may be an implicit pre-assimilation exercise into the mainstream ways and perceptions of the receiving country to ensure alignment of refugees with these new societies.

Dominant frames of refugees look primarily at the lives of persons who have experienced forced displacement solely as refugees, negating any sense of life beyond, before, or after the experience of forced displacement. We must remember that “people are always more than victims of their circumstances” (Espiritu, 2014, p. 156). That is to say, missing from these dominant references are the rich, contextual details of lived experiences across time and space.

Also missing from dominant frames is a look at root causes, a critical component that if addressed could, at the minimum, decelerate the growth of forced displacement. The “hyper-focus on the refugees’ needs and achievements has located the *problem* within the bodies and minds of the refugees rather than in the global historical conditions that produce massive displacements and movements of refugees” (Espiritu, 2014, p. 5). Not addressing the causes of forced migration through this critical lens allows for

countries, such as the United States to maintain the identity of “benevolent receiver” (Espiritu, 2014) versus the driver of displacement in the first place. Further, the framing of the “grateful refugee” asserts “the uncontested status of the United States as a nation of refugees, which has been key to the recuperation of American identities and the shoring up of US militarism in the post-Vietnam War era” (Espiritu, 2016, p. 196). These examples illustrate several narrow yet dominant views on refugee contexts that oversimplify a range of complex variables into uni-dimensional frames and shift how and which part(s) of the refugee stories are told.

CRS attempts to address this head on, identifying and challenging root drivers of forced migration—imperialism, colonialism, and militarism. I argue that global capitalism and neoliberalism (see *Global capitalism and neoliberalism* section) should also be included in this complement of root drivers, especially given its exponential growth and adverse impact on societies. While this is mentioned lightly in the literature, I argue that this needs much greater attention moving forward given my opening remarks about stark inequalities or expulsions.

In fact, in Sassen’s (2014) notion of expulsions, she suggests that inequality has become so drastic that typical explanations seen through traditional disciplines of study are incapable of capturing a full understanding of contributing factors. Going beyond these typical disciplines, Sassen conceptualizes the existence of *subterranean trends* that lead to these stark levels of inequality. These subterranean trends serve as “an overarching dynamic” that go beyond “[r]ich individuals and global firms” and are aided by “a complex interaction of these actors with systems regeared towards enabling extreme concentration” (Sassen, 2014, p. 13). She suggests that this has brought about a

new stage of a kind of global capitalism. These complex interactions and trends span geopolitical divides, and “these destructive forces cut across our conceptual boundaries—the terms and categories we use to think about the economy, the polity, the diversity of nation-states and ideologies from communism to capitalism” (Sassen, 2014, p. 215). If this holds true, new logics and ways of navigating these overarching dynamics will be needed to match these sophisticated changes that have driven certain populations into expulsion.

Perhaps in a more concrete manner (albeit not exactly the same), and specific to CRS, this might align with Espiritu’s (2014) proposition of *critical juxtaposing* that not only spans across disciplines at any moment in time, but also juxtaposes historical events vertically over time. While Sassen’s notion strikes as more of a holistic meta-effect of subterranean trends, Espiritu’s idea follows a similar path, albeit not as fully, in simultaneously looking at multiple disciplines. Critical juxtaposing then is “the bringing together of seemingly different and disconnected events, communities, histories, and spaces in order to illuminate what would otherwise not be visible about the contours, contents, and afterlives of war and empire” (p. 21). For example, “ahistorical juxtaposition of opportunities in Vietnam and in the United States naturalizes the great economic disparity between the two countries, depicting the two economies as unconnected rather than mutually constituted” (p. 7). Schlund-Vials (2016) states that Espiritu’s notion of critical juxtaposing serves “as a means of interrogating the mechanisms and machinations that produce, police, and manage refugee bodies and subjectivities” (p. 201). Such efforts not only allow us, but also call us to contemplate and reevaluate the multiple, historical and relational “dimensions of US imperialism, ever-

expanding militarization, and state-sanctioned exceptionalism” (p. 201). It is worthwhile unpacking each area in order to more deeply understand each as well as the interrelations between them. I attempt to do this below.

### *Militarism and imperialism*

Espiritu (2014) identifies powerful tensions that arise when historically disparate disciplines of study, such as that of refugees and militarism are juxtaposed. In her book, *Body Counts* (2014), she introduces the term *militarized refuge(es)*, a “symbiotic relationship: that *refuge* and *refugees* are co-constitutive, and that both are the (by)product of U.S. militarism” (p. 2). Espiritu (2014, 2017) explores “the crucial issues of war, race, and violence—and the history and memories that are forged from the thereafter” (p. 3). Espiritu (2014) promotes the idea of thinking of war in the context of *militarized violence* in which “‘guns and bombs’ [are] unleashed on ‘expendable nonpersons,’ those devoid of names and faces, family and personal histories, dreams and hopes, politics and beliefs” (p. 16-17).

Her work is explicitly and intentionally interdisciplinary, bringing together topics of colonialism, militarism, settler colonialism, and war (Espiritu, 2014, 2017). Within the Vietnam war and refugee context, it was by following “the most-traveled refugee route via military aircraft, [Espiritu] knitted these different events together into a layered story of militarized refuge(es)—one that connects or critically juxtaposes U.S. colonialism, military expansion, and transpacific displacement” (p. 47).

In the academy, scholarship has traditionally separated studies of war and refugees, thereby decoupling the critical role the former plays in the latter. This has bled into mainstream media as well in how those who fled Vietnam in particular were

portrayed primarily as “desperate individuals fleeing political persecution and/or economic depression, or simply fleeing ‘the Communists,’ completely discounting the aggressive roles that the U.S. government, military, and corporations have played in generating this exodus in the first place” (Espiritu, 2014, p. 17). By erasing the role of the U.S. via its foreign policy and act of war that led to the large exodus of refugees to begin with, the narrative of the United States as the “rescuer” is strengthened.

In reality, it was through the U.S. military bases developed through its military expansion project throughout the Asia-Pacific that the evacuation route for refugees from Vietnam took place. This evacuation route included bases in Vietnam, the Philippines, Guam, and California. That is, it was this substantial military project in the Asia-Pacific region that allowed the U.S. to power through the Vietnam War as well as manage the significant rescue operations that followed (Espiritu, 2014, 2017). And it was the same groups that were bombing villages and innocent lives during the war as those who were distributing aid and transiting refugees (Espiritu, 2014). Military bases were simultaneously serving the function of refugee shelters. Michel Agier (in Espiritu, 2014) might describe this as “striking with one hand, healing with the other” (p. 79). CRS explicitly calls out these structures of power created and perpetuated by imperial actors.

In addition, throughout history, dominant global powers have repurposed already inhabited and claimed lands for their own purposes. In Guam, for example, the significant number of refugees routed through by the U.S. stressed local resources to the point that locals faced reduced access to water, increased spread of diseases, deterioration of health conditions, limits to travel and transportation due to the overwhelming presence of military vehicles on roads and school buses being repurposed to transit refugees. Given

its status as an “unincorporated territory of the United States,” (Espiritu, 2014, p. 32) Guam was seen to have limited choice in the matter. The militarization of this space, peoples, and land highlights the idea of indigenous lands being *empty land* or land stolen and turned into occupied territories, here or abroad, leaving indigenous communities landless, displaced or compromised (Espiritu, 2017).

Espiritu (2006) states that we are seeing a “reinvigorated US imperialism... [in which] ‘refugees’ have continued to serve as a stage for the (re)production of American identities and for the shoring up of US militarism” (Espiritu, 2006, p. 411). “Indeed, all of the nation-states from which the largest numbers of US refugees originate—El Salvador, Cuba, Guatemala, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and Somalia—have been deeply disrupted by US ‘counterinsurgency’ actions, anticommunist insurgencies, terrorism counteraction, and peacekeeping operations” (Espiritu, 2006, p. 423). While past drivers of militarism included fighting communism, today, the ideological target of militarism has shifted to that of global terrorism (Espiritu, 2014).

The U.S. was eventually deemed the winner of the Cold War as well as the world’s military power (Espiritu, 2014). However, the anticommunist movement, having equated the idea of freedom with that of capitalism, subsequently shifted the emphasis towards the free market, capitalism, and the idea of “freedom, citizenship, and democracy rather than the more radicalized social transformations” (Espiritu, 2014, p. 101). “It is this collapsing of capitalism into freedom and democracy that discursively distances ‘the free world’ from ‘communism’ and more recently from ‘terrorism’” (Espiritu, 2014, p. 102). Collectively, “themes of rescue, anticommunism, freedom, and multiculturalism present the United States as having a right and even an obligation to consolidate its

political, military, and economic power—that is, a right to hegemony—in all parts of the world that are deemed ‘enemies of freedom’” (Espiritu, 2014, p. 104). It is true that the lines between economic and political motivations or policies can seem blurred. Whether intentional or unintentional, how such matters are framed can serve to generate or collapse support, or anything in between. It can also serve to perpetuate a norm, and in this case, a dominant way of thinking that if goes unchallenged, carries high probability of perpetuating forced migration and the expulsion of certain populations.

This study privileges the voices of non-dominant actors, specifically those who have the lived experienced of forced migration plus maintain the will to contribute to collective uplift, whether through peace, justice, and/or sustainability, to guide a deconstruction of this dominant voice and offer new ways of thinking.

### ***Militarism and resettlement***

Refugee admission programs are in and of themselves political projects, in which states determine “whether, when and where displaced persons receive asylum in the West” (Espiritu, 2016, p. 201). States determine who is granted asylum and who is not, how migrants are categorized and processed, and which special immigration programs are set up.

In the current and following sections, I attempt to critically juxtapose several categories of events in order to reveal tensions and competing interests, specifically between militarism and resettlement (this section), and militarism, resettlement and nationalism (see *Nativism and nationalism* section). To begin, Table 1 provides a snapshot of a timeline beginning with the U.S. invasions in Iraq and Afghanistan,



followed by the creation and authorized annual entry ceilings for three corresponding programs for Special Immigrant Visas (SIVs).

Table 1

Timeline of U.S. military invasions in Iraq and Afghanistan, and corresponding creation of three Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) programs in the United States, Fiscal Years (FY) 2006-2019

<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Event</b>
October, 7 2001	United States invades Afghanistan
March 20, 2003	United States invades Iraq
FY 2006	The first of three Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) programs is set up. This program is for Iraqi and Afghan translators and/or interpreters with the U.S. Armed Forces (U.S. Department of State, n.d.a)  National Defense Authorization Act, Section 1059 authorizes <i>up to 50</i> SIVs
FY 2007	Section 1059 amendment expands “total number of visas to <i>500</i> per year for FY 2007 and FY 2008 only” (U.S. Department of State, n.d.a)
FY 2008	The second of three SIV programs is set up. This program is for Iraqis employed by U.S. Government (U.S. Department of State, n.d.b). National Defense Authorization Act, Section 1244 authorizes <i>up to 5,000</i> SIVs per year through FY 2013
FY 2009	Under the first program, number of SIVs allocated for issuance is reduced back down to <i>50</i> per year. A third SIV program is set up under the Afghan Allies Protection Act of 2009, Section 602(b). This program is for Afghans employed by the U.S. Government (U.S. Department of State, n.d.c).
FY 2014	The second SIV program for Iraqi nationals is extended from October 1 to December 31, 2013. The program is then further extended to authorize <i>2,500</i> visas, effective January 1, 2014 until all are issued at which time, program will close.
FY 2019	Under the third program, the Consolidated Appropriations Act authorizes an additional <i>4,000</i> visas, effective February 15, 2019 until all are issued.

*Note.* While the three programs included in the table are distinct from one another, some interpreters and translators may qualify for more than one program. In addition to other criteria for eligibility, programs two and three also require that applicants “have experienced or be experiencing an ongoing serious threat as a consequence of their employment” (U.S. Department of State, n.d.b, n.d.c.).

### ***Critical juxtaposition of militarism and resettlement***

Juxtaposed, entries in Table 1 reveal a tight link between militarism and resettlement priorities within the United States. To provide more explicit linkages, in 2008, then-President George W. Bush signed into law the second of the three SIV programs listed. This second program was targeted at Iraqi nationals who worked for the U.S. government in Iraq. In addition to authorizing “up to 5,000 Special Immigrant Visas (SIVs) annually through fiscal year (FY) 2013” (U.S. Department of State, n.d.b), the law also gave him the authority to “oversee appropriations intended ‘to establish any military installation or base for the purpose of providing for the permanent stationing of United States Armed Forces in Iraq’ and ‘to exercise United States control of the oil resources in Iraq’” (Schlund-Vials, 2016, p. 202). Similar to Espiritu’s (2006) earlier example linking U.S. military actions in nation-states with where refugees come, we see a direct relationship between resettlement and military expansion.

### ***Nativism and nationalism***

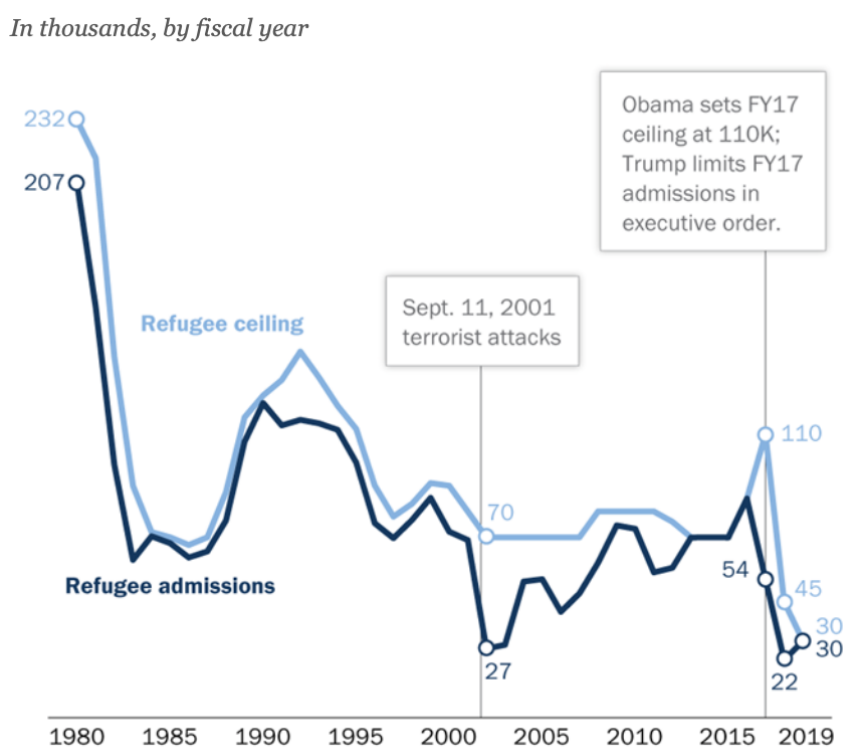
The Global North, in particular Europe and the United States is experiencing a rise in nationalism that is directly impacting responses and policies towards forced migrants. In the then-Director’s Foreword of the University of Oxford’s Refugee Studies Centre’s annual report, Alexander Betts (University of Oxford, 2017) states that while “[t]he public focus on the European ‘refugee crisis’ has died down[,] rising populist nationalism has shaped the political landscape, threatening many governments’ commitments to support displaced populations” (p. 3). The same is also true of the United States today and in the historical past as well. Peter A. Shulman, an associate professor at Case Western Reserve University in the Department of

History, compared public opinion responses and attitudes towards primarily Jewish refugees in Europe in 1938 and current attitudes towards Syrian refugees. Noting situational differences, Shulman states, “in terms of a heavily politicized, nativist response to a refugee crisis, we have been here before. And the example of Jewish refugees fleeing Europe in the late ’30s is most poignant because we know how it ended” (Ross, 2015; Tharoor, 2015). It’s important to spend time unveiling the historical consistencies in this nativist response and mark the trends, catalysts, and consequences in increased nationalism today.

While Shulman’s aforementioned quote links historical events and corresponding public attitudes, Schlund-Vials (2016) notes a striking omission of the Vietnam War in this comparison. She states, “a more up-to-date instance of war-driven nativism can be found in the unreconciled aftermath of the Vietnam War (1959-1975)” (p. 199). In the lead up to the 1980 Refugee Act under then-President Carter’s administration, public polls indicated disapproval of increased annual admissions of refugees from Southeast Asia. The Act, however, did pass and in combination with the 1975 Indochina Migration and Refugee Act from President Ford’s administration, was credited for carving a path for the resettlement program from Southeast Asia to the United States (Schlund-Vials, 2016).

Each year, the President of the United States sets a ceiling for the number of allowable admissions for refugee resettlement to the United States. The highest ceiling was set in 1980 (enactment of the 1980 Refugee Act) by President Carter at 207,116; the lowest was recently set for 2020 by President Trump at 18,000 (White House, 2019),

following a ceiling in 2019 of 30,000 (U.S. Department of State, 2018). While the ceiling for 2018 was set for 45,000 (U.S. Department of State, 2017), the total number of actual admissions only reached 22,491 (Refugee Processing Center, n.d.). These low ceilings and admissions numbers set by President Trump are notable as they reverse the upward trajectory set forth by President Obama with a ceiling of 110,000 the year prior. “The trend has prompted fear among lawmakers in both parties who are proponents of the program, which traditionally has enjoyed broad bipartisan support” (Mills, 2018, para. 31). Figure 2 provides a look at the ceilings and admission numbers since 1980.



Note: Fiscal years end on Sept. 30 of the years shown. Figures rounded to the nearest thousand. Refugee ceiling is the maximum number of refugees allowed to enter the U.S.; the ceiling is set by the U.S. president after consultation with Congress.  
 Source: U.S. State Department's Refugee Processing Center, accessed Oct. 1, 2019. U.S. Yearbook of Immigration Statistics, 1980-2017. "Refugee Admissions and Resettlement Policy," Congressional Research Service, December 2018.

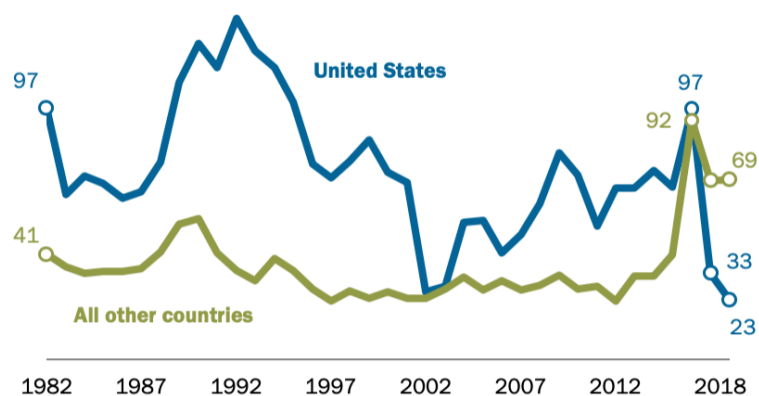
*Figure 2.* “U.S. refugee ceiling and admissions have declined in recent years.” Reprinted from *Key facts about refugees to the U.S.* (Krogstad, 2019), retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/10/07/key-facts-about-refugees-to-the-u-s/>

### ***Critical juxtaposition of militarism and nationalism***

Juxtaposing this downward trend in resettlement ceilings under President Trump with the previous section (Militarism and resettlement) reveals a tension between military and nationalist interests. As mentioned, President Trump set a 2020 resettlement ceiling at 18,000. While discussions had been taking place for some time, this announcement was officially announced on November 1, 2019 in a Presidential Memoranda (White House, 2019). In July 2019, however, Politico was the first media outlet to report proposals within the Trump administration to cut the 2020 ceiling to zero, with other numbers ranging from zero to the official number of 18,000 also being proposed (Hessen, 2019; Davis & Shear, 2019). On September 3, 2019, a group of 27 retired military admirals (nine), generals (12), lieutenant generals (five), and major general (one) (Alexander et al., 2019) wrote a letter to President Trump imploring him to reconsider the proposed cuts. The prime argument from this group of distinguished retired officers from the military was that of national security, referring to the refugee resettlement “program [as] a ‘critical lifeline’ to people who help American troops, diplomats and intelligence officials abroad, and warned that cutting it off risked greater instability and conflict” (Davis & Shear, 2019, para. 18).

As Figure 3 illustrates, these significant drops have put the United States’ resettlement ceilings below the rest of the world, calling into question one narrative of the United States as a benevolent humanitarian actor as Espiritu (2014) brought to light as a primary frame around the Vietnam War.

Number of refugee admissions, in thousands, by calendar year



Note: Figures rounded to the nearest thousand.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees data, accessed June 12, 2019.

Figure 3. “U.S. trailed rest of the world in refugee resettlement in 2017 and 2018 after leading for decades.” Reprinted from *Key facts about refugees to the U.S.* (Krogstad, 2019), retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/10/07/key-facts-about-refugees-to-the-u-s/>

There are other examples of the tension brought to light by juxtaposing nationalist rhetoric and policies with militarism and refugee reception. In addition to dramatic decreases in resettlement ceiling numbers, President Trump’s administration has introduced multiple policies to prevent asylum seekers from entering the United States in order to seek asylum. Citing a *security crisis* and *urgent humanitarian* needs along the U.S.-Mexico border (Department of Homeland Security, 2019) in January 2019, the administration rolled out its Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP), commonly referred to as the *Remain in Mexico* policy, which effectively stops asylum seekers, primarily from Central America, from entering the United States. Corresponding lawsuits are ensuing. The ACLU (Mukpo, 2019) is making a two-pronged argument as part of its legal claim, including that it:

violates the prohibition in both domestic and international law against

“*refoulement*”—returning people to countries where they would face persecution

or torture. “*Non-refoulement*” is one of the central guiding principles of the Refugee Act of 1980, which was enacted to bring U.S. law into compliance with the international Refugee Convention and Protocol. (para. 32)

In fact, Ormsby (2017) argues that “many states have adopted increasingly complicated and severe deterrence policies to keep asylum seekers out.... [and notes a] growth of refugee deterrence policies internationally” (p. 1193). Ormsby maps out types of deterrence policies, including the imposition of visa requirements in order to enter a country; “interdiction and repulsion or return of refugees in extraterritorial areas, particularly the high seas,” as is the case in United Kingdom, Australia, and the United States; or “implementation of ‘safe third country’ or ‘first country of arrival’” (p. 1203).

A newer strategy of deterrence is:

‘cooperation- based *non-entrée*.’ This can take a number of different forms, but at its most basic level, it involves coordination between states, ‘with deterrence occurring in the territory, or under the jurisdiction, of the home state or a transit country.’ The United States, for instance, has partnered with Mexican authorities to institute programs in Mexico aimed at preventing Central American asylum seekers from ever reaching the U.S. border. (p. 1204)

Between dwindling resettlement allowances at a time of peak forced migration numbers (UNHCR, 2019) and severe deterrence policies, seeking refuge in the United States has become significantly more challenging. Rhetoric around security threats of migrants has also been driving fear and racist anti-immigration policies. A look at the ACLU (n.d.a) website gives examples of the violation of “fundamental constitutional protections of due process and equal protection embodied in our Constitution and Bill of

Rights [that] apply to every person, regardless of immigration status” (Immigrant Rights’ section, para. 1). For example, “[i]n 2013, 83 percent of people deported from the United States were not given a hearing before a judge” (ACLU, n.d.a What You Need To Know section, para. 2). Featured stories include issues of migrant children being “warehoused” in Texas, not accepting legitimate applications from asylum seekers and detaining mothers and children seeking asylum, racial profiling inspired by discriminatory laws (including SB 1070 in Arizona) that provide police authorization to stop anyone and request they produce papers that prove immigration status or citizenship, and criminalizing refugees. The list is long. Other-ing and externalizing refugees create “objects of state suspicion, threats to security” (Espiritu, 2014, p. 12). Such efforts fuel nativism and nationalism while deviating from humanitarian mandates and respect for international humanitarian law.

### **Racialization of refugee and *other-ing***

While alluded to above, the racialization of refugees merits particular attention, given its enabling force in motivating other categories of “isms.” Barnett (2002) states that after the Cold War, the focus within the refugee regime shifted away from an East-West relevance to a North-South focus and that this corresponded with a pronounced focus on race being “one problem that is omnipresent in the refugee regime” (p. 254). Allegations of differences based on race have led to refugees being seen as suspicious or hostile. “Once the North-South flows began, rather than recognizing real persecution, receiving nations often labeled such refugees from the South as economic migrants” (Barnett, 2002, p. 254), a category of migrants not protected under the 1951 Convention.

Neoliberalism claims that we live in a postracial, colorblind society based on a



perceived level playing field that assumes that structural and systemic inequalities do not exist (Kumashiro, 2012). This belief assumes there will be more losers than winners and therefore the sole “responsibility” for any failure falls on the privatized individual. At its extreme, those who lose the most are those who are expelled from society, “from life projects and livelihoods, from membership, from the social contract at the center of liberal democracy” (Sassen, 2014, p. 29). As Sassen points out, it is refugee and forcibly displaced populations who are expelled from society in the Global South. It is not a leap in logic to see that these populations also represent many of the black and brown bodies around the world. As Figure 4 clearly illustrates, the majority of refugees remain in the Global South.

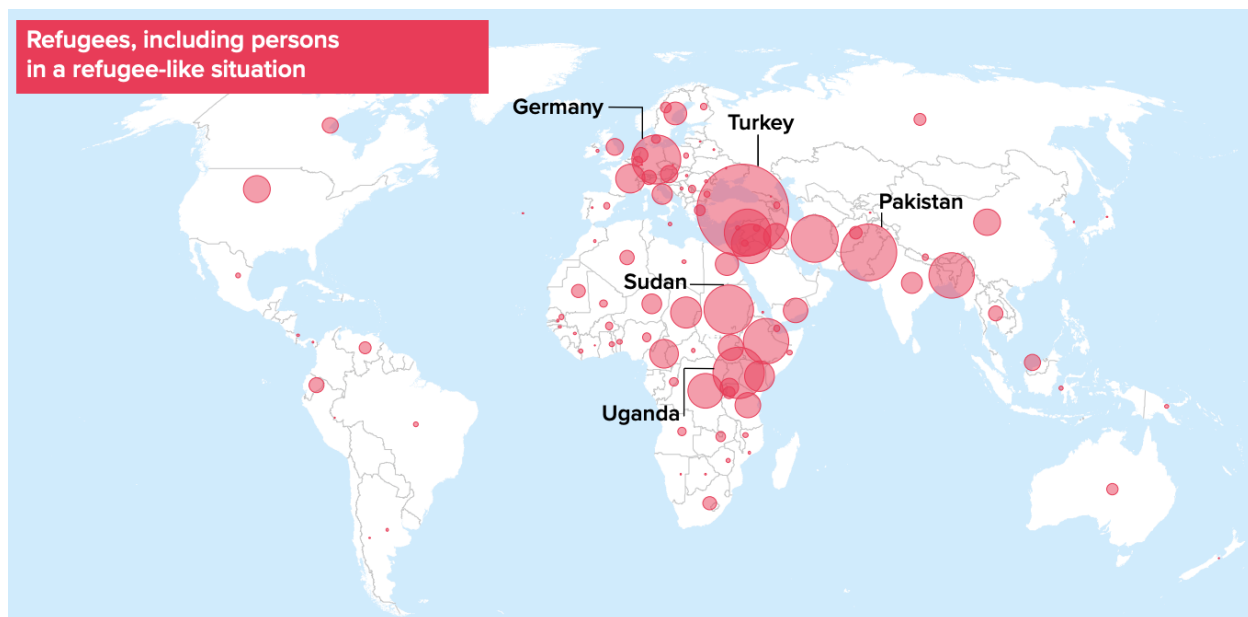


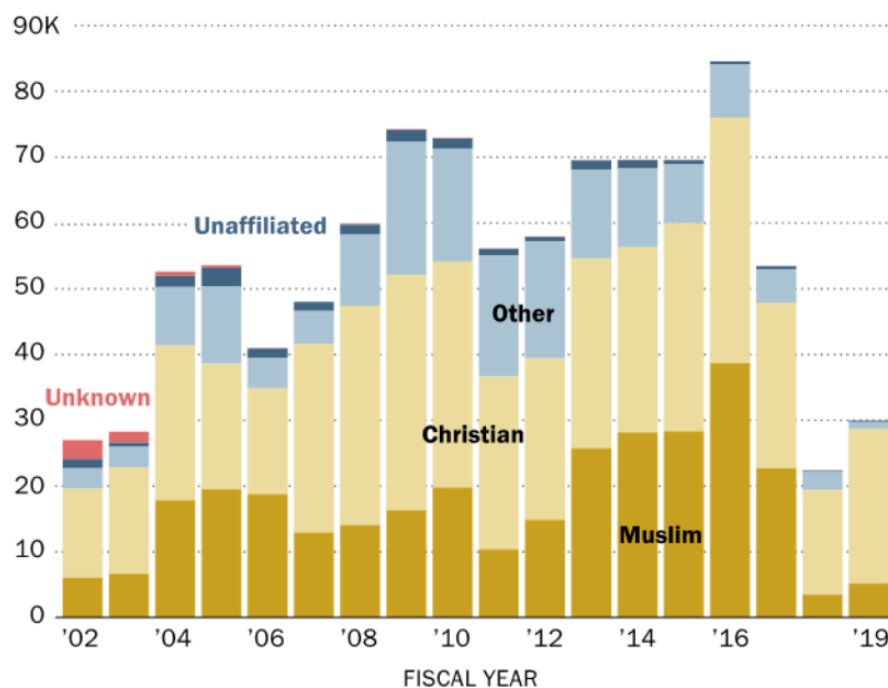
Figure 4. Map illustrating majority of refugees location in the Global South. Reprinted from *Global trends: Forced displacement 2018* (UNHCR, 2019), retrieved from <https://www.unhcr.org/5d08d7ee7.pdf>

Espiritu (2014) makes a critical reference to *expendable nonpersons*, calling into question who exactly these nonpersons are? In the context of the lack of recognition of the loss of Vietnamese lives, she asks “what makes for a grievable life? As Judith Butler

asks, how does mourning take place for those who never ‘were,’ who ‘fit no dominant frame for the human,’ and whose lives do not count as lives?” (Espiritu, 2014, p. 19). It is not a leap in logic to infer that those forcibly displaced and expelled from society are those who do not fit dominant frames. How then do these lives count within the dominant view of the world? Or have they been racialized and removed from society to such a degree that even the worth of their lives has been expelled?

Another category of people President Trump has strategically targeted are Muslims. Under the guise of Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States (White House, 2017), more commonly known as the *Muslim ban*, President Trump signed an executive order that would ban “foreign nationals from seven predominantly Muslim countries from visiting the country for 90 days, suspended entry to the country of all Syrian refugees indefinitely, and prohibited any other refugees from coming into the country for 120 days” (ACLU, n.d.b). Further, the first group of refugees listed under President Trump’s *Determination on Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2020* are those who “have been persecuted or have a well-founded fear of persecution on account of religion” (White House, 2019). The effect of this is illustrated in Figure 5.

*Number of refugees entering the U.S., by religious affiliation*



Note: Fiscal years end on Sept. 30 of the years shown. "Other religions" include Hindus, Buddhists, Jews and other religions. Data do not include special immigrant visas and certain humanitarian parole entrants.

Source: U.S. State Department's Refugee Processing Center, accessed Oct. 1, 2019.

*Figure 5. More Christians than Muslims have entered the U.S. as refugees since fiscal 2017. Reprinted from *Key facts about refugees to the U.S.* (Krogstad, 2019), retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/10/07/key-facts-about-refugees-to-the-u-s/>*

The racialization and *othering* of people of color and Muslim people seeking refugee has been significant under the Trump administration. And while there is significant public outcry and pressure from groups, such as the ACLU in fighting these efforts through protests and lawsuits, the ubiquitous nature of these policies in aggregate coupled with negative rhetoric has had and continues to have a severe negative impact on families and communities seeking refuge.

### ***Global capitalism and neoliberalism***

Globalization driven by (exclusionary) neoliberal ideals have led to significant and growing disparities throughout the world's populations (Oxfam,

2016, 2017), and has also contributed to growing oppression and human rights violations by the few to the many. I opened this paper by referencing extreme inequality worldwide today, measured by the staggering discrepancy in wealth of individuals. Alongside this phenomenon is an unprecedented growth in corporate wealth, some even exceeding that of GDPs of nation states. Growing refugee populations continue to be at risk.

Reports such as “An Economy for the 99%” (Oxfam International, 2017) investigate how the super-rich and large corporations “are driving the inequality crisis” (p. 2). Sassen (2014) suggests a more nuanced dynamic in which in addition to the role of the super-rich and large corporations, there is also an amplified effect. She states that “[r]ich individuals and global firms by themselves could not have achieved such extreme concentration of the world’s wealth.” Rather, they depend on “systemic help: a complex interaction of these actors with systems re-gearred towards enabling extreme concentration” (p. 13). Once fortune or poverty is established, a momentum arises, perpetuating wealth for the super-rich (Oxfam International, 2017), and trapping the poor “in a life of poverty, hunger and sickness” (Oxfam International, 2016). While maintenance and growth of empire (see *Militarism and imperialism* section) arguably remains a constant driver of forced displacement, the motivations have arguably shifted from that primarily focused on anticommunism following World War II (Espiritu, 2014) to that of global capitalism.

Beyond the traditional understanding of a corporation, we are now seeing the ascent of meta-nationals. Unlike traditional corporations that may take pride in national

origins, Khanna (n.d.) refers to meta-nationals as a new era of corporations that are stateless. That is,

companies all choose locations for personnel, factories, executive suites, or bank accounts based on where regulations are friendly, resources abundant, and connectivity seamless. Clever meta-nationals often have legal domicile in one country, corporate management in another, financial assets in a third, and administrative staff spread over several more. (para. 4)

The above challenges the very meaning of “global superpower” in which supply and demand is becoming more powerful than sovereign law. Khanna (n.d.) posits that “corporations are likely to overtake all states in terms of clout” (para. 6). With one measure of power being financial capital, the growing number of corporations that have more cash on hand than the GDP of some nation-states changes the playing field. In one example, “the cash that Apple has on hand exceeds the GDPs of two-thirds of the world’s countries” (para. 7).

A strictly supply and demand-led world by nature negates the rights and human dignity for all; and can serve as a means for forced displacement itself when the demand is for land or natural resources tied to land. An example of how this affects migration is President Trump’s efforts to prioritize immigration based on skills and merit while simultaneously deprioritizing family ties, diversity, protections in immigration policies for those seeking asylum (Mills, 2018).

The term stateless offers an interesting paradox given its opposite meaning for corporations and people. For the former, “there’s always another place to go where profits are higher, oversight friendlier, and opportunities more plentiful. This belief has

helped nimble, mobile, and smart corporations outgrow their original masters, including the world's reigning superpower" (Khanna, n.d.). For the latter, opportunities are lost and rights largely unprotected. We are seeing freer movement of capital, goods, and services and simultaneous increase in restricted movement of people. Where these individual rights are meant to be protected by nation-states, one must wonder, what happens to persons who fall outside the protection of nation-states; and what happens when the role of corporations whose primary purpose is to maximize shareholder wealth, supersedes the power of nation-states that were meant to protect individual rights in the first place?

Some argue that globalization and neoliberalism are synonymous. The latter represents "an economic philosophy that privileges the market and capitalist logics in regulating all aspects of social life" (Rodriguez, 2015, p. 119). Neoliberalism believes that governments are inefficient and invasive and their roles should be diminished, specifically as it relates to providing health, education, and other social services (Rodriguez, 2015). Synonymous or not, there are clear links. Since the 1980s, there's been a proliferation of neoliberal thought and practices manifested in a range of social and economic policies, means of governance, and ideologies that have promoted the self-interest of individuals alongside a "sharp retrenchment of the public sphere" (Lipman, 2011, p. 6). Private interests now supersede social necessities (Giroux, 2004); privatization of public domains is shifting responsibility for public services from "the state to the market;" and focus is shifting from the collective or society and towards individual gain (Kumashiro, 2012).

This is the same era Sassen points to as the birth of this new systemic logic of expulsion, which again, directly affects forcibly displaced populations in the Global

South. She states that “since the 1980s, there has been a strengthening of dynamics that expel people from the economy and from society, and these dynamics are now hardwired into the normal functioning of these spheres” (Sassen, 2014, p. 76). Perpetuated, reproduced, and legitimized through education, neoliberalism has been engrained into our social fabric and collective common sense (Giroux, 2004). It has become the new *social imaginary* (Lipman, 2011, p. 6). It goes largely unquestioned. It has become the common sense or hegemonic notion of the day. (Giroux, 2004).

Furthermore, these neoliberal influences and their reductive tendencies infuse a dynamic antithetical to the aspiration for education to work towards the “full development of the human personality” (United Nations, 1948) or whole person while also preventing the necessary pre conditions for tolerance, friendship and peace, as outlined in Article 26 (2) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Below, I explore how this is manifesting and growing in the context of humanitarianism.

### ***Neoliberalism and humanitarianism***

Juxtaposing neoliberalism with humanitarianism might seem like an oxymoron at first yet is worth further inquiry. Espiritu (2014) states that “liberal resettlement programs are a form of ‘geopolitical humanitarianism’ that end up affirming the state-citizenship hierarchy” (p. 13). In the case of Vietnam, “humanitarian” efforts aided in reframing the U.S. as saviors and rescuers, arguably also serving a role in reviving a sense of sovereignty and rehabilitating the country after the loss in the war (Espiritu, 2014) and emboldening “the role that US empire plays in producing the global history of displacement” (Espiritu, 2016, p. 195). In the context of forced displacement, the link

between humanitarianism and militarism is paralleled with the link between militarized violence and militarized refuge(e) (Espiritu, 2014).

Decades after the Vietnam war, neoliberal realities and trends have been rising in presence and power in the world of humanitarianism (Hyndman, 2000). Within the context of forced displacement of Syrian refugees and education, there has been a surge in participation by the private sector (Menashy & Zakharia, 2017). While a growing involvement from the private sector may help mitigate resource constraints, resources are often coupled with policy and funding direction, thereby expanding opportunity for growing neoliberal influence.

With funding and influence comes shifts in power dynamics in which mission and scope are more exposed to risk and influence by the private sector. Through the associated *authority* that this growing relationship affords the private sector, the related power and influence are positioned to drive future funding and program policies (Menashy & Zakharia, 2017; Oxfam International, 2017). While some corporate giving is framed as corporate social responsibility, it is also true that the primary mandate of all corporations is to maximize shareholder wealth. While there are ways to align private gain with collective good, prioritization goes to the former. It is thus important to unpack, understand, and challenge this growing influence.

Menashy and Zakharia (2017) discuss additional forms of influence through the frames of *disaster capitalism*<sup>4</sup> and *philanthrocapitalism*, both of which compromise humanitarian foci as private sector actors enter humanitarian space. The former refers to the notion of looking at disasters as “exciting market opportunit[ies]” (p. 21) while the

---

<sup>4</sup> This term was coined by Naomi Klein in her 2007 book, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (Menashy & Zakharia, 2017).



latter refers to the competing interests between humanitarian and business motivations. More specifically, McGoey (in Menashy & Zakharia, 2017) states refers to philanthrocapitalism as “the tendency for a new breed of donors to conflate business aims with charitable endeavors, making philanthropy more cost-effective, impact-oriented, and financially profitable” (p. 20).

As illustrated above, the retrenchment of state powers and reach, a key tenet of neoliberalism, is pervasive in its many manifestations. In addition to the larger space this leaves for private actors, including disaster and philanthrocapitalists, to influence and directly affect public domains and humanitarian spaces, it is worthwhile revisiting and expanding upon Espiritu’s (2014) notion of empty land (p. 32). The idea of empty lands is that already inhabited lands are viewed as empty when occupying forces move in, leaving native communities landless, displaced or compromised (Espiritu, 2017). Whereas land occupation is often seen as a displacement of people driven by imperial motivations enacted by state powers, with the growth of neoliberalism, what is becoming more clear is also the displacement of peoples from land due to economic and capitalist drivers, including but not limited to the extraction of natural resources. Powerful private actors influence the retrenchment of state protections of lands and environment, even sacred native lands that violate Treaty rights, such as in the case of Dakota Access Pipeline (Eilperin & Dennis, 2017). While a deep exploration on climate change goes beyond the scope of this review, it is important to note that the aforementioned actions have long-term impacts on land, water (through sea level rise), and air, thereby expanding the causes of forced displacement. While climate refugees are not a protected group as outlined in the 1951 Convention, it is a growing area of concern and discussion.

In addition to direct forced displacement resulting from climate events, it is also important to point out the subsequent effects on other communities as a result of forced migration. The case of Mozambique illustrates how a move from one location that may be at risk for flooding can be replaced with another location that lacks access to riverbanks and fertile lands for fishers and subsistence farmers, as well as land ownership. It's often those living in extreme poverty that are most affected. The conflating effects are detrimental and also result in increased dependency on foreign or domestic aid (Sassen, 2014), which then strengthens and perpetuates the engine of dependency on humanitarianism.

As stated earlier, once poverty is established, a momentum arises trapping the poor "in a life of poverty, hunger and sickness" (Oxfam International, 2016). Expulsion then, is not just about economics, militarism, and war, it's also about social expulsion driven by displacement, environmental calamities, extreme poverty (Sassen, 2014).

### **Giving Back: Transnational (Forced) Migration and Giving Back**

The preceding literature review on CRS expands the conversation about refugees beyond solely acts that take place after forced displacement to include root causes of forced displacement. The literature takes a critical look at power and the expansion of power in the context of militarism, imperialism, colonialism, globalization, and the racialization of refugees; and the roles these phenomena have in the creation of forced displacement. While CRS argues for a move of scope from refugee *bodies* to these larger power dynamics and motivations, it also encourages listening to refugee *voices*. I posit that there is a critical role in learning from the lived experiences of refugees and other forced migrants in order to inform a different path forward, a path that focuses primarily

on collective well-being rather than private gain and growth of power. The CRS literature arguably leaves the reader wondering *how* to disrupt the reinforcing nature of power dynamics at the expense of others in the context of forced displacement. This study is designed to investigate this question.

I acknowledge that many of the problems mentioned above are large structural problems about unequal global relations and how that may seem disconnected with the smaller communities of CoLS that this study explores as they desire to give back and work towards collective uplift. I posit, however, that some of the same dynamics that exist in those unequal global relations also manifest in the daily lives of CoLS, as data reveal. Thus, I argue for the necessity to seek new logics rooted in communities who have the lived experiences of forced migration, the scholarship and leadership through study and praxis, and commitment and will for betterment of the collective. As illustrated in Chapter 4, some CoLS seek to do this at a small scale; however, some have larger sights in mind. Hence, while this study hones in on a relatively small space, I argue that the potential reach can be much broader. For with each CoLS, there is a reach in multiples by virtue of their community work, and together there is a larger multiplier effect. And while they may not reach the magnitude of the structural problems address in this literature review, these agentic and counter-hegemonic actions are valuable and worthy of scholarly attention, as are individual and collective orientations towards social change. For the desires CoLS follow (Chapter 4) relate to collective uplift that may assist those forcibly displaced immediately after displacement or in sustainable ways with an outlook to the longer-term future to prevent reoccurring forced displacement, or to simply create more peaceful, equitable and peaceful communities. In a world where the numbers

of those seeking refuge have reached a record high and policies initially set up to help refugees now hinder them, new logics are needed. Even if it begins in a small collective, it's a start.

Further, CoLS are each a part of a diaspora. Many are active transnationally by means of their membership in their diaspora, locally and/or in countries of origin and/or transit. Many are also actively engaged with other diaspora communities locally. Van Hear (2003) acknowledges and explores the role these diasporic transnational communities can have in sustainable development and reconstruction of societies during or post conflict. He juxtaposes the notion of transnational relations with the three UNHCR durable solutions for refugees—voluntary repatriation, local integration, or third country resettlement. While he acknowledges transnational connections as having the possibility to fuel conflicts, they also can have ameliorating “effects: for good or ill, exile communities have been essential bases of support for those contesting power in the homeland” (p. 12). Further, transnational connections and diaspora links “that develop to sustain societies in conflict are likely to be irrevocably integral parts of the ‘post-conflict’ society to be reconstructed” (p. 15).

Since this dissertation, through its purposeful sampling, aims to work individually and collaboratively with a group of CoLS who have experienced forced migration and who have self-identified and illustrated a commitment to giving back to either communities of origin or matters related to forced displacement, the literature review below aims to bring in and connect studies that speak to this phenomenon. In the process of researching and developing this review, the following observation was made—it seems that there is no one body of literature encapsulated under one body of work that addresses

all of the above. As such, in the following review of literature, rather than going deep into any one sub-body of work, I aim to share enough of each area to then be able to thread the work together. My hope is that through this effort, I can illustrate commonalities as well as limitations, thereby exposing a need for more research in this overlapping area. The various bodies of literature also refer to the study populations in different ways. Hence, I begin below by exploring this in order to help frame the population for this study.

### ***Framing the study population***

The search for a frame to describe the population in this study was deeply reflective, critical, intentional, and not without consternation. While one can always self-define a frame, it is also true that dominant narratives can skew a frame causing pre-defined understandings of a people, phenomenon, or topic. While there are opportunities to persuade otherwise, pending how deeply rooted dominant discourses may permeate or subsume one's consciousness, it may also limit the depth of reach of discourse related to those frames. As such, in the below, I attempt to unpack some common frames to illustrate my journey in critically analyzing and eventually reaching a frame for this study population.

In the end, I came up with my own framing, referring to participants as Community Leader-Scholars *with refugee experiences* (CoLS, pronounced *coalesce*) (see Chapter 4 for a detailed description as it applies specifically to participants) as no one frame fully addressed what I hoped to achieve through this study. In fact, many of the following frames applied to participants and I did not want to artificially box any one and certainly the entire group of participants into just one. I had considered using a similar

frame as Shapiro (2018), who introduces the term, *refugee-background youth*. However, in the end, I did not want to pre-frame participants with refugee-background. The experiences of participants shared in this study illustrate how as soon as they are introduced as a refugee, the perception and reception towards them changes (Janya, interview, April 26, 2019). I did *not* want to replicate this. Rather, I wanted to lead the introduction to participants with and centering their strengths, hence, *Community Leader-Scholars with refugee experiences* (CoLS). Further, all participants have had refugee experiences; however, not all fall into the limited definition of refugee per the Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees (hereafter referred to as the 1951 Convention) (UNHCR, 2010). Again, I wanted to challenge this narrow definition with refugee experiences, broadening understanding of shared experiences while also acknowledging that the protections available to refugees may differ from people seeking asylum (interview, February 15, 2019). Finally, I wanted to make a statement that all people, including participants, are made up of a multitude of experiences in order to also disrupt the uni-dimensional narrative often applied to those who have sought refuge. With this statement and understanding, I use CoLS as a primary reference; however, I also pull in and utilize more common vernacular, as described below, throughout.

Below, I introduce some of the more common frames referenced, including refugee, diaspora, *conflict-generated diaspora* (Lyons 2007), and transnational migrant. I define them as well as acknowledge their limitations. In addition to helping to provide background in my process of thinking through appropriate framing for this study, this effort helps to identify connections to the next section of this literature review in which I outline ways in which migrants give back and their motivations for doing so. Finally, as

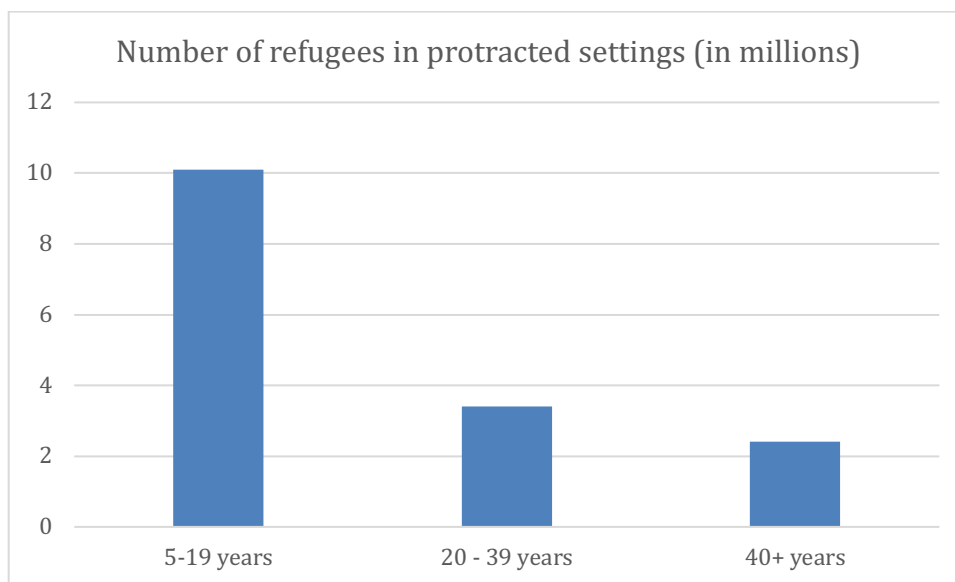
the field of migration and related studies evolve, these connections are starting to be made and it would behoove the scholar of migration to at the minimum be aware of these overlapping discourses, in a hopeful effort to later contribute to this growing body of work.

### ***Refugee***

While the term refugee has a larger colloquial understanding, the technical and legal definition, according to the 1951 Convention “is someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.” (UNHCR, 2010, p. 3). There are several key considerations and exclusions that result. First, regardless of widespread understanding and acknowledgement of other causes for displacement, including but not limited to poverty, economic exclusion, marginalization (United Nations, 2016), at present, the definition of refugee still remains as defined by the 1951 Convention thereby excluding certain forced migrants from a range of protections. Second, a refugee is someone who has crossed a national border thereby excluding internally displaced persons (IDPs) or individuals forced to flee yet who remain within country borders.

Thirdly, when the 1951 Convention was initially set up, the drafters did not foresee what has materialized today in terms of the growth and persistence of protracted situations. “UNHCR defines a protracted refugee situation as one in which 25,000 or more refugees from the same nationality have been in exile for five consecutive years or more in a given host country” (UNHCR, 2019, p. 22). While there are limitations in accurately accounting for these populations given internal mobility within said

populations, the point is that protracted situations measure settings that have moved beyond emergency stages that reside between life-saving assistance and protection and one of the three durable solutions as defined by UNHCR—voluntary repatriation, local integration, or resettlement. Many refugees in protracted contexts reside in camps or neighboring countries and have for numerous years. Figure 6 illustrates refugee communities in protracted situations at year-end 2018.



*Figure 6.* Numbers of refugees living in protracted settings at year-end 2018, displayed by range of years. Data from UNHCR (2019).

The total number of refugees living in protracted settings at year-end 2018 was 15.9 million. This was an 18% increase from the previous year. That is, in 2017, 66% of all refugees were in protracted situations. In 2018, this grew to 78%. Of the 10.1 million refugees who were living in protracted settings between five and 19 years, “more than half represented by the displacement situation of Syrians in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey” (UNHCR, 2019, p. 22). The 2.4 million people living in protracted



situations for 40 plus years<sup>5</sup> represent refugees from Afghanistan living in Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran. This has many implications for the many aspects of education. With protracted settings now including multiple generations of families, education for the long-term becomes more critical, including but not limited to higher education.

There are several reasons why the extended reality of refugee situations merit a different frame for refugees living in protracted settings. As indicated above, the drafters of the 1951 Convention never imagined such a prolonged state for refugees as evidenced by the addition of the 1967 protocol that both expanded the geographic applicability of the 1951 Convention and lengthened the timeframe to also include refugees resulting from events before and after January 1, 1951 (UNHCR, 2010). I posit for consideration identifying a new frame for refugees in protracted settings who by definition have surpassed emergency stages yet are in limbo given structural limitations in reaching a durable solution. From a humanistic frame, I also posit that solely referring to individuals who have experienced forced migration as refugees even after a durable solution has been met, reduces those individuals to the definition to solely the one part of their lives. As significant as that part may be, it negates the larger, more holistic, and multi-dimensional aspects of any individual or human being, while also boxing them into a dominant deficit frame that has unfortunately permeated mainstream discourse.

### *Diaspora*

Unlike the formal definition of refugee that is outlined and determined in the 1951 Convention, “[d]iasporas are defined by self-identification and participation in networks

---

<sup>5</sup> “[T]his does not mean that individuals have necessarily been displaced for 40 years as there may have been departures, new arrivals, births and deaths” (UNHCR, 2019, p. 22).

engaged in activities designed to sustain homeland linkages. Behaviour and choice rather than ascriptive identity therefore are critical to determining membership in a diaspora” (Lyons, 2007, pp. 531-2). Similarly, Brinkerhoff (2011) defines diasporas as “immigrants who maintain a connection, psychological or material, to their place of origin” (p. 116). It’s important to note here that ‘homelands’ may not necessarily reflect a country. Hence, Brinkerhoff (2011) states that “it is sometimes more appropriate to refer to place of origin (PO) as opposed to country of origin (COO). This is particularly so in conflict contexts where state boundaries may be contested” (p. 116). That is, the notion of belonging as it relates to nation-states can in itself be exclusionary given citizenship or residency status. As such, using the term PO allows for the notion of homeland without questions about belongingness.

Van Hear (2014) suggests three attributes that contribute to the definition of diaspora. First, diaspora are separated from two or more territories and not just from one homeland. This is an evolution from earlier migration studies that limited migration to one-way directions from sending to receiving countries. The second attribute is that there is “enduring, although not necessarily permanent presence abroad” (p. 2). The final attribute is the existence of some current of exchange among the diaspora. This can be economic, social, cultural, or political. While the specific definitions of diaspora may range between social science, government or policy, and vernacular representations, these representations inform each other and have become fairly established in the field of migration and beyond.

Since the 1990s, refugees have grown in importance in the creation of diaspora leading to the growth of transnational activities. Concepts of transnationalism (see below)

and diaspora have been established conceptually within refugee and migration studies in this timeframe as well and now widely used in policy discourse (Van Hear, 2014).

### ***Conflict-generated diaspora***

There is of course diversity within diaspora groups. In most of the original scholarship, references to migration, transnational, and diaspora took place within the context of stable settings. Any linkages to diaspora in relation to conflict settings were generally negative and framed as instigating or perpetuating revolt or violence. It wasn't until the 2000s that there was an acknowledgement that diasporas could also have a positive role in peace building, relief efforts and post-conflict reconstruction. The make up, motivations, and activities of diaspora range.

For those originating from places of conflict, homeland linkages can take on higher levels of symbolism or political engagement, and even serve as centers for mobilization. Lyons (2007) presents the term, *conflict-generated diasporas*, defined as specific diaspora communities that are unique in that their origins of displacement are based in violence or forced migration versus economic opportunities pursued by choice; or alternatively, "diaspora groups produced by a specific set of traumatic memories" (p. 529). Migration might also take place as a result of state fragility, defined as "the inability of a governing regime to provide basic services to its citizens owing to a lack of capacity or legitimacy" (Lum, Nikolko, Samy, & Carment, 2013, p. 202).

Diaspora can also be broken down into the term refugee diasporas, which can further be broken down into near diaspora that defines those residing in neighboring areas, or wider diaspora that defines those who have migrated farther away. Transnational connections may then form across these multiple locations (Van Hear, 2014).

### *Transnational migration*

In contrast to earlier research in migration studies, transnational migration research now acknowledges simultaneous ties migrants may have with homelands and receiving states. The array and scope of related cross-border activities and practices vary tremendously and can span familial, cultural, political, religious, social and/or economic domains. Basch et al (1994) “initially defined transnationalism as ‘the process by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement’” (in Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007, p. 131).

More current scholarship acknowledges “transnational migration as taking place within fluid social spaces that are constantly reworked in migrants’ simultaneous embeddedness in more than one society” (Levitt & Glick Schiller 2004, Pries 2005, Smith 2005 in Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007, p. 131). While Levitt and Jaworsky (2007) connect this idea to places where migrants have with “their conationals and coreligionists” (p. 131), I posit and explore through this dissertation that connections may also exist across experiences of forced migrations, regardless of countries of origin or religion. Further, I argue that connections may also exist with places of transit, and not just those of origin or settlement.

Levitt and Khagram (in Levitt and Jarwosky 2007) state:

Transnational studies represent a concerted effort to take a systematic and synthetic look at how governance, social movements, income-earning, and religious life change when they are enacted across borders and how we must rethink identity, belonging, and democracy in response. (p. 146)

In the following section, I review literature on the ways in which diaspora and transnational communities give back to communities in order to frame and provide some theoretical background for desires and motivations of how and why study participants *may* give back. I disrupt some common assumptions and complicate this notion further in Chapter 5.

### ***How migrant communities give back***

The reason for breaking down the aforementioned definitions is that some scholars argue that the way in which forced migration takes place may influence ways in which remittances take place (Lindley, 2009). That is, the experiences people have before migration have strong influences on their activities in their countries of settlement, which in turn influence their remittances to their respective homelands (Levitt & Lamba-Nieves, 2011). Humanitarian emergencies and conflict in places of origin can also inspire action (Brinkerhoff, 2011). Below, I begin with some general ways researchers have codified how transnational migrants give back. I also include references to specific migrant groups, including but not limited to refugees or forced migrants.

Levitt and Jarwosky (2007) outline five key areas of how transnational practice manifests—economic, political, social, culture, and religion. Of these categories, Brinkerhoff (2011) refers to the economic and political and adds two additional yet overlapping ways diaspora contribute—philanthropy and human capital. Weng and Lee (2016) identify five key ways refugees and immigrants contributed back into their communities—direct support, connecting others to help one another, contributing money to support families and causes, participating in fundraising or organizing to raise funds for larger causes, and volunteering time to ethnic community organizations. In this last

area, the authors note that many of their participants assisted in the running of ethnic organizations or created nonprofit organizations. Table 2 illustrates how these compare.

Table 2

Ways in which transnational migrants and diaspora give back to their communities

Ways in which transnational practices manifest or how migrants give back	Levitt and Jarwosky (2007)	Brinkerhoff (2011)	Weng and Lee (2016)
Economic	✓	✓	✓
Political	✓	✓	
Social	✓		✓
Culture	✓		
Religion	✓		
Philanthropy		✓	✓
Human Capital		✓	✓

The following is a more detailed explanation of these areas, categorized primarily by the categories outlined by Levitt and Jarwosky (2007); and Brinkerhoff (2011).

1. *Economic*. This includes remittances, entrepreneurship, and development and can support individual and/or collective projects. Lum, Nikolko, Samy, and Carment (2013) define “[f]unds remitted expressed as a percentage of GDP ” (p. 213).

Beyond solely the economic, social capital can also play a key role in traversing class divides as well as remittances (Levitt and Jarwosky, 2007). Lindley (2009) states:

in the same way that migrants are not ‘just labour’, so remittances are not ‘just money’. Our understanding of the remittance process may be greatly enhanced by moving beyond economically functionalist approaches to

analyse the intense ‘relational work’ involved in the production of remittances. (Zelizer 2005, p. 1331)

This quote holds greater meaning when juxtaposed with the discussion on neoliberalism in the previous section. I address this relational work through the concept of collective ways of being in Chapter 5.

2. *Political*. This may include participation in elections as candidates or voters; involvement in political parties, campaigns, or associations and may evolve boundaries related to belonging (Levitt and Jarwosky, 2007). It may also include fundraising for political campaigns, and the supply of ideas and political strategies that can range from polarizing to peacemaking (Lyons, 2007) to nation building (Levitt & Jarwosky, 2007). Advocacy, placing diplomatic pressure, or participation in post-conflict political processes are also ways diaspora contribute (Brinkerhoff, 2011).
3. *Social*. This relates primarily to family, kin, race, gender, and class relations, and the impact that transnationalism can play in evolving dynamics given these areas and intersections. There is some alignment to the notion of social remittances, that is, the sharing of norms, identities, ideas, and practices (Levitt & Jarwosky, 2007). Levitt and Lamba-Nieves (2011) state that “[t]he ideas and practices migrants bring with them actively shape who and what they encounter in the countries where they move, which then shapes what they send back” (p. 2). This is often shadowed by economic remittances yet plays a unique and critical role across transnational communities.

4. *Culture*. This looks at what may happen to culture as it travels through space in multiple directions, including the debates around the potentiality of increased reach of Western culture to previously remote cultures (Levitt and Jarwosky, 2007).
5. *Religion*. Sometimes subsumed under the category of culture (per Levitt and Lamba-Nieves, 2011), this growing area looks at the unique and overlapping intersections of religion, migration, and in appropriate contexts, also culture.
6. *Philanthropy*. “[S]ome Somali diasporans have come to believe humanitarian or development support to their PO is the best or the only way to support lasting peace and stability” (Brinkerhoff, 2011, p. 128) including investing in the creation of a middle class that are interested in peace, or investing in educating of newer generations. This category could also relate to economic activities.
7. *Human Capital*. “Diaspora populations are one of the most fruitful sources for human capital for reconstruction and development” (Brinkerhoff, 2011, p. 129) and can take the form of staffing development and government programs. This could also feed into several of the other categories.

The aforementioned list collectively provides a comprehensive view to the ways in which diaspora and transnational communities may give back. While listed individually, these categories overlap in various ways. It is worth mentioning the difference scholars make between remittances (both economic and social) on the individual and collective levels (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves, 2011). The former often takes place between family members, friends, or neighbors whereas the latter refers to organizational contexts such as churches or political parties. The significance of the



collective level is that it can also address capacity building efforts and larger community development efforts. Social remittances can also scale vertically from local to national or regional levels; or also scale horizontally to other areas of practice (Levitt & Lamba-Nieves, 2011). The following provides examples of remittances on a collective level through organizations.

In Tavanti, Abdi and MacHarg's (2016) article on "Somali diaspora civil society organizations (SD-CSOs)," the authors explore the role SD-CSOs working in the area of gender equality and democracy have in promoting like efforts in Somalia. It's notable that these efforts go beyond solely the economic realm of remittances to include advocacy and solidarity efforts, and social remittances as well. In addition to analyzing how these diaspora SD-CSOs give back, the authors also note the unique role Somali diaspora serve in bridging local and international perspectives, including in the areas of cultural competency, sustainable solutions, and international priorities. "Somali diaspora communities are valuable assets that could be the subject of investment for peace, empowerment, development and country reconstruction" (Tavanti et al., 2016, pp. 11-12). Noting the increase in the number of Somali diaspora returning and the education gained abroad, the authors note the important role Somali diaspora have in not only daily survival but also longer-term development projects. In addition to leadership capacity through SD-CSOs, this also points to possibilities and capabilities in contributing to leadership in the governance of development efforts, something the authors state has rarely been used so far (Tavanti et al., 2016). The exploration around leadership of diaspora, specifically those who have experiences of forced migration is exactly the focus of this dissertation.

Van Hear (2014) further breaks down into three spheres ways in which diaspora engage that span public and private domains. The first sphere is the “household/extended family sphere” (p. 6). This sphere is primarily personal and private and likely the most supported. The primary means of engagement in this area is in the form of remittances or sending money. In the context of conflicts, this helps family to cope and survive. The second sphere is referred to as the “known community” (p. 6). It is more public than the former sphere and includes “collectivities of people that know each other or know of each other” (p. 6). Engagement occurs where one has in the past or currently resides “among people one knows or knows of. It is the realm of associational life: residentially and ethnically based associations and clubs, schools, religious bodies, mutual aid and welfare organizations, community-based and civil society organizations” (p. 8). The final sphere is referred to as the *imagined community* and includes national, ethnic, and/or other allegiances.

The concept of imagined communities is primarily aligned with the scholar Benedict Anderson who references the “nation to which one has an affinity without necessarily knowing its members personally” (Van Hear, 2014, p. 8). In the collective portion of this study, however, I extend the idea of imagined communities to go beyond the typical national or ethnic groupings to that of other shared commitments formed through the shared lived experiences of forced migration.

Collectively, the estimated volume of remittances received by developing countries in 2014 was \$427 billion (World Bank Group 2015a in Vargas-Silva, 2016). There is evidence to suggest that a large proportion of forcibly displaced persons participate in the sending or receiving of remittances. Patterns of transactions take place

between family members who remain in places of origin and economic (or *nondisplaced* migrants), refugees/asylum seekers, and/or internally displaced persons (IDPs). There are also patterns of transactions between displaced migrants as well as between nondisplaced and displaced migrants. The patterns are multiple yet the research, in particular as it relates to IDPs remains scant (Vargas-Silva, 2016).

***Motivations: why migrants give back***

Through my ongoing involvement with Refugee and Immigrant Transitions, I have observed a seemingly disproportionate number of newcomer students who have expressed a desire to give back motivated by their own lived experiences. This study aims to better understand those motivations, aspirations, barriers, and strategies. In this section, I review literature that speaks to the motivation of why migrants give back.

In their study with refugee and immigrants in the United States, Weng and Lee (2016) identify four key themes of why study participants gave back to their communities. These include “(1) a desire to maintain ethnic identity and connection; (2) ethnic community as an extension of family; (3) a sense of duty and obligation; and (4) measure of achieved success” (p. 509). This last point merits further explanation in that giving back served as a metric for one’s own success symbolizing a level of establishment allowing them to then support others. Employment and/or education were considered means to further oneself. For example, the authors reference a statement from a refugee participant about dedicating his college education to serve his country. It is statements like this plus references to serving as community leaders as another measure of success that inform and inspire this study.

Levitt and Lamba-Nieves (2011, pp. 8-9) also, in the case of transnational migrants from Dominican Republic, note that “they come to the US with a culture of participation and conscientiousness that it is natural for them to recreate after they move” (p. 9). They also note prior experience developing community projects “because they have been raised to feel a strong sense of responsibility to their community” (p. 8). The experiences people have before migration have strong influences on their activities in their countries of settlement, as well as their remittances to their respective homelands. And while some mobilize around identities, the motivation for that mobilization may in fact be driven by experiences of marginalization and a need to be a part of and protect the collective identity from erasure. Others may be motivated by obligation or a feeling of guilt as they try to reconcile differences between host community and ongoing struggles in places of origin.

Vargas-Silva (2016) lists several motives behind remittances to and from forcibly displaced persons, including altruism to contribute to the well-being of those left behind; self-interest to improve upon one’s own future wellbeing; insurance to help reduce future risk of the household; and loan-repayment for costs related to migration or education. Going beyond solely the transactional nature of remittances, Dryden-Peterson & Reddick (2019) take a deeper look at how diaspora engage in development work in places of origin, specifically as it relates to education in *fragile and conflict-affected settings* (FCS). Their study illustrates a strong sense of motivation to contributions that have a long-term view towards peace in places of origin.

This recent literature makes a strong case for the responsibilities and motivations immigrant and refugee diaspora feel towards giving back, whether to their countries of

origin, transit or their current communities. In this dissertation, findings made a strong case for a more foundation influencer in why people give back, which I believe goes deeper into Weng and Lee's (2016) third theme of sense of obligation and duty; and Levitt and Lamba-Nieves's (2011) reference to a sense of responsibility and pre-migration experience. That is, in Chapter 5, I go to an arguably more foundational level of these motivations rooted in and informed by earlier experiences growing up in collective struggle and how that idea of the collective has informed participants' way of being in the world.

### **Conclusion, Implications and Inspiration for This Study**

The growing state and importance of diaspora and transnational communities worldwide illustrates the role and influence diaspora communities can have on host communities, and places of origin and transit. Effects can span economic, social, and political realms in positive and/or negative ways, and can be factors in stability and/or instability. While there is certainly a range, diaspora communities generally lead to stability in places of origin. "However, there is no obvious consensus in the current literature on the overall impact of these linkages on fragility... Interestingly, no global relationship between remittances and fragility was uncovered" (Lum, Nikolko, Samy, and Carment, 2013, p. 216) although there are theoretical associations between diasporas, peace movements, and development in places of origin.

This is an exciting time for scholars to build upon and continue to grow this body of work. Lum, Nikolko, Samy, and Carment (2013) state that "the next logical step is to develop a broader theoretical framework for explaining how and why diaspora communities accomplish their goals" (p. 202). This study aims to better understand and

potentially contribute to the development of this theoretical framework. A practical application of this can be to inform policymakers and political actors how to partner with diaspora communities and members in peace making and sustainable development efforts. Not only could this theoretically lead to more engagement with diaspora groups but also enhance the possibility of positive contributions to fragile places of origin. While there are examples of diaspora involvement in such contexts (see Chapter 4), more research is needed in this growing area of diaspora studies, and even more so in the context of conflict-generated diaspora and fragile states.

Remittances and diaspora contributions can contribute to peace or conflict (Brinkerhoff, 2011). As such, “it is imperative that diasporas are understood not as a monolithic actor with unwavering exclusive interests. The same diaspora has potential to make a range of contributions... constructive, destructive, as well as unintended” (p. 132-3). Diaspora practices can also provide critical supports to people living in conflict and can likely also serve in post-conflict settings. A deeper, broader, and more nuanced understanding can inform policy and practice as it relates to peace building. Research that map diaspora to peace building and/or conflict is still scant leaving continued need for data to inform diaspora policies, praxes, and resource development.

Further, studies need to emphasize “the concurrent influence of transnational ethnic groups in both their homelands and their host countries, not just one or the other” (Lum, Nikolko, Samy, & Carment, 2013, p. 217). As the scope and importance of diasporas continue to grow, connections between host and places of origin will grow in depth and complexity. Research methods need to thus be sufficiently comprehensive in order to comprehend and explain evolving nature and relationships of diasporas.

Migration is not a dichotomous point A to Point B linear path. Further, more research is needed to better understand connections and relationships with development, including notions of sustainable development, or the formation and perpetuation of economic inequality or dependency, individual or collective remittances and the effect on organizations and institutions, contribution to social change, etc. (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves, 2011).

At a time when the number of forced migrants has never been higher, future resettlement—one of the three durable solutions for refugees—is dwindling, and protracted refugee contexts is growing, Van Hear's (2014) suggestion that transnationalism could be a durable solution is worthy of further reflection and research. Van Hear suggests that there are links across the corresponding locations of the three durable solutions that come to light in diaspora and transnational literature. Diaspora communities and connections have great potential for societal reconstruction post conflict and as stated earlier, destabilization as well. Future solutions may include a collective look at a household in which some members stay and some go abroad.

Clearly, much more research is needed in the area of diaspora and transnational migration in general, and related to forced migration in particular. Not only does this study focus on this area, this study also argues for different perspectives, solutions, and actors at the table and in leadership positions, in particular, those with the lived experiences to fill in knowledge and commitment to the collective good. Freire (1970/2018) questions, “[w]ho are better prepared than the oppressed to understand the terrible significance of an oppressive society?” (p. 45). The communities I center in this study represent those who have experienced significant hardships, oppression, and life

challenges. They have witnessed and/or experienced atrocities many have not even heard of or could not imagine. And through those experiences, as family members, peers, and other members of said communities have shared with me, knowledge and wisdom has been cultivated through both lived experiences and reflection. Perhaps, per the above literature, they have also contributed to a motivation to give back as well as informed how to give back.

This study thus centers individuals and communities—their experiences and resilience—and explores individual and collective motivations, barriers, wisdom, goals, and strategies that arise, specifically in their efforts to give back.



## CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

### Researcher Positionality

The process of generational transmission of war memory is complex and difficult, not only for the survivors but also for their children, as the latter move between honoring their elders' memory and constructing their own relation to this contentious legacy. In a lucid account of the intergenerational legacy of the Holocaust, Marianne Hirsch (in Espiritu, 2014) argues that shards of memories of traumatic events persist to mark the lives of children of survivors. Although separated in time and space from the devastating histories, the postwar generation remembers these powerful experiences by means of the fractured images, stories, behaviors, and affects transmitted, sometimes indirectly and wordlessly, within the family and the culture at large. Hirsch has called this memory of the generation after as *postmemory*: the experience of being separated in time and space from the war being remembered, yet of living with the eyewitness memory. According to Hirsch, postmemory—a secondary, mediated, and inherited memory of a long past—is not the same as memory in that it does not recall but rather imagines, projects, and creates the past, yet it can be just as weighty because it “approximates memory in its affective force” (Espiritu, 2014, p. 141; Espiritu, 2006). “[F]rom the position of a second-generation Vietnamese American,” Viet Thanh Nguyen “expresses that children of refugees are implicated in a tangle of identification with a past we can’t truly know, but can never shake; we make and make sense of new identities in between worlds” (Nguyen, 2013, p. 103).

As a first generation born and raised Canadian to immigrant parents who each escaped North Korea when they were young, spent their formative years forcibly

displaced by their escape and ensuing war resulting in the loss of life's basic needs as well as loss of loved ones through family separation (that still ensues today), I am the product of forced migration. I am driven by my own ideals and personal need to challenge powers that continue to oppress and displace people and separate families in favor of militarism and global capitalism at the expense and erasure of human life. This motivates me to work in solidarity with all people affected by war, conflict, and forced migration worldwide.

In many respects, this study is a commemoration and remembrance of my family history in order to help disrupt the cycle of displacement and oppression of others. Lyons (2007) states that "trauma of violent displacement is vivid in the first generations' minds and is often kept alive in subsequent generations through commemorations and symbols. In fact, one function of 'conflict-generated diaspora' networks is to ensure that displacement's original cause is remembered and the grievance passed on to the next generation" (p. 532). As the findings in this study illustrate, it is not only the grievance that is passed on but notions of resistance and change as well.

My family history defines me. I feel no gap in time and space in our collective history. These are the experiences and memories that have driven me for years to question and search, feel helpless and inspired. And yet, I am acutely aware that given the generational gap between myself and when my parents fled North Korea, I also approach this work as a relative outsider. While I hold dearly our family memories, I do not have the personal lived experiences they do nor do I of study participants who have lived through forced displacement and who have directly contributed to this study. So I approach this work with caution and cultural humility (Koirala-Azad, Zanoni, & Argenal,

2018), acutely aware of how little I know and committed to honor the spaces others open up to me. I enter this space as an invited guest and am honored, humbled, and committed to continue on this journey.

I have experienced a range of contexts (directly or through our family story and identity) and traveled many liminal spaces. Born a Canadian citizen to immigrant parents, living as an *alien* in the United States spanning a range of residency visas, and eventually becoming a citizen of the United States, I have both enjoyed and questioned my stability of place and growing privilege. I am acutely aware of the responsibilities that accompany that privilege—better understand and raise consciousness about the injustices of the world, and the randomness of our placements in where we are born or why some are able to flee and seek refuge while others are not. Should our circumstances land us on the side of varying privileges, I believe we must remember our sisters and brothers whose fates are different. In my view, it's not about charity or pity but a responsibility to right wrongs, and work towards structural change and justice for all. I believe we must also honor the strengths and capacities of those too often seen only as victims and recognize our own limitations and ignorance. These commitments inform how I come to this dissertation research and why I chose to pursue an action research design as a strategy for community engaged scholarship.

In addition to my family history and experiences, I approach this study after learning and working with refugee populations over the last 16 plus years. My entry into this world began more formally in 2003, the summer before starting a Master degree in International Educational Administration and Policy Analysis at Stanford University. I was drawn to the program in pursuit of the question, “what is the role of education in

reconstructing societies after a political transition?” My focus was North Korea—where my family has roots—and knowing that access to data would be limited, I spent the summer before the program living in South Korea, meeting with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), scholars, government officials, refugees, and activists. The following year, I was invited to travel with a group of South Korean scholars—graduate students and professors—studying North Korea. The travels spanned the entire North Korea - China border, beginning in Dandong in the west and ending in Yanbian in the northeast area of China. Yanbian simultaneously borders Russia and North Korea and is an area where many North Korean refugees reside in hiding.

These inquiries and experiences coupled with my own family’s migration from Korea to Canada before I was born left a tremendous impact on me, and sparked a longstanding commitment to understanding issues of forced migration and education. Subsequent inquiries and various volunteer roles eventually led me to Refugee and Immigrant Transitions (RIT), a non-profit organization based out of the San Francisco Bay Area that partners “with people who have sought refuge in the U.S. to create education, family engagement, and community leadership opportunities” (Refugee and Immigrant Transitions, 2019). I joined the organization as the Director of Strategy and Development in 2012 and have since also volunteered in various capacities, including at RIT’s summer camps, after-school programs, and in classroom settings. Currently, I serve as Chair of the Board of Directors. Through these various positions, I have continued to ponder the role of education in transitioning societies as well as the role of education for individuals and communities in transition. Through RIT, I have seen how formal and non-formal education systems can not only help individuals successfully

transition into their new communities but also, in collaboration with individuals and communities in transition, contribute to community resilience and well-being. It is through this work, oral history projects with migrant youth, and related studies of RIT's youth leadership program (see *Background and Need* section), that a pattern of youth leaders who desire to give back become increasingly visible.

In addition, over the last few years, I have had the opportunity to serve as an adjunct professor and guest lecturer around topics of forced migration. Even within critical spaces of inquiry, it has become evident that the dominant deficit and/or victim frame of refugees, albeit at lesser levels, persist. I felt that I needed to engage and produce research at a deeper level that would investigate why in order to further disrupt these patterns at a deeper level. All my learning from these various contexts inform and inspire this dissertation.

## **Research Design**

### ***Knowledge claims, strategies, and methods***

Creswell (2003) outlines three components of inquiry that lead to research approaches and research design processes—"knowledge claims, strategies, and methods" (p. 5). This study drew from two approaches to knowledge claims—constructivism and advocacy. Constructivism believes in the subjectivity, variability, and multiplicity of experiences "leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views rather than narrowing meanings into a few categories or ideas" (p. 8). In this design, meaning is negotiated and developed through interaction. In the context of these social constructions, I acknowledge my own positionalities (as outlined above) and the effects they may have had on interpretations. While this study took primarily an inductive approach, through its

iterative design, it was also informed by deductive processes.

The advocacy approach to knowledge claims takes the constructivist work a step further, acknowledging an inherent interconnection with the political and advocating for action for social justice (Creswell, 2003). A social justice concept includes a direct connection with community life, the continual exploration of questions and answers based on lived experiences within or outside of the community, and finally, a commitment to advocacy in which the researcher works *with* the community (Angrosino, 2005).

Creswell (2003) couples the knowledge claim of advocacy with participatory. This form of research proceeds collaboratively, including participants in the design, data collection, analysis, “or receive rewards for participating in the research” (Creswell, 2003, p. 10). This study was inspired by yet not explicitly participatory. Rather, it pulled from and was informed by principles of Participatory Action Research (PAR), such as reciprocity, collaboration, mutuality. I looked to PAR values as guidance in the exploration and nurturance of “new counter-hegemonic knowledge and practices” (Koirala-Azad, 2010, p. 85) as well as *dialogic and reflective* practices (Koirala-Azad, 2010, p. 86) to inform that.

My goal for this study was for it to be deeply informed and guided by participants while at the same time respecting their busy schedules and multiple commitments. Hence, I did not ask participants to proactively design or analyze data; however, what I did do was seek input from Level 2 participants (see *Levels of participation* for a description of Level 1 and Level 2 participants) on the design. Specifically, in addition to informal conversations over the years that helped to construct this study design generally, I also

specifically reviewed the proposed study design at the first group session at which time the group dialogued about what data made sense to collect and what was comfortable for them to share. Also, group sessions were times when I brought preliminary reflections or analyses to share, obtain feedback on, critically dialogue about, and/or utilize as a safe space to more deeply explore an idea or emerging theme. In that way, Level 2 participants were absolutely part of the analysis process. During interviews, I also took a more dialogic approach than a concrete question-answer approach. Questions were semi-structured and open ended, specifically designed as such to allow the interviewee to take the interview places where s/he wished while also ensuring that key research questions were addressed. I also followed up individually with participants about ideas when I needed clarification on something shared.

Finally, I followed up with each participant with a draft write up of their individual profiles and where applicable, quotes I included from them in this dissertation from respective interviews and group sessions to see if they reflected how participants meant to present themselves and their ideas, and wanted to be presented. Feedback was encouraging and edits were incorporated. Following are some examples of initial feedback. “Thank you for sending it to me. I love it 😊” (Amina, personal communication, October 25, 2019). “I really like the story that you wrote about me, it’s very well said and I really like it. Thank you for all the good wording, it made me very happy” (Sean, personal communication, October 25, 2019). “This looks great and thanks to you so much for sharing this... I like how you wrote it thank you” (Mvuye, personal communication, October 25, 2019); “And thank you for the transparency” (Mvuye, personal communication, October 27, 2019). “Thanks for sending this along. This looks

great” (Denpo, personal communication, October 28, 2019). “Reading the doc took me back to the [classroom where we met]. Interesting to read what I said in that class. It’s a lot of work; thank you for putting this together. For me, everything looks well represented” (Maya, personal communication, November 5, 2019).

I read the quotes and the profile that you sent me, and I love it. Reading the profile you created made me recall back some of the memories. I think it is very straightforward, yet powerful. You have included all the information I want people to know (i.e. my background, my goals). When I was reading through, I could imagine all the experiences from the past again. I hope all the readers can do too. I am very delighted to share my story with you and to other readers soon. I am very proud and thank you for doing this project to make our (refugee/immigrant) visible and our voices to be heard even if it is a little. It means a lot to me. (Almara, personal communication, November 4, 2019)

I include the aforementioned feedback as they are reminders of the need to carve spaces to share voices as they intended to be represented and the simultaneous urgency in disrupting dominant narratives. In moments when I struggled to write, I would remind myself why I was doing this study and who I was writing to and for. As soon as I re-grounded and centered participants in my mind, the path would open and I could start writing again. The words above served as validation to keep going along this path and the necessity of such a design.

In regards to Creswell’s (2003) reference to distributing rewards to participants, I thought at length about whether to include a stipend or honorarium for participation in this study for I wanted to honor participants’ contributions of time, energy and



knowledge. However, I feared that a stipend approach might reduce the engagement to a transactional one that actually felt counter to motivations for the study<sup>6</sup>. In an effort to be transparent about this dilemma, at the beginning of each interview with Level 1 participants, I explained that there would be no direct benefit to participants (see *Consent Form* in Appendix) but that my hope was that this process and study could contribute to community well-being in the long term. Overwhelmingly, participants expressed alignment with that desire. Some expressed gratitude for an opportunity to share their experiences and their own hopes of changing dominant narratives and educating others about their experiences.

For Level 2 participants, who shared a significantly greater amount of time participating in interviews and group sessions, I explicitly asked them what might be beneficial to them as a result of their participation. Level 2 participants shared that group sessions were healing spaces for them as well as good opportunities to dialogue about ideas and experiences they couldn't share elsewhere. In addition, to address particular needs of their projects, we held a separate session to discuss fundraising strategies. I also engaged in ongoing dialogue with each Level 2 participant about their project strategies as well as assisted by writing recommendation letters and addressing other requests throughout and beyond the study period.

The aforementioned approaches to knowledge claims and the purpose of this study lent themselves to a multi-level strategy of qualitative methodologies of inquiry, which included a) grounded theory in which theory emerged from participant views

---

<sup>6</sup> This was validated throughout the study via participants' responses and focus on communal ways of being and foci on community collective well-being versus individual transactional ways of being. See more in Chapter 5.

versus being imposed from a pre-established place; b) phenomenological research, in which through extensive observation and engagement with participants around a phenomenon (in this case, collective dialogue among CoLS), meaning was formed; and finally c) narrative research, in which I gathered a living repository of stories of CoLS (Creswell, 2003).

Finally, research methods included all four of the basic types of data collection outlined by Creswell (2003) related to qualitative research—observations, interviews, documents, and audio/visual material, in addition to focus groups (referred to as group or group sessions) in the form of a collective created through an action-research component. In Figure 7, I detail the specifics of each type for this study, and illustrate how each type maps to knowledge claims and strategies of inquiry.

<b>Knowledge Claims</b>	<b>Strategy of Inquiry</b>	<b>Methods</b>	<b>Additional Methods</b>	<b>Data Analysis</b>
Constructivist	Ethnographic	Observations (i.e. participant observations in collective group sessions, plus ongoing researcher journaling).	Documents and audio/visual (i.e. visual artifacts depicting goals, motivations, and/or challenges/barriers).	Open coding (emerging from data)  Axial coding (selecting codes within theory)
Advocacy	Narrative	Interviews (i.e. semi-structured one-on-one interviews for narrative inquiries plus collective group settings i.e. focus groups).		Selective coding (identify and analyze interconnections → develop/inform story/theoretical model)

*Figure 7.* Knowledge claims, strategies of inquiry, methods, and data analysis. The first three columns are adapted from Creswell (2003, p. 20) and mapped to other concepts detailed in Creswell (2003).

### *Levels of participation*

As alluded to above, this dissertation study had two levels of participants. Level 1 participants (10 participants) represented a broader set of participants who helped to provide a larger understanding of hopes, dreams, and challenges. Themes or questions that arose from Level 1 participants informed ongoing collective conversations with Level 2 participants (3 participants). Level 1 participants participated in one individual interview each. In a few cases, there were additional phone calls before and/or after. In all cases, there were also multiple email and text exchanges throughout to request additional data, help clarify or follow up on something previously shared, or sharing excerpts for feedback.

Level 2 participants were involved at a more intense level and included a subset of the Level 1 pool. They also participated in individual interviews. In addition, Level 2 participants participated in four collective group meetings throughout the course of the study. All sessions were facilitated through a dialogic and humanizing frame (Freire, 1970/2018; Koirala-Azad, 2010). For a detailed outline of each session, see Appendix III. The first meeting was focused primarily on getting to know each other; sharing about the inspirations, motivations, and values that informed the study; discussing and obtaining feedback on the study design; and creating space for any questions, suggestions, and concerns. This was an opportunity to ensure that the evolving study design was in alignment with the stated goals as well as participant expectations and their own interests in participating.

## **Population**

This study worked with Community Leader-Scholars with refugee experiences (CoLS) who share the following attributes:

- Undergraduate or graduate students, or recent alum.
- Reside in the United States and at one point lived in the San Francisco Bay Area.
- Connected transnationally to two or more communities.
- Previously experienced forced displacement (may or may not fall under the 1951 Convention definition of a refugee but currently have documentation).
- Have a self-identified commitment to (and is already working towards) community well-being in one or more of their transnational communities.

The aforementioned criteria map out a theme of shared interests and experiences of CoLS based on informal and semi-formal observations over a number of years. They are very purposeful in their selection given the focus of this study.

### **Purposeful and Chain-Referral Sampling**

Given the very specific criteria laid out for this study, I pursued purposeful sampling methods, drawing from my own networks as well as chain sampling. In particular, I reached out to my own network of colleagues, friends, classmates, acquaintances, and committee members of whom some participated and some referred me to others who participated. I also reached out to one person who I had read about in an article and who accepted the invitation to participate.

Level 2 participants included people I had already identified as CoLS and had known for a number of years. Like other qualitative studies, I did not aim to generalize

findings to larger populations. Rather, the goal was to explore and discover rich, nuanced data of participants individually and collectively (for Level 2 participants).

Table 3

Research participants and fields of study

#	Participant	Place of Origin	Gender	Age	Year moved to U.S.	Higher education focus/major	Dates of interviews
<b>Undergraduate students</b>							
1	Almara	Burma (Chin)	F	24	2011	Sociology	January 29, 2019
2	Sean	Afghanistan	M	21	2014	Engineering	April 24, 2019
3	Amina	Somalia	F	21	2012	Public Health	May 8, 2019
<b>Graduates (undergraduate degrees)</b>							
4	Katy	Iraq	F	22	2000	Media Studies	January 31, 2019
5	Maya*	Bhutan/Nepal	F	26	2009	Business Administration	February 15, 2019
6	Denpo	Burma/Thailand	M	27	2000	Sociology	May 1, 2019
<b>Graduate students (master level programs)</b>							
7	Mvuye*	Rwanda	M	31	2016	Psychology Education (MA)	February 11, 2019
8	Janya	Bhutan/Nepal	F	26	2008	Sociology Public Health	April 26, 2019
9	Abhyas*	South Sudan	M	27	2006	International Relations International Studies (MA)	April 26, 2019
<b>Graduates (of master-level degree)</b>							
10	Samuel	Eritrea	M	33	2012	Engineering International Studies (MA)	February 2, 2019

*Note.* All participants currently live in the U.S. All have significant ties to the San Francisco Bay Area, having been resettled in the area, previously lived in the area, and/or currently live in the area.

\* Indicates Level 2 participant. All Level 2 participants participated in an individual interview plus four group sessions. Group sessions took place on January 28, 2019; March 4, 2019; April 22, 2019; and April 29, 2019.

### Data Collection and Analysis

As indicated in Figure 7, primary data collected were through semi-structured interviews (eight in-person interviews and two video/audio call interviews), focus group sessions (four in-person sessions), participant observations, visual materials created during group sessions, and ongoing researcher journaling. All interviews and group sessions were audio recorded and auto-transcribed using Zoo, after which I listened to

each audio recording while cross referencing them with the auto-transcriptions. In most cases, the auto-transcriptions required significant editing. To expedite the process of editing, I copied each of the auto-transcription files from Zoom into Word format before editing. I simultaneously jotted alongside the transcription editing process. Jottings included general comments as well as potential patterns and codes. After editing each transcription, I wrote a summary profile at the beginning of each interview transcript, and a summary and purpose at the beginning of each group session transcript. I then formatted each transcript to obtain consistency of layout, including page numbers and names in order to allow for facile referencing throughout the remainder of the coding and analysis process. Once formatted, I then revisited each transcript, transferring any handwritten jottings taken at the time of interviews and/or sessions onto the respective transcript, highlighting important quotes, and calling out emerging themes. Once these steps were complete for each transcript, I iterated as necessary to ensure that codes brought up in one transcript were also reflected in others, where applicable.

Once all transcripts were coded, I captured all codes within an EXCEL spreadsheet, which I later grouped into themes. While coding was primarily open coding, emphasizing codes emerging from data, in some cases, axial coding was also used when data were informed by theory. I journaled and jotted continuously throughout, iterating as necessary and triangulating ongoing reflections with data and emerging codes, making meaning of codes and emerging themes (Creswell, 2003). Codes and emerging themes were cross referenced with research questions and literature, and then clustered as such to organize and later present data.

### **Validity and Reliability**

As advised by Creswell (2003), data were triangulated across multiple sources, including interviews, group sessions, written materials, and observations. When clarification was required, I followed up with individual participants. Member checking was also employed. In the case of participant profiles and quotations, this was shared with each participant for feedback. I also continually checked my own biases and where there was doubt, I clarified concepts directly with participants. In addition to formal data collection times, I also spent time with participants in informal settings, including at community events and other meetings. An initial draft of one of the chapters was also shared with my committee chair who provided feedback on the organization of data.

### **Protection of Human Subjects and Ethical Considerations**

Approval of this study from the University of San Francisco Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects was granted on August 24, 2018. A copy of the consent form can be found in the Appendix. I began each interview with a review of the research, its goals and intentions for data usage. Each participant received a copy of a written consent form as approved as part of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process, which I reviewed at the beginning of each interview. Written permission was granted from all participants.

To ensure data reflected intention and meaning of participants, each participant was sent early drafts of their narrative profiles as well as quotations from them intended for use in the final dissertation for feedback. Feedback was then incorporated into later drafts. Each participant was also given the option to select a pseudonym.

## **Conclusion**

Inspired and framed within a CRS lens and guided by PAR values, the methodology in this study was designed inherently to explore and nurture “new counter-hegemonic knowledge and practices” (Koirala-Azad, 2010, p. 85). It was driven by two approaches to knowledge claims—constructivism and advocacy—and was qualitative in its design. Centering lived experiences and the sharing of those experiences through “dialogic and reflective aspects of the PAR process” (Koirala-Azad, 2010, p. 86), this study aimed to reveal motivations and aspirations; wrestle with experiences with systemic barriers; and contemplate strategies for collective uplift through participant activities and projects. In addition to the knowledge shared and created for its own sake, this study was also inherently action oriented in strategizing and supporting participant goals for collective uplift.

For a detailed outline of focus group topics, please refer to Appendix III.



## **CHAPTER 4. COMMUNITY LEADER-SCHOLARS (CoLS) WITH REFUGEE EXPERIENCES: A DESIRE TO SERVE, HIGHER EDUCATION, AND COMPLICATING NARRATIVES**

I open this chapter by introducing the frame and definition of Community Leader-Scholars with refugee experiences (CoLS), a term born from this study. I then share data on participants' desire to serve and related motivations to address Research Question 1: What aspirations, hopes and dreams do CoLS have as it relates to their communities and how have they been shaped? I define communities as one or more of a participant's transnational settings—a place of origin, transit, and/or residence. I follow this by addressing Research Question 2: Why do CoLS pursue higher education and what are their experiences? Experiences that relate to barriers and challenges are explored more deeply in Chapter 6. Data in the aforementioned sections are presented in a collective representation of themes that emerged across participants.

I close this chapter with a presentation of data related to narratives—the impact dominant negative frames have had on the lives of participants as well as participants' agency and desire to reframe and contribute alternative narratives based on their lived experiences. I follow this with the presentation of individual participant profiles to provide more detailed and nuanced representations of each participant (see Table 3 for a summary of participants).

### **Community Leader-Scholars (CoLS)**

The term Community Leader-Scholar (CoLS, pronounced *coalesce*) came about deep into the study. I realized that not only were participants scholars given their relative long careers as students, but they were also scholars of their communities. In addition to having lived and grown up in community, by virtue of wanting to serve community, they

have needed to think and study their communities at deeper levels. Some have studied their communities in academic contexts, having written papers related to their communities, others have studied them in their life studies.

All ten participants have higher education experience. As illustrated in Table 3, at the time of interviews, three were in undergraduate programs, three were university graduates with undergraduate degrees, three were in graduate-level masters programs, and one had graduated with both undergraduate and master-level degrees. Interestingly, of the ten participants, eight participants were studying or studied fields that are public-serving. Two of these eight started in a science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) field, however, both later went on to do a master degree in International Studies. While one finished an undergraduate degree in engineering, the other, who began in chemistry, switched his undergraduate major in his third year to International Relations. While he was excelling in his chemistry program academically, in that third year of his program, the Syrian war broke out, raising memories of his own experiences as a child and awakening a desire to work on matters related to forced migration and peace building. He graduated with an undergraduate degree in International Relations and is now in his second year in a master's program in International Studies. Of the two remaining participants, one hopes to use his STEM degree in Engineering to help rebuild in Afghanistan; and the other, after graduating with an undergraduate degree in Business Administration, is in the process of applying to graduate programs, specifically in the area of forced migration or international studies. As such, all participants have or aim to study an area that relates to their desires to serve. All have worked extremely hard to make this happen. Two of the participants received full scholarships. Of the remaining

eight, all (but possibly one) concurrently worked at least one job in addition to going to school.

For all participants, English is at least their second language. For one participant, it is at least his fourth language. Yet, all participants, some in a very short period of time, have learned enough of the English language, in particular academic language, that they are able to engage in university courses and materials all in English. Yet, most participants stated struggling with English either in their written/oral communications and/or confidence (see Chapter 6). All interviews and group sessions were conducted in English. It is a result of participants' language abilities in English and understanding of the fine nuances that shift when translating a cultural concept rooted or framed in one culture/language to another that this project was even possible.

While participants study different disciplines within the higher education context, a key thread that brings them together in this study is their shared commitment and desire to serve community. They have experiences or first-hand witnesses of those communities they desire to serve and have but not always, shared in the same collective struggles. Their pursuits may range from the immediate community but more often one more expansive and interconnected. In addition to knowing these struggles from living and witnessing them, they have thought deeply and at length about them. While their disciplines of study may vary, they serve as building blocks for their larger purpose. As university students and graduates, they have also turned experiences and ideas over in their minds through multiple lenses. With the distance of time and space plus a critical lens further cultivated through higher education settings, participants illustrated deep thought, study, reflection and action. For some, this materialized in academic research

papers, for others, not. However, I argue that ongoing connectedness to experiences, current events, communal service, and exploration of increasing impact and scope deem them all scholars, community scholars.

As outlined in Chapter 3, I define the community leader portion of this as people who “have a self-identified commitment to (and may already be working towards) community well-being in one or more of their transnational communities.” This and other criteria listed in Chapter 3 collectively represent how I spoke about the study during the recruiting process. Some of the participants I knew directly. Others I met through chain referral and as such, were recommended based on this definition of community leader.

Interestingly, as I reviewed the study outline with participants at the beginning of each interview, several participants shared that they didn’t see themselves as leaders whereas in my interpretation, they very much represented leadership. As illustrated below, this led to an interesting revelation around the different interpretations and meaning. As I progressed through the stages of analysis and writing, it became evident that participants’ modest representations of their leadership activities—things that others might jump at listing on their resumes—did not equate to a definition of leadership in their minds as they were just a part of who they were and how they walk through the world. That is, it was just an inherent part of their knowing and being in the world. The aspirations section provides more context to this.

Learning of all participants’ community work and activities was not the prime purpose of this study. However, I think it worthwhile to provide a very high-level snapshot of some of the activities participants have or currently engage with in order to illustrate their leadership—whether it be in thought leadership, community leadership,

role modeling, mentoring, etc. Some of the key areas include a) starting up and/or running a community/student organization; b) serving as a youth leader in a non-profit organization; c) serving as a classroom assistant; d) serving as a captain and/or a coach of a sports team; d) being selected for highly competitive scholarship programs; e) engaging in service learning programs; f) taking care of/sponsoring/seeking safety for family members in multiple locations; g) advocating for refugee populations through public speaking, advocacy and/or performance; and h) being the first ones in their families to go to university. Again, this is not an exhaustive list.

*A desire to serve (versus aspirations)*

One of my original research questions was to ask participants about their hopes and dreams. Later, I amended that to include *aspirations*, per guidance from my dissertation committee. I'm grateful for that addition because the inclusion of the word *aspirations* triggered conversations and questions by and among participants about the definition and meaning of the word itself. Participants' often unprompted explorations of this word collectively revealed an underlying foundational theme of this study—differentiation between a desire to serve and a pursuit of attaining one's own individual goal, and the differentiation between collective and individual ways of being. This underlying revelation taps into a nuanced yet essential way of being that mandates exploration in and of itself as well as in order to understand other findings. I unpack the former below, and the latter in Chapter 5.

Overwhelmingly, there was pause and question over the meaning and applicability of the word, *aspiration*. For some participants, the term presupposes that certain things are first in place—a visible path, resources that ensure a life beyond

survival, choices, and the possibility of attainment. However, these assumed things for many are not necessarily present for all participants. Certainly, there have been times in the lives of some participants when none were present. An unexpected sharing by participants is that even with the incredible “successes” and “achievements” they have had in their lives, as evidenced by their participation in higher education institutions in the United States, some felt that future visibility, resources and choices were still unavailable to them. To other participants, the word aspirations seemed to represent the idea of a tangible goal that one might pursue along a linear path to achieve, the focus being on a tangible goal to achieve versus a motivation or process. In addition, the term aspiration also felt narrow for participants, such as implying aims for what one might do after graduating from college, such as what job they might pursue. My intent as the researcher was to go beyond a desired job or vocation.

Another significant disconnect here was with the seemingly individual nature of this word. Participants, especially in the group setting, spoke at length about a collective concept and way of being. This was represented in phrases such as a *collective struggle*. This understanding of a collective way of being is explored in depth in Chapter 5. In group, we settled on the word *desire* in place of aspirations. While the term aspiration continued to be used on occasion, it was understood within this context. Overwhelmingly, the desire participants spoke of was the *desire to serve* community.

For example, when I ask Denpo about his aspirations, he launches into a conversation about what aspirations mean. He differentiates between the ideas of “helping and serving... what you should be doing is serving the community.” He talks about some people’s concept of aspiration of creating something new or wanting to do

something. He says, “there's already a lot of stuff. Try to support because at the end of the day, it's not about you, it's about the community.” He follows up by emphasizing the importance of consistency in serving (Denpo, interview, May 1, 2019). Maya says, “we might not get there but... no matter what situation we're dealing with, to go towards that general direction, I think that's important” (group session, April 22, 2019). Again, she focuses on process and movement versus the achievement of a tangible goal.

Mvuye points out that “when people talk about aspirations here [in the U.S.], it's different from the definition of aspiration back home.... it's more of the community you want to really serve.... where do I want to serve, more than a career” (group session, April 22, 2019). He prefers the word *desire* and says the path along which one serves depends on and is guided by whichever doors open. Samuel also talks about these differences in the quote below. He says,

It's a battle you wish people understood. You know, like maybe white people they say, having a purpose in life and they always chase that. I don't know if they can find it all the time but there's exactly in their mind and they're always asking, what's my purpose? And sometimes they leave Harvard to go do little things, which is noble, because they want fulfillment for their own joy, what my life really meant. I don't know if we really ask that question. Sometimes I feel like there's a lot of, I mean... the meaning of life is to live the pain of others as if it were your own and also rejoice in the success of others. (interview, February 2, 2019)

I differentiate this with the literature on immigrants and refugees *giving back* reviewed in Chapter 2. What was interesting about what participants shared was that their

desire to give back seemed to be motivated from a deeper place than explored in the literature. This theme came up with many participants. Abhyas shares, “there’s always a sense of duty,” a desire to give back, and to elevate others. I highlight some of the motivations to serve below and also explore a deeper argument for this in Chapter 5.

### *Motivations to serve*

A slight distinction I make here from the previous section is the difference between wanting to serve and why. That is, desires and motivations. Here, I explore several themes that came up through this research. Mvuye says, “how sad I am about that [situation] is the aspiration I have. And that is something that is being awakened depending on circumstances” (group session, April 22, 2019). He shares seeing images of refugees and being saddened and re-connected to his refugee experiences, and therefore wanting to serve refugee communities.

Samuel has lived many lives and there are correspondingly many deep motivators for his efforts for peace and justice, mostly from the injustices he has lived and witnessed. He says he started working towards justice when he was in South Africa after fleeing Eritrea. He explains how many of his young friends also left. He was able to go to South Africa to study. However, while there, the situation for his friends and others was worsening, many of whom attempted to reach Europe via Sudan, Libya and the Mediterranean. Many, he says, are still stuck in Israel. He shares of many friends and a family member getting trafficked and dying in the Sinai desert. He shares about the practice of traffickers holding migrants for ransom, extracting and selling human organs. “I think that made me really bitter and angry” (interview, February 2, 2019). After having just graduated with an engineering degree around that time, he shares feeling empty.



While he faced his own troubles living as a refugee in South Africa, it was the loss of many young friends he grew up with that served as his wake-up call. He says,

I couldn't go back to fix things today. So I might do something here. That's why I was engaged with [a local organization] serving refugee students... In a way, the fact that it got me busy I was less stressed and it felt a little fulfilling that you are helping people... that's where it started because I started losing a lot of my friends.” (interview, February 2, 2019)

The sadness, loss and injustice have had a motivating effect for some, as has the increase in negative rhetoric and policies that have been targeting and harming immigrant communities. Maya says, “I think the more that there is a push against immigration, the more I realize how important it is to speak up... whoever is looking for a home, I want to support that” (interview, February 15, 2019). The United States is currently experiencing a stark rise in nationalism, racism, and anti-immigrant policies (see Chapter 2) that have made their way into the lives and experiences of participants. Yet, participants, as indicated above, are responding by standing up for their communities; courageously challenging narratives by sharing their own; extending their time, energy and resources to start and support community projects; and pursuing higher education as shared in more detail below.

### ***Why higher education?***

I was committed to working with CoLS with refugee experiences who had by definition, self-identified a commitment to collective well-being and had a history of serving in some way. I chose to work with those in higher education—whether undergraduates, graduates, or recent alumni—as this would represent longer-term

commitments to serving (versus high school students by virtue of their relative stage in life). For most participants, the areas they desire to serve is mirrored by their study disciplines. That, too was a marker of commitment. This section presents data on other reasons why participants pursue higher education.

In Chapter 6, I present the theme and challenges of being the *first one*. This is the case for most but not all participants as it relates to higher education. Katy shares that in Iraq, her entire family went to college. She says that every day, she heard her father say, “knowledge is power. If you have education..., you will always have stability.... success and a career, but also you know how the world works, you're intelligent, you can navigate accordingly" (interview, January 31, 2019).

Maya juxtaposes her life with her mother’s life. She says,

My mother never went to school. Currently her whole world is going to work, come back, eat, sleep and repeat. Although, she has rights but she doesn’t know that she has them and that she can practice them. For example, if she’s mistreated at work, she doesn’t say anything because she doesn’t know how to go about it.

This is just an example, why education and language is so important. (interview, February 15, 2019; personal communicationssNovember 5, 2019)

The reality of this seems hard as Maya notes how she is able to speak up in an unjust situation but how her mother cannot. In her interview, she also says that education “opens up different perspectives and it connects you with different communities.” Much later in the same interview she says, “education is like a weapon,” which she clarifies as being a non-violent weapon. It helps one to understand oneself as well as others, and allows people to come together.

It is easy to fall into a trap of believing that education is a panacea. Mvuye, a graduate student in education takes a more critical view, distinguishing between a banking model of education in which knowledge is poured into the minds of students versus a critical education that fosters and encourages critical understandings of the world (Freire, 1970/2018). Mvuye has experienced both in his higher education career. The former favors compliance and thus validates existing power hierarchies, while the latter provides a critical layer, allowing space to explore better ways and possibilities, and validate frustrations with injustices experienced.

Space and time also allow for the opportunity to reflect and reconsider a situation from afar. Abhyas speaks about the different levels of focus and influence education and geographic distance allow. From afar currently located in the United States, he is in an environment in which to reflect upon issues from “outside of the box” whereas back home, he says he would be focused on the immediate community given the need surrounding him. He describes this as a:

limitational prism perspective. Because... [when] you're inside the box, you just see what is inside. We don't see the exterior part... If you're outside and stand back and you're just looking around like what is happening, you're more keen to observe certain details. (group session, April 22, 2019)

In addition, he continues, higher education provides a platform and opportunity to make an “appeal to the people who have the power to change.” Abhyas’ goals are lofty. He seeks for a peace solution in South Sudan and explores complex matters such as the role of ethnocide in nation building. He focuses on displaced communities and ethnic minorities. A large platform for such discussions is necessary.

Several participants also spoke about how education can provide access and a greater platform from which to speak, advocate, be heard, and make change. After graduating with a Master degree in International Studies, Samuel is preparing to pursue a law degree as that would give him law experience as well as legitimacy as he pursues his larger efforts of advocating for reform and peace in Eritrea. Mvuye says that educational accreditations give him a space where his voice can not only be heard but trusted. Back home, Mvuye shares that within refugee camps, the community is not even given exposure to where food that feeds them comes from. Education, would allow him not only knowledge of who but a seat at the table with those who design programs.

Education is also something that one will never lose once gained, as Sean shares as he reflects upon his high school diploma from the United States. Soon, he will also have a college degree. Sean also alludes to the differing levels of legitimacy one receives from a university degree in the United States versus elsewhere, as well as the seemingly uni-direction of transferability of that legitimacy. His soon-to-be civil engineering degree from the United States is something he can take back to Afghanistan. That transferability is not as easy in reverse.

For those who seek longer-term change, there is recognition that education can be multi-generational. I opened this section with Katy's reference to hearing about the power of education from her father daily. Abhyas, who is the first in his family for many things, including higher education, refers to education as a gift. He says that in his culture "there's that old saying in Africa, *a good inheritance is a good education*" (group session, January 28, 2019). Consistently, participants apply their education for others. For example, Samuel says, "I'm not just looking at it from taking care of myself. I'm looking

from what I can give to communities” (interview, February 2, 2019). Mvuye illustrates imagery to represent the extension of education for others. Specifically, he refers to a bridge—representing community development programs and the like—that he walks through and how the goal of his education is then to extend a bridge for family and community to cross. The commitment to community is strong and threads throughout how participants reflected upon the question, why higher education.

### **The Power of Narratives**

Several participants were motivated to participate in this study because they wanted to offer alternatives to the dominant narrative, often negative and/or dehumanizing. These negative narratives have at times found their way into the lives of participants by way of how they are received or treated by society. Through the voice of participants, I share reasons why they are motivated to challenge and change the trajectory of such narratives.

Almara shares not having many opportunities or outlets to share her story. As such, she shares wanting to participate in this study because “people have to understand” (interview, January 28, 2019). In my interview with Abhyas, he says,

especially living under this [Trump] administration, getting stories of immigrants or anything related to refugees that can open other people's mind about refugees and what kind of myth we have about refugees really helps. In that sense, you are not only helping me, but also someone else who is new to the country and going through what we're just going through... We all come from different areas but we do have very similar stories. (interview, April 26, 2019)

Samuel also makes a reference to the current political context. He references the time of the 2016 election in the United States that led to the Trump administration and how there were “so many negative words coming about immigrants, refugees, asylees. The year after the election, the Muslim ban, so many things.” Later in the interview, he says, “when Trump... makes these mini comments about black people or like shithole countries, in a way, he's kind of making comments about many countries ... What are other people learning? What example is he setting?”

Samuel aims to document his life history and his experiences in and about Eritrea in the form of a book. He speaks of having “lived the situation” pre independence in Eritrea. From childhood, he was among the people who fought for independence and who are now in power. He has first-hand experience of being in the national service after independence and the equivalent of what he refers to as modern-day slavery. He says,

every generation is working to correct the mistake of the previous generation. Our parents went out for the struggle because of the mistakes their parents did and we correct the... generation of my father... I feel we need to tell that story.... I have to speak about it. (interview, February 2, 2019)

Not only would his future book serve as a historical reference for the younger generation, it would also serve as an advocacy tool to support his larger advocacy efforts for reform in Eritrea. His hope is that once published, even if one family purchases a copy and shares it with their children, perhaps that child may take things to another level. He speaks hopefully.

The capturing and sharing of these experiences fills the void of untold stories. Similarly, a key motivation for Katy’s goal in collecting oral histories of family members

before, during, and after Saddam Hussein's rule to contribute to a larger understanding of histories untold or unwritten around the war in Iraq. In her efforts, she aims to obtain untold narratives that are different and might actually conflict in order to illustrate the range and diversity of experiences. She says that history often exists in "texts and numbers but not in" stories and lived experiences (interview, January 31, 2019). She is hoping to address this directly.

Certainly, not everyone wants to share their stories. Katy speaks of some people she has reached out to who would prefer not to share. They might not see the purpose or may be fearful of potential negative stigma or fearful of reprisal. Perhaps they may be hesitant in revisiting memories of war. All to say that as powerful a drive there is for some participants to share their stories, that same desire is not ubiquitous for all who have experienced life as a refugee.

***Negative narratives in perpetuating barriers—reduced and othered***

This section illustrates the real impact negative rhetoric and narratives have had on the lives of participants. At the minimum, they've posed challenges to their pursuits. However, they have arguably also perpetuated systemic divides by relegating or reducing refugees to a status of continual dependence, of not being seen as full multi-dimensional persons, or of being otherized and therefore alienized.

Narratives have been used to diminish certain populations to those primarily of need, incapable of taking care of themselves. In some cases, this sets up a justification from actors to "help" without equal voice by those "being helped." Often, this looks like a hierarchical relationship with a "benevolent actor" giving and a "helpless beneficiary" receiving. For example, Mvuye speaks of Western ways of seeing what it means to be an

African. As he refers to images of refugees produced by large organizations that serve refugees, he says, there's "that mindset of going and helping those people you learned about for so many years... I could see those pictures everywhere. African African African Africans in the reports and slides" (interview, February 11, 2019) he says as he refers to images that perpetuate a predominate narrative of need among all Africans.

At times, narratives are so strongly entrenched that people may play through related scripts without perhaps realizing it. Katy shares about her experiences being interviewed for an article and not feeling like the full scope of her story was being represented. She shares feeling as though her story was used for a larger public relations purpose with a pre-identified story line for the publishing institution. Katy is very respectful and understanding of the many reasons why this may have been as she shares these experiences with me but as the interview progresses, she shares that this has happened to her on several occasions from the same institution. The challenge of course with a pre-identified story is that they might not be true and may perpetuate simplistic narratives. This was the case for Katy in which assumptions were made about her motivations for her work based on overly simplified and false assumptions. Diminished and feeling seen only as a refugee and that alone having shaped her world view felt dehumanizing and reductive. She says, "I didn't feel valid" (interview, January 31, 2019).

Narratives can also be powerful tools to *other* people. Maya talks about how refugees are often referred to as

*the other* and I was the other for most of my life.... I was nobody... I don't want to say helpless, voiceless. It's not that you don't have a voice, but people don't hear



you unless you have a certain kind of identity... the system is created in a way it chooses to hear certain voices over others. (interview, February 15, 2019)

She asserts that people leave their homes not because they want to but because there is no choice, regardless of whether they leave due to economic reasons, or the climate, or violence. Further, she notes how the U.S. is responsible for starting wars in other countries yet “people at the top constantly scream that crimes are going up and people are invading and whatnot. And it's not true. But a lot of people believe that's true.” She wonders what people can do to ensure that voices are heard and then acknowledges how people choose not to know. “I think the more that there is a push against immigration, the more I realize how important it is to speak up... the system in the world alienizes them” (interview, February 15, 2019).

In her TED Talk, *The Danger of a Single Story*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009) talks about the consequences of uni-dimensional narratives. She says that single stories aren't necessary wrong, they're just partial and incomplete. In some cases, as Mvuye, Katy and Maya illustrate above, narratives can take on a life of their own and prevent even hearing that alternatives exist. In the case of refugees and immigrants, as also noted above, in particular at this political time in history, often the dominant narratives are framed through a deficit lens and are uni-dimensional. Below, I share narratives of each participant in order to introduce participants as multi-dimensional people and not solely “refugees”—people with hopes and dreams, challenges and misunderstandings, trials and joys, thoughts and feelings, the full breadth of what human beings experience and more.

## **Participant Narratives**

As illustrated above, data that surfaced in this study revealed a number of ways negative narratives about refugees have been perpetuated and manifested in the daily experiences of participants. Who participants are and the barriers they've faced as a result of narrative is an important discovery in this study. I hope that the sharing of participant profiles will inform the reader of the lesser represented stories of those with refugee experiences as well as cultivate a more humanistic frame to any work related to refugee experiences.

There are limits of what can be captured of an entire life. As best I can, I present parts of their lives that participants chose to share, representing different aspects. As all people are, participants' narratives and life experiences are multidimensional. They are emerging scholars; they are community leaders; they are activists; they are sons and daughters, sisters and brothers, they are workers and professionals, and they are people who at some point in their lives sought refuge. There are themes that thread through their stories; however, their lives are their own and unique.

Each of the following narratives was reviewed and approved by the respective participant. All of the narratives were informed by or directly quoted from interviews and group sessions (see Table 3 for specific dates of interviews and group sessions). Where data were also drawn from additional personal communications, they are noted specifically below.

### *Undergraduate students*

#### *Almara*

Almara is a senior in college, majoring in sociology. When asked about her motivations in studying sociology, she states wanting to give back to her community. She shares how she used to want to be an architect and later realized that the underlying reason for that was to help other people. She shares about the help her family received through food stamps and social services when they first moved to the United States and how she would like to be like the people who helped. She also shares about witnessing a neighbor in Burma not having enough to eat, or another family who would take what they grew in their yard and walk miles into town to return with some money, or sometimes rice, or something nothing at all. She hopes to take what she learns from her sociology degree in the United States and one day return to Burma.

Almara is keen to share about her experiences and future goal. She says that “refugee people don’t really have opportunity to hear their voice are not heard. This is a great opportunity for me to share my thoughts and experience.” Almara shares about her migration journey in detail, which includes transit through and temporary stays in multiple countries, including Thailand and Malaysia. She takes care of others en route. She speaks with the innocence of a young child with memories of leaving her dog, bonding with her cousin before needing to leave, the spicy food she gets at a transfer point. Yet her experiences span courage and strength as she speaks with officials on behalf of her uncle, taking care of her sister who had been chronically sick, border and dangerous river crossings, searching for her sister with whom she was temporarily separated along their migration journey, being packed in a minivan of people seeking

refuge (of mostly men and a few girls) driving through the night, walking shoeless across a border area, crawling through a cut through of a wire fence, her sister getting caught in the fence, hiding from agents under search lights and running back to Thailand, being separated from her sister and later finding each other, crossing with others into Malaysia, navigating transit spots known for rape where she is persistently followed to the shower, being the lone female in a transit shelter, moments of comfort when an agent (or other migrant) turns out to be a friend of her father's and able to talk to her in her dad's language, the kindness of an agent giving her extra food, and impressing the other men in her group for her speedy running. Through the sharing of her story, she illustrates humor, innocence, strength, and incredible resilience.

Almara is Chin, an ethnic minority group in Burma. As a pastor, her father's work brought the family to move when they were young. She spent most of her young life living in an area where ethnic minorities or Christian minorities, such as her family were not welcome. Her parents have different dialects from different villages. She speaks of her and her sister, "we don't have Chin accent, we have Burmese accent" and how this language ability was instrumental at a border crossing. Specifically, she shares about how she was able to talk with border officials and pass through without commotion given this ability and the inferred ability to mask as a member of mainstream Burmese society (interview, January 29, 2019).

### *Sean*

Sean is an undergraduate student studying civil engineering and has an associate degree in mathematics from a community college. He is originally from Afghanistan and migrated to the U.S. with his family when he was in high school. His academic capacity

is far beyond typical in that on average, he takes around 25 units per semester across multiple post-secondary institutions. His dream is to become a civil engineer and bring that back to Afghanistan.

Access to education was not an issue for Sean back in Afghanistan given his father's ability to support the family through his job. He arrived in the United States at high-school age and attended an international public high school that is revered for its holistic community school approach. Through that school, he had access to college counselors and mentors. After graduating from high school, Sean went to community college during the summer to keep his momentum going at a time when all his classmates were taking the summer off. Since, he has taken almost 108 units, the equivalent of approximately 30 classes over a span of two and a half years. Each semester, he takes no fewer than 20 units, which is the equivalent of five or six classes. He claims that he does not work currently so is motivated to study. Pulled by his main focus of becoming a civil engineer, and not bound by the financial need to work, he is motivated to pursue his goal. Referring to the number of units he takes per semester, he says, "[my] main focus is on civil engineer. I want to become a civil engineer. So based on my goal, I had to do that." He has two semesters remaining before he expects to graduate. At the time of our interview, he was taking 25 units of college courses across two different colleges given the maximum allowable units at his primary college. In addition, he works with a community non-profit once a week as a teacher's assistant helping newcomer adults learn how to use the computer. He also just received two job offers for summer internships, both through international construction engineering companies.

Sean has been a youth leader through a program of a local nonprofit organization for quite some time and as indicated above, now continues as a teacher assistant once a week through the same organization. Sometimes he teaches classes by himself and also substitutes often. He is very dedicated to contributing back to the community given how much he says he received. He also participates in monthly meetings through another local organization to gather ideas and solutions for helping all immigrants to the community.

When asked how he would define community, he uses a metaphor for someone who takes care of you. He distinguishes this from his experiences in the U.S. where when offering to do something nice for someone i.e. give them a ride or buy them a cup of coffee, people respond by wanting to pay him back. He states that this does not make sense to him.

Sean shares how there is no Afghan community in close vicinity. As such, he has gotten deeply involved in a very diverse community of newcomers from around the world. He shares how this community has given him a lot and about his desire to give back, which he does through the aforementioned ongoing volunteer activities through a couple of local non-profit organizations. He says, “we need a lot of help and support in this community that we live [in]” and he is keen and happy to play a role in that.

When I ask him what advice he would share with newcomers, he shares what his father shared with him growing up. “[O]ne advice from my dad, I will always have it in my mind is, if you don't know something, it's considered a shame. But if you ask something that you don't know and you want to learn it, it's not shame. So don't feel shy to ask.”

*Amina*

Amina is a 21 year-old health science major with a concentration in public health. After graduating from high school, she “went to community college because I thought maybe... go to community college and save up money for the big university.” She transferred to a university last year and is currently in her second semester. She has one more year left before she graduates. In addition to her schooling, she works three to four night shifts a week at a local sorting facility for a major online consumer company.

Amina’s family is originally from Somalia. She herself was born and raised in Dadaab refugee camp, Kenya where she also attended formal schooling. She credits her mother for prioritizing her and all of her siblings’ education, and includes mention of her mother’s ability to find ways to do so. She currently lives with her mother and two younger female siblings in Northern California. She also has three older brothers who live separately but nearby. Of her siblings, two of her older brothers went to college, the other older brother works. Amina and her next younger sister are both in college. Her youngest sister is in high school.

She quickly references her mother as her prime motivation given how her mother worked to ensure that all her kids went to school, as well as her modeling and leadership in helping others in Dadaab where Amina grew up. Amina notes her mother’s belief in education for girls based on the teachings of Islam in educating both girls and boys, an unconventional belief in the Somali culture, according to Amina. Her mother’s stories of illness and death in the camp related to easily preventable health concerns also inspires Amina’s goals to pursue a health degree in order to help others. Amina is also inspired by the teachings of Islam, specifically about sharing, giving back and feeling that of others.

While in high school, Amina participated in a youth soccer program through a local non-profit organization, eventually becoming captain of her team. She has since helped coach another team and was invited to France in the summer of 2019 with the team to represent the organization at FIFA. Among other community activities, Amina has also served as a teaching assistant helping newcomers obtain citizenship through another local non-profit organization.

### *Graduates with undergraduate degrees*

#### *Katy*

Katy is a recent university graduate having majored in Media Studies. She defines herself and her family as very political, in particular on her dad's side of the family. She has been involved with numerous service-learning opportunities through her alma mater, locally and abroad. These social justice-informed experiences provided opportunities to learn from non-hierarchical models of community service, working closely with and learning from communities that have been marginalized, including but not limited to people who are homeless.

As a non-Muslim, Iraqi American who immigrated with her family to the U.S. as refugees when she was four years old, Katy has found herself in many liminal spaces. Not fully feeling part of any one community, she blends and moves between multiple experiences, cultures and knowledge. Her family is from Iraq but she has lived in the U.S. since she was four. Her family is Christian so doesn't fit within the larger Middle Eastern Muslim community, or even what she would say the Arab community given that she speaks only a little Arabic.



We spend a good amount of time in our interview exploring the notion and meaning of community. While Katy is able to name particular people who have helped her or served as mentors at her alma mater, she says that she didn't really feel that she had a community of support during her undergraduate years.

For the past few years, she has been developing a project idea to gather oral histories of those who lived pre/during/post Saddam Hussein in Iraq, including but not limited to family members. She hopes to eventually share the multiple, diverse experiences and perspectives within and between those three eras. Ideally, she would submit this to the Library of Congress, as well as make it accessible through multiple media for anyone interested to digest. Challenges include language given that most of her narrators would be primarily Arabic speaking.

Katy had planned to join the Level 2 group meeting beginning with the second meeting; however, her grandfather passed away the night before. At the time of our interview, she had just begun a temporary job and was exploring the idea of moving at the end of the summer to start her project. Her grandfather's passing encouraged her to quickly wrap up her summer employment at the end of the contract term and commit to going to Europe for a few months to begin collecting the stories of her grandfather's siblings and other relatives. In a follow up email, she writes "the purpose of my travel is to connect with my grandfather's remaining two sisters and my uncle and aunt, all deeply involved members of the Iraqi communist party. It's been a lifelong dream of mine to personally conduct interviews with my family, and after the recent loss of my grandfather, I figured there's no better time than the present!"

***Maya***

Maya is a young professional working as a development and program associate at a non-profit organization serving refugees and immigrants. She is a university graduate with a BA in business management and is in the midst of applying to graduate schools where she hopes to study migration and/or global affairs. Since the time of her interview, she was accepted to three graduate programs; however, due to high costs of graduate school, is deferring acceptance and reapplying the following year.

Maya supported herself through college through grants and working alongside her studies. She made the difficult choice to stay on the West coast after her family moved to the East coast at the beginning of college. She is self-sufficient and does all she can to contribute back to newcomer communities who have also come to the United States seeking refuge.

Maya grew up in a refugee camp in Nepal and lived there until age 15 when her family was resettled in the United States. She has struggled with her identity in the past but after a lot of thought and reflection, she now embraces her multiple identities. She says,

I can never be just one thing. And that's the beauty of it. If I go to a Nepali event then yes, I'm fully Nepali and I will dance to Nepali stuff... I will carry that with me. And I am an American. No matter what is happening in politics, I do believe in American values because I've seen people... with true American values, like we're all equal. This is the land of freedom and opportunity and all that. I'll always be that. And I'll always be Bhutanese whether I like it or not because my parents think they're Bhutanese. I was born there and by birth I should have that right but

I'm not going to say, I should have that because, you know, who am I to say I would have that, right? But it's like accepting that all, celebrating that.

Maya shares how she is in a good place currently as it relates to her identity. She recognizes that might change as it has in the past. She shares how when she was younger, for a couple of years she went to a boarding school outside the camp in Nepal. Her father was a teacher at the school and she had received a scholarship. She states knowing a lot of people who worked outside of the camp and how “they all had to hide their identity.” She says that until two or three years ago, she was ashamed to call her herself a refugee. Now, she is not ashamed. However, she also notes that she is not *just* a refugee.

Maya wonders aloud why when people introduce her, they sometimes make a point of mentioning that she's a refugee. She says, “it's like such a big thing being a refugee. You're given certain taglines, you know? Like oh my god, you're so lazy, you get like rations... I was a refugee but at the same time, I'm so much more from it.”

Maya exudes humility as well as an appreciation for all of humanity. She is competent, independent and compassionate. She is a critical thinker and yet she also sees the good in life and her place in the world. While she spent most of her childhood in a refugee camp, she says, “in comparison to other people, like a lot of the displaced population, we had like a heavenly situation.... At least my family was living together, even though my dad's family was separated.” She refers to little children having to run across borders and acknowledges how her parents might have had to do the same but how in comparison, she feels like things were smooth for her given her access to education and rations. When she compares her life today to that of the past, she recognizes “that

was not a very good life” but in her humility, she also recognizes the struggles of others. She recognizes the injustice.

Currently, Maya dedicates her days and spare time supporting newcomer communities. In addition to her day job, Maya participates and supports a performance group with other Bhutanese refugee youth. They share their stories through Nepali dance, movement and words; aiming to raise awareness about their past in an effort to prevent future atrocities leading to forced displacement. In our last group session, Maya shared about her upcoming performance with her storytelling performance group as well as the group’s roots, and its journey in telling stories of displacement and ethnic cleansing, growing up in a refugee camp, the struggle with identity crises post displacement, and the desire to belong and find a home and hope. She explains how this year, the group will also be trying to bring in memories of their parents into the performance.

Maya is also part of other Bhutanese community organization efforts. She is part of a book club and also often participates in larger community events. She is a very talented henna artist.

### ***Denpo***

Denpo is a university graduate with a degree in sociology from a university on the East Coast. His specific area of study was sports-based youth development, an area where he has deep experience as both a former youth participant in a program and a coach, leader and program coordinator at a non-profit organization.

Denpo is well respected by colleagues. During the recruiting phase of this study, he was referred to the researcher by two separate colleagues, recognized for not only rising through his organization but also for being looked up to by students his

organization serves. He also received an academic scholarship to university and played soccer at the college level.

Denpo came to the United States at the age of seven. His family is originally from Burma and so he says that he “straddle[s] two cultures, because I grew up in a [Burmese household]... but I was young enough to be here to [be American].” He refers to himself as being “from Oakland” and most of the experiences he shares is within the context of growing up as a person of color in Oakland versus as a refugee from Burma. He associates and has affinity with the youth in his program, also young people of color growing up in an urban context. And yet, he also recognizes that he is seen as a “poster child” given his background as a refugee and his journey to present day. His awareness and ability to navigate this framing with confidence, in combination with his commitment to his community allows him to fluidly navigate these multiple understandings to garner support for the work he does and most importantly, the community of youth he serves.

He has a very strong and positive relationship with his American coworkers, some of whom he refers to as his best friends. He praises the organization’s ability to bring in good people, which he contrasts with other experiences he has had with non-staff Americans who present the “white savior” role. He is extremely committed to the youth in his program and the community in general.

He shares that his “mother was always the father and the mother” given that his father passed away when he was young. His respect and love for his mother comes through in our interview.

*Graduate students (master level programs)*

*Mvuye*

Mvuye is a second-year master level graduate student and a recent admit into a doctoral program. A clinical psychologist from Rwanda, he is in the United States as a research scholar at a university in California. He is a deep thinker. He's also a systems thinker, meaning he sees the interrelations and interdependencies across connected parts, thereby being able to see the larger picture in a more holistic fashion. He moves fluidly between the sharing of personal stories and theoretical reflections such as how the impact of colonialism and neocolonialism manifests in the West and Africa today. He guest lectures frequently and is often sought out for his expertise.

His journey to access and continue his education came with a lot of pressure. His father died when he was finishing his sixth and last year of primary school (there are three years of nursery school, six years of primary school, and then six years of high school in Rwanda). His family was unable to afford high school fees for him to continue his schooling, a cost of \$25 for one academic year of public school. His uncle on his mother's side shared about an opportunity to get an education in a camp but that it was "only for people who are smart who can benefit from this." So Mvuye went to live in the refugee camp so that he could go to high school.

In our interview, he pulls up a picture on his computer and points to an image of the refugee camp, showing me where his sister lives while also searching around for the school he attended. He points to where he lived previously and a church that was there, then a health center, and then a school on the other side. He points out some improvements made to the school from the satellite picture and explains how he finished

primary school there. He notes the corruption that existed, recalling a memory of a request for a bribe of \$10 by the person in charge of registration so that he could enter high school. Not being able to afford the \$10, he was placed to repeat a grade. This was his only chance to go to high school.

Mvuye explains the educational system of six years of primary school and then straight to six years of high school for students who finish primary school. If he were to do well in his classes and succeed in the national examination in Rwanda (a very difficult feat), he would then get a scholarship to be admitted into a public school and would be funded by a non-profit organization for each semester he was successful. If he were to fail a semester, they would send him back to the school in the camp. He says, if “you don't succeed, you lose, you come back.... So there was so much pressure” (interview, February 11, 2019).

In the school of 800 students sitting for the examination that year, 45 students passed and were therefore eligible to take the national exam. Mvuye was one of them. Each year, approximately 56,000 students sit for the exam. The Ministry of Education allocates all those who pass the national exam to public schools. Mvuye spent the first three years of high school in the neighborhoods by the border of Uganda not so far from camp. He was then required to take the national exam again before his last three years, which he spent in a high school closer to the border with the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Here, he continued to receive the support of the non-profit organization.

Having been uprooted from the genocide in Rwanda and having spent 9 years in and out of multiple refugee camps, some transit camps, Mvuye is dedicated to supporting

post-genocidal healing rooted in indigenous knowledge and community ways of being. He sits patiently with me as I learn more about his life and lived and scholarly reflections.

Mvuye also shares about his project in Rwanda that grew out of his thesis working with a high school community in a post-genocidal context in which students came up with the idea of creating family groups among themselves to support one another given that many had lost parents in the genocide. They also created a business model to raise chickens in order to provide support for their families. The challenge now is sustaining the project given limited/lack of resources.

### *Janya*

Janya is a first year master-level graduate student in public health at a reputable university on the East Coast. She has one year remaining in her program. She was a star student in high school and a recipient of a Gates Scholarship, allowing her the choice of universities. She refers to the help of a tutor from a local non-profit organization who helped her in this process. Janya references this tutor now as being part of her family.

Janya was born and raised in a refugee camp in Nepal. Her family left the camp when she was 15 for the United States. While she was born in Nepal, she does not identify as Nepali. No country defines her. She says her parents say they are from Bhutan. She states that she doesn't feel American, Bhutanese, or Nepali.

In our conversation, we explore the idea of community, something Janya has thought a lot about but struggles to define in her current context in a big city on the East Coast. She states feeling like she doesn't belong. She states having friends and being able to go to them when she needs but also differentiates that from having a community there. She shares that as soon as they find out she's a refugee, she senses different treatment.



Later, she connects this to not feeling like she is from Nepal or Bhutan, exploring the feeling of not belonging more generally. Yet when she talks about the Bhutanese refugee community, she speaks clearly of what community means in that context. It's where you help each other when in need, celebrate together around festivals, come together and help each other. Community in this context is belonging and a place of support.

Since moving to the United States, she has since lived in Haiti for two years and has also traveled to Laos and India through various programs to learn about public health. She notes her ability to volunteer for a year having had no loans as a result of her Gates scholarship. Her multiple experiences have contributed to a desire to give back. She references not only her own lived experiences growing up in a refugee camp but perhaps even more so, working with communities as an "outsider" and seeing the lack of basic needs being addressed in present day. For example, she recalls a time in India watching people drinking directly from a river and saying that even in the camp where she grew up, she had clean drinking water and that in 2019, basic needs should be available to everyone. She acknowledges now "seeing it from the other side."

She also states how she tries to remind herself all the time of where she came from and the people along her journey who believed in her. She says that it's hard to stay positive at times. However, people have been there for her and that serves as motivation. She shares about the limited opportunities her parents had. Watching how hard her parents work is a key motivator, as is having witnessed how people are treated "if you don't speak English." She wants to make her parents proud and also recognizes how she herself is not following cultural norms such as getting married early given her desire to give back and pursue her education.

She is a strong believer in higher education for all and points to the change in her own thinking since moving to the United States and having access to education at the post-secondary level. She shares how she was born and grew up in a camp and was raised there until she was 15. She says she never thought she would finish high school. She says that while schooling was available, she would see her parents and people in her community and wonder what the point of finishing high school was if one could never leave the camp or if there were no opportunities. At 13 or 14 years of age, she imagined she would get married as her friends would talk about also doing. However, she says everything changed after she moved to the United States. While her first year in the country was very difficult, she started to learn English and started to enjoy school.

Janya is now a citizen of the U.S., something that has afforded her opportunities to pursue some of the study abroad programs mentioned above, which she wasn't able to pursue before becoming a citizen. She's interested in pursuing a PhD program and is interested in learning more about policy, possibly work in the area of women's health or in refugee camp settings. She is trying to figure out what she wants to do next. Presently, she continues with her graduate program, has started an internship with UNICEF, and participates in a student of color leadership program.

### *Abhyas*

Abhyas is a master-level graduate student studying International Studies. He is a wise soul, a philosopher. Originally from South Sudan, he talks about duty and commitment to his community, informed by witnessing, observing and experiencing life as a collective survival and sharing. He teaches me about the difference between trading between individuals and the idea of a collective sharing.

He is the first in his community to be where he is and he speaks in passing about ways in which he supports his extended and immediate family. Through our many conversations, he doesn't share about any specific experiences he had prior to coming to the United States, only once stating that it is too horrible to recall.

Rather, he speaks of the collective struggle and the motivation to support his community. He speaks of how the pressure that used to be on the community is not on the one individual, "you who made it" and how this serves as both a challenge and a motivator. On one hand, there is self-guilt in feeling like you haven't done enough. On the other, it "humanize[s] the struggle you went through" and serves as a motivator.

While Abhyas is originally from South Sudan, he lived for some time in Uganda. His dream project is to set up a center in this community in Uganda where his mother still resides. He shares about his hopes in setting up a food bank and irrigation system in Northern Uganda primarily for widows and children. Set up as a self-sustaining community project, he has already bought land yet the project is presently on hold as he directs his resources to his education currently. Once set up, however, the project would better support his community longer term versus what he is able to do currently responding to individual requests with his limited means. In group sessions, he talks about the challenge of pursuing such projects given barriers to resources.

When I ask Abhyas about community, he names several places, including his high school, his university, a larger annual gathering of South Sudanese diaspora. Over the years, he says that he has kept in touch with and built relationships with former high school teachers. In that context, he says that he "wouldn't hesitate to call any of the teachers and they would be able to give me a different perspective." As a Level 2

participant, Abhyas speaks with appreciation for the collective group meetings. Different from other group contexts of which he is a part, he has found the collective to be an opportunity to share with others who have had shared refugee experiences.

### *Graduates with master-level degrees*

#### *Samuel*

Samuel is a fierce advocate for refugees. He has lived what seems generations of oppression and resistance. He fights for freedom, not only for the people of Eritrea where he's originally from, but also for others who have fled oppression and sought refuge. He was born in pre-independence Eritrea and was six years old when Eritrea obtained independence. He lost his father in the border war of 1998 to 2000 between Eritrea and Ethiopia. In a post-independence Eritrea, he has experienced oppression, such as beating by his own government and served in the national service in the military training camp, a mandatory service for all Eritreans. This led him to eventually flee the country to Sudan, South Africa, and eventually the United States. While most of his friends fled and journeyed abroad by way of the Sahara desert and the Mediterranean Sea, his journey, through a call from his uncle who knew of Samuel's desire to pursue his undergraduate degree, led him to South Africa where his uncle resided at the time. He completed his undergraduate in engineering there. And it was also there that he experienced racism for the first time from other black Africans. He would experience this again later in the United States. Yet, he is clear to point out the greater struggles he experienced as a refugee over the racism he experienced.

In addition to a BA in Engineering from South Africa, Samuel is a graduate of a master degree in International Studies from the U.S. where he served as the

commencement speaker for his graduating class. Currently, he is preparing to apply to law school. In addition to his experience and time in post-secondary settings, he has organized conferences and gotten involved in numerous community capacities in South Africa and the United States, some of which he co-founded and all working with immigrant and newcomer communities in areas of post-secondary support, legal support, resettlement, translation, the list goes on. He has also spoken locally and all around the globe at gatherings and functions to advocate for refugees everywhere, human rights, as well as freedom and democracy in Eritrea. He has trained government officials, he has spoken with UN bodies, and he has started organizations. He says, “I didn't do them because I had some aspiration for the future. I did them because it was necessary to do it at that point... The question is where can I touch more lives that could, you know, in a way that could help them prosper, become better for themselves.” He speaks of a pain inside him unable to be express before getting involved. He says, “whatever I go I try to look for ways I can help. I can, I can add something.”

In addition to preparing to apply to law school and starting an NGO for future peace and reconciliation in Eritrea, Samuel is writing a book about his life and his witnessed accounts in Eritrea. He speaks of the political divide within the Eritrean diaspora in the U.S., some siding with the government and others not. He speaks of the divisive nature of this dynamic and hopes to record this history for future generations. While fluent in his English communications, his self-identified challenge is the formal English language. He seeks someone to help him edit his book. He is clear, however, that he will not compromise authorship given that this is his story.

He shares about some difficulty he faced during his graduate program, feeling misunderstood by his peers. It clearly contributed to some confusion and hurt but in the end, he says, “it felt like this paid off, you know, forget everything, finally I got what I want[ed] out of the institution. I graduated; I did a lot of extracurricular activities. They gave me recognition” through an award for living “education through action.”

Considering all of the above, he names the hardest period in his life being a period of time when he was not allowed to work in the United States as he awaited his asylum application to be processed, a period that was meant to last a year but granted in six months. Yet in this period of not being allowed to work, Samuel spent his time engaging in community service with multiple different organizations helping Eritrean and other refugees.

Presently, in his early 30s, Samuel talks about the pressure from family to give up his work for others and settle with a family and live a simpler life. Yet his urge to serve is strong. He also notes that in a way, he has already had children, having been the first of his family to have fled Eritrea and then being the one to ensure the safe migration of his remaining family member (siblings), the last being his mother who he is awaiting transition. “Yeah, because my mom is still there. We are trying hard to get her out because, if things get out of hand, she leaves the country.... But we're trying, we're trying to get her to Canada through the refugee process. If we can do that, I don't have much worry. But until then, she's the only one that's left. The fact I'm actively advocating for reform and democratic change in Eritrea, she has been receiving threats from people inside the country. That is why I want her out, so that I can advocate without her facing any hardship.”

Samuel's ultimate hope is for peace and reform in Eritrea. His hope is to go back one day for this purpose and "start an NGO for peace and reconciliation in Eritrea" in the long-term. In the immediate future, he is "working with another organization as an expert group member on researching how to reform the government, strategizing for peaceful transition and reconciliation in Eritrea." The organization is tailored towards helping Eritrean refugees locally. Early next year, he will be organizing a workshop on mental health for the Eritrean community and is currently arranging for an "Eritrean mental health specialist to speak at UC-Berkeley" (Samuel, personal communications, November, 5, 2019).

### **Closing Thoughts**

In this chapter, I shared participants' hopes and dreams, deconstructed the notion of aspirations and reconstructed it into a desire to serve, and I presented participant motivations for that desire to serve. My hope in this chapter presentation is that it provides the reader with a window into who CoLS are—collectively as well as individually; and that their narratives disrupt some of the negative narratives readers may be familiar with while positioning CoLS as leaders and scholars. CoLS hold knowledge, they bring lived experiences, they offer critical lenses and scholarship, they are committed to justice and community; and they offer hope and determination for collective uplift. In Chapter 5, I go deeper into the idea of a collective way of being, that both informs a more foundational motivation to serve as well as serves as background for the remaining chapters.

## CHAPTER 5. A DESIRE TO SERVE BORN OUT OF A COLLECTIVE WAY OF BEING

### A Collective Way of Being

The second part of the first research question—What aspirations, hopes and dreams do CoLS have as it relates to their communities and *how have they been shaped?*—ended up unearthing a much deeper level of understanding how CoLS move through the world in general. In Chapter 4, I shared how aspirations, hopes and dreams also presented more nuanced responses than expected, grounded in more of a way of being than a goal or event to achieve or pursue. Participants framed their responses as a *desire to serve* versus a goal to achieve. What I came to realize over numerous iterations of processing interviews and group discussions was that many of the participants had grown up in collective contexts and thus grew up embodying collective ways of knowing and being. As such, the starting framework for many was already that of the collective.

As mentioned, one area where this surfaced and continued to resurface was when I asked participants about their motivations to serve community as well as their related aspirations. As Chapter 4 details, responses often began with an unpacking of the term aspirations itself. Most often, they were also followed by descriptions of collective ways of knowing and being, and how that framed desires to serve. This wasn't always explicit and in fact, it wasn't until later in my analysis that I realized the consistent and sometimes nuanced or implicit ways this came up. Like air breathed, it wasn't something that needed to be articulated necessarily in the minds of participants given that it was inherent in their ways of knowing and being. What I emphasize here is that in addition to occasional explicit references during interviews and group sessions, there was also an unspoken and ever present current throughout this study grounded in a collective



epistemology. I thus ground this dissertation and subsequent presentation of findings in a deeper understanding and sharing of participants' collective ways. I dedicate a full chapter to this given its importance and share how for some of the participants, this is rooted in an understanding and earlier lived experiences of a *collective struggle*. I then share findings on the learning and embodiment of the collective beginning at a root level. I then map this with an exploration of community and how different participants defined this, suggesting that a collective way of being can grow in understanding, experience and practice from the local to the global. Finally, I close by exploring the reinforcing nature of community as one participant shared.

To begin, whereas the idea of a collective may be associated with a group of individuals bound together by a like interest, participants (especially in group) expressed the idea of a collective as being more unified with indistinguishable lines of separation among and between individuals. Mvuye presents the notion of fluidity in the existence of the collective wherein there are no separable components or demarcating lines. He says, "it's like this *tea*... You cannot just separate, I am helping myself and then I help my family. No.... I'm one of them" (interview, February 11, 2019). Listening and reflecting on the various ways participants brought up these distinctions further prompts the question of whether this fluid notion of the collective is shadowed by a Western dominant individual frame (see *Neoliberalism and the dominance of the hyper-individual* section in Chapter 6), certainly it represents a different way of knowing.

The notion of fluidity implies that supporting a collective or serving others is just part of what one does. It is not reduced to a set of calculated transactions between individuals. For example, Abhyas says, "From my experience, what I see is most

immigrant communities don't expect anything back. Actually, when you try to repay them, they just take offense because it's more of a general understanding that you help just because it's the right thing to do.... That's really very common" (interview, April 26, 2019). Sean shares a similar sentiment, confused by his experiences in the United States of people trying to pay him back for acts as small as buying a friend a cup of coffee or giving a friend a ride. All he cares about is contributing to community, recognizing also how much the community helped him when he first arrived in the United States (interview, April 24, 2019). In the above and many other examples, the focus of CoLS actions is on the collective, superseding self. They're non-transactional, communal and without expectation of a return.

### **Collective Struggle**

I found participants' continuous efforts to give back notable. Even after having made significant leaps forward as students/graduates of higher education,<sup>7</sup> CoLS continue to face steep barriers (see Chapter 6). As such, I wondered how it is that they still have the desire and capacity to serve the collective. In my interview with Abhyas, I proposed the idea that not everyone would feel a continued sense of duty and that some may choose to focus primarily on their own self interests. How might he, I asked, shed light on his own continued motivation to give back to his communities. His response: "I think that mostly comes from the culture, at least where I come from because most people rely heavily on one another." He hones in on a specific example about the common state of drought and famine where he grew up in Uganda and the reliance on sharing given that most people might only have one food source, such as beans or corn. When I ask if this is

---

<sup>7</sup> Access to higher education for refugee populations is staggeringly low, hovering around 1% (UNHCR, 2014).

like a bartering system, he quickly says that “it's not like a trade. It's more like helping one another.” That is, a trade would include transactions or exchanges between individuals whereas helping one another in this context is rooted in the idea of a collective survival or sharing, even if or perhaps especially when resources are limited. In fact, he says that even when availability or access is limited, “that helps with another day” (interview, April 26, 2019).

Additionally, Abhyas shares that the one with access *wants* to give back. There's an understanding that someone with access to resources today may not tomorrow, and vice versa so there's a development of a network of “mutual help refugees have built... you could say it's [like a] local economy but, [it's] like an intricate kind that involves no cash.” Unlike a quid pro quo or a series of individual transactions between individuals, this economy is viewed as a collective pot for sharing where the collective faces challenges *together*—sharing when one has extra and receiving when one has less. His lived experiences of this collective struggle informs and drives his ongoing motivations to contribute to the collective. Specifically, he speaks about an area in Southern Uganda as his homeland where many refugees from South Sudan and Congo have come to live. The area is known to have more open space, attracting Southern Ugandans to move to graze cattle. It's primarily an agricultural area where the growing of crops is heavily reliant on seasonal rains, which affects the whole community given its variability. He has been working on an idea to create something similar to a food bank for times of emergency “when people don't have enough harvest.... If they don't have money, they can exchange with labor force by maybe working on the farm, something mutual they can benefit.” Once set up, he sees this project having the opportunity to be self sustaining

(interview, April 26, 2019). This example illustrates how even far removed by space, Abhyas continues to feel a deep commitment to this community. Abhyas faces his own resource constraints as a full-time graduate student paying for his graduate education, school fees for his younger sister back home, and supporting other family members; yet the larger community needs remain a part of him.

There is growing literature on immigrants and refugees giving back to their communities. At the simplest level, this literature seems to be born in the idea of remittances, beginning with economic remittances but also including more on social remittances and expanding into other areas (see Table 2 in Chapter 2). The language in some of the literature, as economic remittances might connote, strikes as transactional, versus the collective way of being described by participants. There are, however, more recent and exciting studies that have delved deeper into motivations for why immigrants and refugees give back (Weng & Lee, 2016). In a very recent publication, Dryden-Peterson & Reddick (2019) share how “diaspora were motivated to engage in education development by a sense of responsibility for communities.” This resonates with Abhyas’ earlier comments about a sense of duty. It seems, however, that the notion of a collective epistemology may add another nuanced layer of understanding to these motivations. By shifting the frame of giving from within an individually-based society to centering this understanding from the framework of a collectively-based society that many participants embody, seems to open up a different way of understanding the notion of giving back.

### **Collective Roots: Learning and Embodying the Collective**

There are several themes that surfaced as it relates to *how* participants came to live in and embody the collective struggle. Certainly, this includes periods in participants’

lives when they or family members lived or continue to live refugee experiences. Some participants also pointed to their experiences as immigrants in the United States and being among other immigrant communities as part of that collective identity and struggle. The roots, however, clearly began within the family, modeled by their parents' giving and witnessing the struggles parents navigated throughout their lives, perhaps taking on different roles depending on the context. It is important to note that family, in the presentation by participants, goes beyond the nuclear understanding. Abhyas brought forward the African proverb, *it takes a village to raise a child*. While he only states the first part, *it takes a village*, the proverb is well known to the group and the understanding is clear. That is, Abhyas leans on this proverb to deconstruct the notion of family as being constrained to the nuclear. Commitment and sharing takes place within a larger collective. As this way of being emanates out, there was also a consistent theme of respect and appreciation for a shared humanity that spanned beyond one's direct community. This spanned horizontally to other marginalized communities and vertically across time from past generations representing ongoing inter-generational trauma, memory, and the pursuit of justice.

***Modeling by parents and witnessing the struggles parents navigated***

As shared in Chapter 4, Amina was born and raised in Dadaab Refugee Camp in Kenya, living there until moving to the United States in 2014 as a teenager. Her father passed away when she was six years old so her mother raised six children, the youngest being two months old at the time, as a single parent. Her mother was committed to making sure her children went to school, which meant they needed to eat and they needed access to schooling and school materials. To make this happen, Amina's mother started a

restaurant business. And indeed, Amina remembers eating three meals a day. It's notable that Amina's mother was the first person in Dadaab to own a business, which she built from scratch. Amina shares how her mother cut down trees and would cook outside, even in the winds, which made cooking very difficult blowing sand everywhere. But her mother knew how to work with the wind. Further, when people from the village in Somalia would first arrive in the camp, her mother

would always bring them to our restaurant. She would feed them for free.

Sometimes we donated clothes from our neighborhood from ourselves and we gave it to them. My mom was like a good leader over there, I think... And everybody loved the restaurant because even if you don't have money, my mom would still feed you and trust you to bring money later on. She just had that trust in people and everybody. If you don't have the money right now, they will always come back and give it back to you. (interview, May 8, 2019)

Amina says her mother is her primary motivation noting how challenging it was in the refugee camp, saying "you don't have all of this opportunity. You only get what you get... and if you don't take advantage of those, it's going to pass and you're not able to bring that back." Her mother's fierce determination is evidenced by her long-term commitment to her children's education. As noted in Chapter 4, at the time of my interview with Amina, two of her older brothers were in college, the third brother was working; Amina and her next younger sister were both in college; and her youngest sister was in high school. Amina says, "no matter the situation, [my mother] always made sure that we went to school even though sometimes it was hard to get books, but still she made

sure that we had books for school.” According to Amina, Somali culture prioritizes education for boys. Girls are meant to stay home.

But for my mom, she experienced not going to school or not having anything. She always wanted [for] children to be equal because [Islam says] whatever you teach the boys you must, you should also teach the girls. It's not just like boys are superior to girls. Whatever you teach the boy, you must teach the girl, too.

(interview, May 8, 2019)

The examples Amina shares about her mother is what she says she always saw growing up. The strength and commitment to others that Amina’s mother displays through these stories is tremendous. Certainly, not all could mirror all that she has done and contributed in her life. Yet, there were other examples that came forth in the other interviews. Maya, for example, who grew up in a refugee camp in Nepal shares about witnessing her father’s strong commitment to the community and others. “I grew up seeing him working for the community and even though he made SO little money, he always did that. He stood for people.” She says, “I remember sitting up at my dad's clinic... people used to go to his clinic from camp. He used to provide free service like if it was a check up, they only had to pay for the meds” implying the free services her father would provide. He also served as “a camp secretary and so he was like a representative of the camp.” He would partake in discussions related to matters such as resettlement. This was not without risk. At one point, the family had to sneak away from the camp after rebels threatened to burn down their house. She shares that she was “close to my dad. I was like going everywhere with him. [A] lot of people respected him for what he stood

up” for. Maya shares how she is following in the path of her father (interview, February 15, 2019).

Almara also shares about her parents. She says “we [were] not rich in Burma but then I realized that [we had] something to eat... even my neighbor who lived next to me, they didn’t have anything to eat.” She remembers seeing one of the kids “just waiting for their parents to come back.... Maybe they were going to grow something in their yard to sell. They had to walk I don't know how many miles.... they might not sell all of them. And then they [would] come back sometimes with some money, sometimes with some rice, sometimes with nothing.” She says that whenever she is alone, she still thinks about this and what she can do reflecting on how “my family, we don't have a lot but we share a lot. Because if we have like two pounds of rice, we always give something. And my parents say that in my house, [everyone is a] guest” (interview, January 28, 2019). Again, we see a spirit and pattern of sharing even within the context of limited means.

### ***Multi-generational resistance in the face of injustice***

While the above illustrates examples of direct sharing within communities or across neighbors at any *one moment in time*, participants also shared examples— informed by their parents modeling and community engagement—of how they have continued to engage in collective struggle *over time*. I frame the former as *horizontal community capital*, referring to Yosso’s (2005) seminal work on *Community Cultural Wealth* (CCW). Taking a strengths-based approach within the context of students and communities of color in the United States, Yosso introduces six types of capital in her concept of CCW—aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistance. Shapiro (2019) builds on Yosso’s work as it relates specifically to familial capital in the



context of families with refugee backgrounds and how parents contribute to their children's transitions into college. Building on these conceptions, in this study, I reframe these various forms of CCW in two ways—*horizontal community capital* as encompassing CCW across a community at a given moment in time, and *vertical community resistance capital* that engages in collective struggles and resistance over time and across multiple generations (see *Theoretical Implications* in Chapter 8).

In the case of Shapiro's (2019) study, while involving parent-child relationships, I would still place that within horizontal community capital as it takes place within a relatively defined period of time (college transition). While it does involve multiple generations in a family, the capital is displayed between parent-child largely within a window of time when both are together. To distinguish this from my conceptual of vertical community resistance, I see vertical being a longer pursuit that, while may overlap between parent and child at some point(s), continues within the life, meaning and work of the child in an extended way from the parent or older generation, as is the case with several of the CoLS in this study. It may also go beyond a parent-child relationship and involve a distant adult relative or an elder in the community.

Similar to the ways multi-generational trauma is passed on, I posit that multi-generational resistance can also be passed on, nurtured and cultivated over time and generations. Told in the stories and memories of ancestors with direct lived experiences, post memory (Hirsch in Espiritu, 2014) forms in generations that follow, building up on the resistance and efforts of previous generations.

For example, Katy self-identifies as political. She says, "I can't help but be political because my entire existence is political." She says her whole family on her dad's

side was political. When her family left Iraq, she was only three years old but she grew up hearing stories<sup>8</sup> of life under Saddam Hussein. At that time, she shares, Hussein had undertaken a pan Arab movement with the goal of unifying the Arab world. She says that this meant two things. First, it meant that you were Muslim and second, that you spoke Arabic. She continues saying this excluded Jewish people and Christians in the Middle East from the pan Arab identity, as well as smaller ethnic and other communities. She shares how she believes this contributed to more problems such as isolating certain groups, as well as greater tensions between religions and ethnic groups. That is, an effort that was meant to unify people did the opposite. In response, her family on her father's side, "joined the Communist Party of Iraq, and they were an anti-regime movement. As a result, one of my uncle's was executed. There was lots of torture in my family. We had to flee the country." Katy explains how this is not a known history of Iraq. Many people are unaware of this communist effort. The dominant narrative about the Iraq war, she says was of people trying to flee a country torn from war. She's troubled by the absence of personal narratives and histories that tell different stories. As such, Katy continues in her resistance and efforts by actively interviewing members of her extended family who lived under Saddam Hussein's dictatorship to record their stories that are lesser known, in the hopes of developing a compilation of diverse stories to illustrate the diversity of experiences in that period in history (interview, January 31, 2019).

In a similar resonance, Samuel talks about the legacy his father holds in his mind in his fight for freedom in a pre-independence era in Eritrea. As he reflects back on his early years, he says,

---

<sup>8</sup> "[F]amilial stories of persistence through struggle can be used to build children's navigational and resistant capital (Yosso, 2005)" (Shapiro, 2019).

I had a different upbringing, you know, like most people probably grew up in the cities among the culture and society, but I grew up among the soldiers... Our religion was independence and I also remember the day of independence how people chanted, [there was] joy and everything. Now I'm reflecting back on everything you know like, what happened to that? (interview, February 2, 2019)

Samuel was five years old when Eritrea gained independence in 1991 but he remembers it clearly. The history and fight for independence is engrained in him. The fight was long and there was a lot of loss, “less than 3 million people against 60 million Ethiopian people fighting for 30 years to gain independence and it was too much, you know. Yes, everybody lost somebody. I lost my father.” After independence, “We took it upon ourselves like you know, our parents fought for independence so it's our turn to contribute to this country.” But then he started noticing teachers in his city being arrested and disappeared, including one of his teachers. “He just disappeared,” he says. Samuel explains that in Eritrea at that time, after finishing 11<sup>th</sup> grade, everyone—male and female—would “go to military training camp, you take five months military training camp, six months and then you go into a year of education grade 12 in the military training camp.” There was no escaping it. It was there at the military training camp that he witnessed and experienced numerous human rights violations. He says that at first, as a younger person, one may not pay a lot of attention to it as people were “blindfolded by the victory... because the victory was huge, massive.” He then started to see the hypocrisy and false propaganda around him. He not only saw things first hand, he endured punishment for what he says were for meaningless things. He was beaten up. He started to question why he was getting punished. Having grown up among pre-

independence soldiers and then being in this post-independence military training context, he says, “This is not the people that I know. This is not what my father died for, that's what, it got me.” He laments how he “grew up under them under the liberated part of the country and I used to live among those soldiers before independence. My mom was part of them. My dad was part of them... But I think after independence, they forgot.” The pain is palpable. He goes on.

My father gave his life. What if my father was still alive? Or what if he came back from the dead and reflected and look at what's going on? Would he be happy? Would he die for this country again? Or would he stand along their side? That's the first question I ask and to me, no. There was a point I almost felt like I'm going crazy while I was still in the military training camp... I had to free myself, my situation, my thinking. I had to claim my freedom. (interview, February 2, 2019)

As shared in more detail in Chapter 4, since fleeing Eritrea to South Africa, he's been fighting and advocating for human rights and refugees—all refugees and not just those from Eritrea—since. And he continues the vision and pursuit of peace in Eritrea. In addition to his own direct efforts, he is working on a book project in order to capture his experiences in history to share with the next generation. Perhaps they, too will continue the fight as well.

In another example, Amina refers to her mother as her main motivation in pursuing her public health degree. She shares a story shared to her by her mother. When her family first moved to Dadaab refugee camp in 1991, there was

an outbreak of measles and terrible diseases that killed everybody... over 80% of the population was dead just because they came a new land. Almost 80% of them never had the shot. My brothers and my mom survived because they were vaccinated. Like, how lucky. [My mother] told me how... they had neighbors who consisted of eight kids plus the parents so ten of them died overnight. So that's just crazy and sad.

If Amina were to pursue a health degree, then in the future if she were to ever go back to Kenya or Somalia, she would “have something to give back.” Her mother’s way of being and determination shine as Amina speaks.<sup>9</sup>

As I listen to Katy, Samuel, Amina and others, it is clear that the commitment and fight for justice is strong as though it has been running through their blood for generations. Arguably, it has. While the examples above refer to experiences outside of the United States, several participants also share their witnessing of injustices their parents faced in the United States and how these experiences also inform their thinking today. For example, Denpo speaks with tremendous respect and appreciation for his mother, her support and understanding, and her always getting him to where he needed to be when he was young, regardless of the early hour. He expresses deep appreciation for that parental support, noting that his mother served as both his mother and father given that his father passed away early in Denpo’s life. He recognizes that not everyone has parental support in their life. In his work with youth in an inner city in California, he states “the parents aren't there, they don't have that guidance, and that's why being a role

---

<sup>9</sup> “[F]amilial stories of persistence through struggle can be used to build children’s navigational and resistant capital (Yosso, 2005)” (Shapiro, 2019).

model is such an important thing.” Denpo mentors numerous youth through his role as a coach and program coordinator at a local organization.

### **It Takes a Village: Local to Global Community**

Definitions of community are nuanced. While there may be overlapping traits and themes, they can themselves also be multiplicitous. As Katy states in her interview, communities have identities that are subjective and self-defined. As we talk about the difficulty in defining community, she says, “I think that’s an important part of the research to being, their own ideas of what community identity is because these are very subjective things” (interview, January 31, 2019). She suggests that I include a disclaimer in my research detailing this. I do that here. The motivation guiding my inquiries about community was about wanting to understand how participants *themselves* thought of community, centering *their* ways of knowing and experiencing community based on *their* lived experiences as well as *their* critical reflections.

As stated earlier, the African proverb, *it takes a village* was brought forward in group explicitly to deconstruct the notion of family being constrained solely to the nuclear understanding of family. The context for this discussion implied close and immediate known communities, such as elders and children, cousins or even distant relatives. However, as I sat with the data, I realized that the way participants across all the interviews spoke about communities spanned from the local to the more distant and imagined<sup>10</sup> (Anderson, 1991/1983). Some spanned generations and time—which, similar to previous framing, I refer to as *vertical community*—and some spanned space—which I

---

<sup>10</sup> Participants spoke about imagined communities beyond the constraints of national consciousness or nation-states but rather across marginalized groups or pan refugee communities with the latter going beyond the 1951 Convention definition of refugee and expanding to include all those who seek refuge.

frame as *horizontal community*. Below, I attempt to organize examples shared by participants, starting from the most intimate definition of community to the most broad, yet still tied together by a strong thread of commitment to a collective.

Mvuye reflects on how people have multiple communities and then shares “I think about my community, refugee as my community, then I think about the Rwandan self, my background also being the experiences that led to the genocide, and then think about that community as well.” He goes on to share that communities are where his heart is and therefore where he wants to contribute. Community is intimate and inseparable from self. “When I look at my background, that community cannot be separated from who I am today” (interview, February 11, 2019).

In another intimate expression of community, Sean says, community “it's your mother. For example, my mom, whenever I need, she's always there. Your mom and you can feel it.” He shares about how his mother checks in with him, offers help and guidance, similar to community. “It shows you the paths—what is right, what's wrong, it gives you a lot of support.... So yeah, that's how I would define community—as a mother... whatever you need, they would give it to you” (interview, April 24, 2019). Sean, who has been involved in various capacities at a local organization serving a diverse group of over 50 immigrant and refugee communities, shares appreciation for the support he received when he first arrived in the United States. Now, he serves as a classroom assistant helping other newcomers. He says,

We're all like sisters and brothers.... Each country has their own little community.

For example, some Burmese people, they have their own community. Some

Yemenis they have their own community. To be honest, I feel like I'm in all these communities. (interview, April 24, 2019)

He explains that because there wasn't an Afghan community in the immediate area, he became involved in this larger community through the organization. He talks about the diversity of the community saying "you see people from all around the world." When I ask Sean if he sees this larger community as a community onto itself or more of a collection of community groupings, he says, a diverse community onto itself. He then shares the following analogy.

If we have one finger and you push a chair, you have less power. But if you use all these fingers and grab that chair and push it, you have more power. So that's how I feel about the community. These individuals... are great but when you have all of them together as one, that's what I rely on here and I call that community. (interview, April 24, 2019)

The closeness and diversity within the community Sean speaks of raises hopeful considerations, in particular given its placement in the United States where immigrant and refugee communities are being targeted by the current federal administration. Such strategies have marginalized communities, separating and targeting them further. However, divide and conquer strategies don't work if communities come together or smaller communities form larger ones. Sean glowingly shares how amazing the diversity of the community is. "I love our community here... I always say that if you want to meet the world don't spend your money [and] time traveling all around the world, just once enter our class and you'll meet the world" (interview, April 24, 2019).



Abhyas also sees and embraces these connections beyond traditional ethnic or national lines. Referring to refugee communities (plural), he says:

their particular immigration story, maybe different but there's a broader underlying theme that we all have. We either came from war-torn countries or very poor countries or very dictatorial countries where freedom is a scarcity. So in a sense because you come from such a similar environment, you tend to have a very similar understanding of [each other], you tend to connect more with someone... because you have a very similar environment. Even though the individual story of how you got here or your individual migration story may differ from one person to the other, there's a lot of underlying themes refugees share. (interview, April 26, 2019)

In one of our group sessions, Abhyas shares a very specific example of this. He says, when “Syria was literally falling apart” due to civil unrest, it “reminded me of something I forgot.” He had just completed his third year in university as a chemistry major. The images and situation in Syria made such an impact on him, he says, “I changed my major to international relations, hoping that even the smallest act will make some impact on someone's life. And I've seen that. I just always applied myself” (group session, April 22, 2019).

Like Abhyas, Maya is drawn to work with displaced populations more broadly, casting away the categories and divisions created that give some protections, and some not. She says, “there are other people who are equally qualified and equally deserving and equally in need of, but they don't get all these opportunities, just because they happen to be from another country or another place [with] different circumstances” (interview,

February 15, 2019). This motivates her to pursue graduate education to understand and contribute to policies that are more equitable for all who seek refuge. Here, she, too sees a broader connection. Later in a group session, she says, “no matter what I do, I’m going to commit my life to protect people like that because I, I’m just going to protect the person I was back then” (group session, April 22, 2019). The idea of connecting now with “the person I was back then” is also shared by several other participants.

Katy speaks of a connection she feels to marginalized groups as a whole, beyond communities who have experienced displacement. She shares that community is not only a place where one feels a sense of belonging but also where common experiences exist. Throughout our interview, she draws on her vast and diverse experiences—ranging from lived experiences that she and her family have directly experienced, as well as through her experiences as an emerging scholar in her undergraduate years through service-learning courses—and draws connections across these different contexts and communities. As I reflect on her words, Paulo Freire’s book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970/2018) resonates. His writings of the oppressed explore a unified oppressed versus a disaggregated group of oppressed and marginalized groups. He writes about the need to liberate all, both the oppressed and the oppressors, in creating a new reality of “no longer oppressor nor longer oppressed, but human in the process of achieving freedom” (1970/2018, p. 49). Similar to Freire, Katy’s representation of community is encompassing of oppressed people in a more humanistic form versus in her words, a reductivist representation that people have unfortunately placed on her in the past. Her interest is to serve marginalized communities in the broadest understanding. She says, “I find myself having common experiences with a lot of different marginalized... as

someone who falls into an intersection spectrum. I find myself being like okay well there's multiple communities.” She refers to a Buddhist principle saying, “it's like if someone else in the world is oppressed, marginalized, we all are” (interview, January 31, 2019).

The aforementioned definitions and examples of community range widely in size, scope and reach, starting with an intimate reference to inseparability between self and community, to a community that connects all oppressed people through a lens of humanity. As illustrated more in Chapter 7 and 8, this opens up spaces for wider solidarity efforts and understanding.

### ***Community values, attributes, and reinforcing nature***

Participants talked about the values and attributes of community. Amina says community is “a group of people who are unbreakable, who go through barriers together, who overcome obstacles, who stick together no matter the situation” (interview, May 8, 2019). Abhyas talks about duty and commitment to his community, informed by witnessing, observing and experiencing life as a collective survival that arises from the shared experience of struggle. He further says that communities need to have an affinity and a “sense of belonging... a sense of purpose within that particular group, and that purpose is being valued by every member of the community” (interview, April 26, 2019).

Maya says with “my *core* community... you're comfortable enough to express yourself, but at the same time, you're not afraid to challenge ideas or thoughts and even imagine, dream big and basically be like a support system” (interview, February 15, 2019). Katy reflects upon the non-hierarchical nature of community where everyone treats everyone as equals. She contrasts this with the idea of pitying someone, saying how

pitying is “almost dehumanizing, in a way, when you begin to think about what it means to pity someone.” She follows up to say that doesn’t mean “we shouldn't be upset with the situation” but the distinction is clear (interview, January 31, 2019). Pitying seems hierarchical, whereas community is not.

With these values in mind, it’s possible to then imagine how communities can be reinforcing—to one’s self in one’s desire to serve, and to the community itself. Abhyas beautifully outlines the reinforcing nature of community that not only strengthens community but also allows for the broadening of aspirations, reach and impact. He says,

for myself, helping community reinforces your belief that this is possible because you see your impact in your own community, and you see the feedback people are giving you and you see the positive experiences in both the community you are serving and in yourself. You tend to keep that aspiration going because that reinforces your motivation to say this is possible no matter what the challenges you are facing. Those small things reinforces your belief that ok, you can make this happen. (interview, April 26, 2019)

He provides the following concrete example.

If I want to see peace in South Sudan and I want to see integration, integration rather than disintegration of interethnic communities, I have to be able to exercise that... role you aspire to have in this broader aspiration. So, if you can conceive this is possible in a small group, it's possible to consider it in a bigger collective group because now you know. You understand how your community works, you understand how to listen to other perspectives. And that gives you that sense of leadership and role of ownership to really push for your aspiration and see it come

through. Whether in terms of education, in terms of talking about peace, all of those come from learned value you see around you. You're being taught by your parents and those lessons can only be productive when its being reinforced by community. (interview, April 26, 2019)

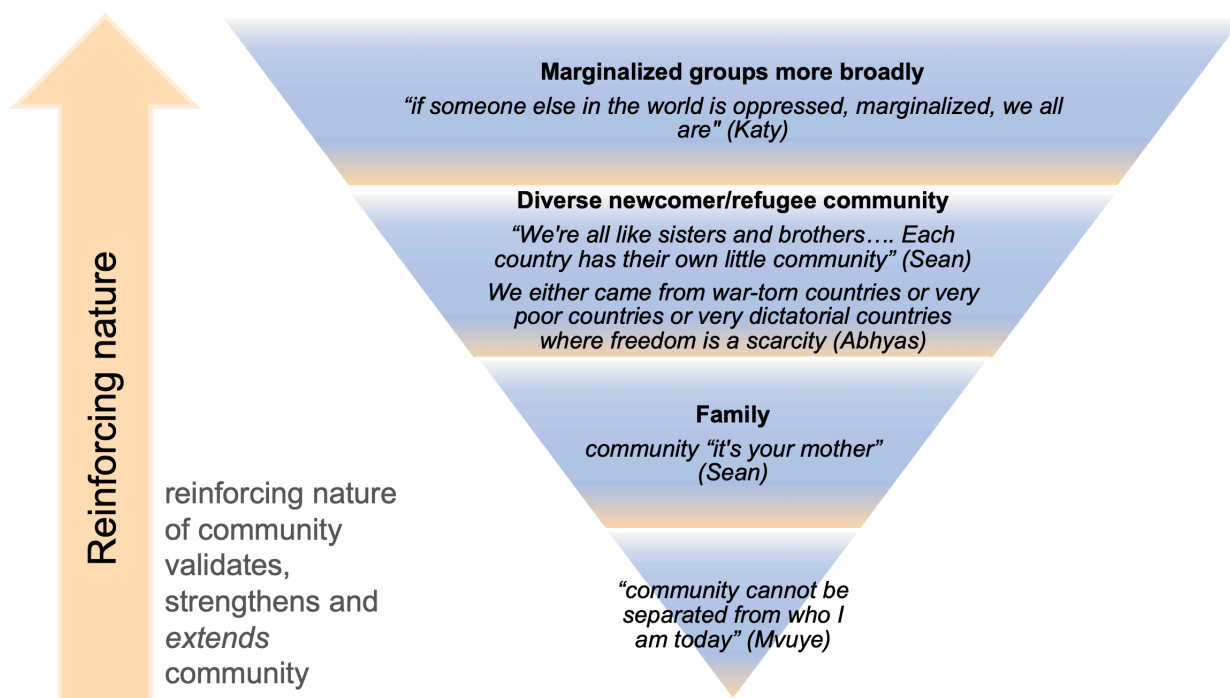


Figure 8. Reinforcing nature of community.

These insightful reflections imply that the reinforcing nature of community not only validates and strengthens community, it also provides the validation and strength to *extend* community see as depicted in Figure 8. Whether this takes place from the local to the global, or the known to the imagined, the wisdom participants share offers much to contemplate.

### Closing

In this chapter, I've attempted to underscore the idea that the desire to serve is born from and reinforced by an understanding and a collective way of being that is rooted

in family and then spans out to larger communities. Guided by values, purpose and belonging, the collective and community reinforce a commitment to serve. Despite the distancing over time and space and distinctly different living conditions from past refugee experiences, participants still see themselves aligned with a larger collective struggle. This is seen horizontally across space having family or community members still in that struggle, and finding likenesses with other marginalized communities; or vertical across time passed on from one generation to the next or in the likeness of participants' past experiences with others facing those experiences now.

After listening and reflecting on the various ways participants described collective ways of being, it is hard not to juxtapose it with a more hegemonic individualistic society as exists in a Western dominant frame (see Chapter 6). There is power in the collective. However, there are also barriers and strain when that collective way of being is situated in a hyper-individualistic environment such as is promoted under today's neoliberal regime. In the next chapter, I explore this and two other overarching themes that place barriers around CoLS as they strive to access mainstream systems in order to affect positive change and greater impact in their communities.

## CHAPTER 6. AN IMPENETRABLE BARRIER FOR HEROES: FIRST AND ONLY ONES

### Situating CoLS as Heroes: Motivation and Challenges for *First and Only Ones*

One of the main research questions for this study is, *What systemic barriers do CoLS face in their efforts towards collective uplift?* In this chapter, I begin by sharing two themes that arose in this study in order to understand the context of CoLS experiences. These themes are that of being the *first one* and being the *only one*. These themes situate participants transnationally, born and mostly raised (except Katy and Denpo whose families migrated to the United States when they were three and seven years old, respectively) physically and culturally in the Global South (in some cases, in multiple countries and/or refugee camps), and currently working and/or going to school in the United States. As the first and only ones, CoLS share—explicitly in group and implicitly in interviews—being situated in a place stuck between two systems: their families and communities that supported them to get to their current place, and the systems they aim to penetrate that sits behind an impenetrable barrier. Data reveal patterns that suggest that this impenetrable barrier is generated by a confluence of global capitalism, neocolonialism, and neoliberalism, reinforced and manifested in daily social scripts and patterns CoLS face. This maps out the organization of this chapter.

Being the first and only one manifested in numerous examples during interviews and group sessions. In group, Mvuye summarizes the challenge of this position as being lifted up by your community and,

you're seen as a *hero* and you know you're not. Everyone else sees you like the savior in their circle and you know you're nothing. They think that you... may be able to navigate the system that they never thought they would ever do. So there's

that frustration knowing that people in this community believed in you but they don't know how much you have in common with them. (interview, February 11, 2019)

This point drew a lot of resonance in the room with responses of simultaneous laughter for the painful truth of it and sadness for the weight of it. Mvuye continues, “I’m not a hero, at least I see myself as the hope for the community” (group sessions, April 22, 2019; April 29, 2019). This was clearly a point of shared understanding and experiences in the room. See Figure 9 for a depiction of a community lifting up an *H* (for hero/heroine).



*Figure 9.* Community lifting up H (“hero”).

There is of course variability across participants in what being the first one represents. For some, the first one means that they were the first ones to migrate from the Global South to the Global North. For most but not all, it means they were the first ones to go to college. For some, the first one means responsibility of caring for and supporting family members—whether that means paying for school fees or helping remaining family members at home seek refuge elsewhere. This was particularly pronounced for a few participants who had lost their fathers when they were young and therefore had to assume



the paternal role of the family early on in their lives.<sup>11</sup> For some, the first one means navigating new grounds where cultural expectations of the family seemingly compete with pursuing graduate school or working towards collective uplift.

Mvuye's earlier comments sparks deep engagement and dialogue in the group. The discussion moves to the multiple responsibilities of overcoming financial and educational expectations, and the corresponding stress that comes along with that. Abhyas says, "you travel here miles away from home and a lot of things are expected of you. And it's just that that stress to overcome that expectation both financially and educationally" (group session, April 22, 2019). Part of the challenges is that those expectations come without an understanding or awareness of the challenges in this new place. Abhyas is clear to follow up.

I wouldn't say it's necessarily a bad thing. Because it's like one of the values you learn from your community, that's how you were raised up and that's how you survive through hardships, that's how you survive and it just becomes actually a test of being that child, you know. It's not a bad thing, it can be stressful but I think its [inaudible] at the same time because people expect a lot from you because back home, it takes a whole village to raise a child kind of perspective. (group session, April 22, 2019)

There are voices of agreement throughout Abhyas' comments. Maya points out that the aim is to "break the cycle and do something so that it doesn't have to repeat itself again. The fact is, yes, we are away from family and yes we are trying to break down barriers... we are also struggling to survive." She laments on how hard it is to fulfill that

---

<sup>11</sup> Five of the ten participants shared losing their fathers when they were young children.

expectation pointing out the tensions of that struggle but “try to do something” regardless of the struggle, and going “back and just be in that bubble” with the resolve that “there is no hope at all. So which one do you choose? With a tiny hope of being able to break the barrier and make it or do you just want to be like... I don't know.” Again, there is strong agreement in the room. Abhyas says, “Those barriers are like real things” (group sessions, April 22, 2019; April 29, 2019).

In addition to being the first one, there is also the challenge of being the only one that merits further explanation. As discussed above, it is the community that has lifted CoLS up to where they are currently. Now in a new place as the first one, participants shared also feeling like the *only one*. At first, this seemed a simple concept to be the only one in a space. However, as I reviewed and reflected deeply on the data, in particular the pervasiveness of a collective way of knowing and being, I realized that this is actually more complicated and substantive than it might first appear. For the new space CoLS find themselves in functions in a completely different mindset—an individualist mindset (see *Neoliberalism and the dominance of the hyper-individual* section). Thus, CoLS are not only the only ones, they are the only ones navigating new spaces where their way of understanding the world is shadowed by an individualistic mindset. That is, the same way the collective mindset is part of their way of knowing and being i.e. their epistemology, they now live in a world that has a fundamentally opposing epistemology that not only conflicts with their way of knowing but due to its dominance, shadows them leaving even the consideration for a collective mindset invisible. CoLS grew up learning, knowing and being in the collective. Their survival was through collective struggle. Now, in this new place, they are navigating largely alone, separated from their communities while trying to

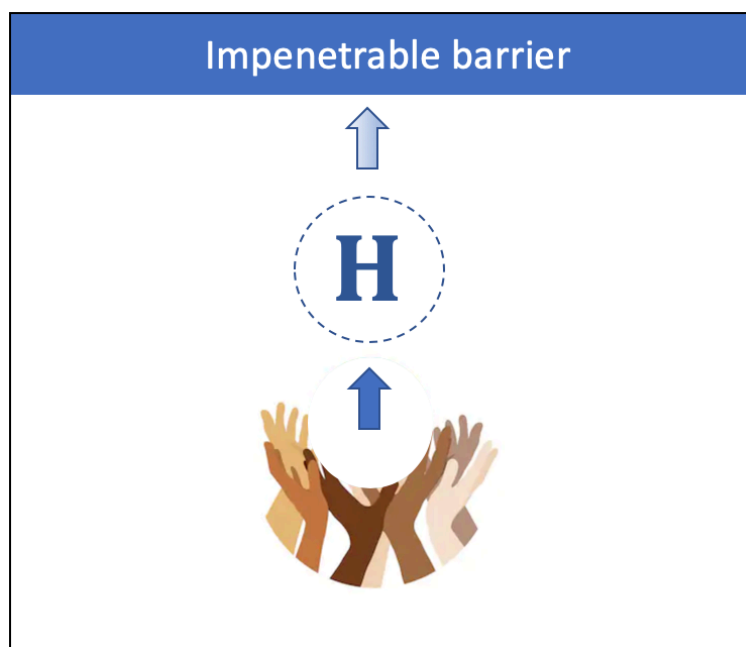
lift up their communities in order to ideally break the cycle of struggle, while also trying to survive alone.

Through this study, even with my own concerted efforts to not impose my way of knowing, and even with my own upbringing trying to simultaneously navigate and make sense of a conflated and contradictory space of collectivist and individualistic frames, I came to realize how pervasive and entrenched the individualistic mindset exists in our environment. This is one of the many reasons why I am deeply grateful for working with the participants in this study. Not only were they deeply engaged and committed to the study (as well as larger pursuits), our conversations embraced critical analysis—not only in their responses but also of the questions themselves. That is, if I asked a question about a phenomenon but my phrasing was skewed towards an individualist frame, participants would proactively clarify and reframe things in a way that helped to break my own invisible barriers of understanding. Through their critical lenses and mastery with navigating cultural, linguistic and liminal spaces, I came to understand this collective way more deeply. The significance of this additional layer of conversation was appreciated throughout but it was only later that the meaning of them truly sank in for me. That is, the different ways seemingly small things were addressed later made me realize how deeply entrenched an epistemology can live. In the bones, heart and spirit, they are inseparable from the person. As such, the challenges that arise as a result of a collective way of knowing and being in an individualistic society cannot be overstated.

### *Stuck in between systems*

At the group session continues, the cohesion in the room grows. Mvuye shares that the “family has really deep needs like itself is like a system... it's as if I'm managing

a district” [*laughter from group*]. For the community, he says they have made “sacrifices but they let you go despite their hardships.” And yet, without someone to lean on or to show you the way in this new land, one needs to survive alone. He says, “there is a thing of not belonging anywhere.” The community at home has pushed you to where you are “but you are neither in the system they think and you are and not in the system that pushed you.” Similarly, Abhyas says, “the system where you are residing now is not what used to know.” He refers to family values. He continues that your family is “also struggling to know the system and you get caught up in those gaps” (group sessions, April 22, 2019; April 29, 2019). Building off the imagery in Figure 9, in Figure 10, the *H* is detached from the community. *H* is slightly within reach of the momentum from community (upwards arrow), but not close enough. *H* also tries to reach the impenetrable barrier but can’t and is just close enough to see that it is impenetrable. *H* also has a dotted circle around it to represent isolation and the sense of being the *first and only one*.



*Figure 10.* Isolated and stuck between two systems.

The energy and connectedness around this discussion is high. Each participant builds on another's point. With recognition of being in a slightly better place than many others, there is still a feeling of defeat. Mvuye adds,

the further you go, the further you realize how you're not the hero they think you are because ... as you push harder against the wall, you realize how strong it is that you can't break it, which brings that hopelessness or fear of not wanting to even be seen as a hero.

Abhyas follows up with,

the community really recognizes that not everyone can make it but if we send one person [Mvuye agreeing], that person would get there faster than the community and the hope is that you come up and help all, that's the expectation. But what we do not know when you're being pushed with this idea/desire is that you don't realize this system until you get up/out there. So when you get up there, you realize the system that that is, that is another weight.... So you you're being pushed from here but you have another weight that is pushing you down, which is a big system and you are in the middle so depending on how hard you're being pushed by the system, you can either fall, which will be a disappointment to your community or stay there permanently. Sometime this transition never ends... it's like, you cannot go forward or backward, you're just there. (group sessions, April 22, 2019 and April 29, 2019).

What becomes apparent through this dialogue is that the gravity and weight of this unbreakable wall is like an impenetrable barrier. I unpack this further next.

### An Impenetrable Barrier

In group, we briefly explored what *the system* meant to participants. Systems represented pathways—pathways to school, language and communications, platforms to broaden one’s reach, access to decision makers. Extracting from other implicit references throughout the study, pathways might also include those to resources—financial and other that would allow CoLS and their communities to go beyond a level of survival where repetitive cycles of oppression and limited means for future generations can be broken. Of course, systems are much more complex than this and are not standalone. However, for the purposes of this study, I use this as a loose working definition.

Participants discussed the notion of an *impenetrable barrier*, collectively made up of the systemic barriers named above. This impenetrable barrier leaves them in a gap or the aforementioned permanent state of transition between the place where their communities have lifted them up to and where they need to go in order to continue in the journey of collective uplift.

Analysis of data reveal three overarching subterranean forces<sup>12</sup> that persist in the lives of participants—global capitalism, neocolonialism, and neoliberalism (see Figure 11). I posit that these tri-forces—individually and collectively—helped to generate and reinforce the *impenetrable barrier*. They are historically entrenched and overwhelming, persistent and pervasive. And they have the reinforcing effect of locking people out from access or pathways to capital, resources, and pathways to positions of power; and

---

<sup>12</sup> Sassen (2014) introduces the concept of *subterranean trends* that has brought about a new stage of a kind of global capitalism and corresponding stark levels of inequality. As can be seen in more detail in Chapter 2, she refers to “a complex interaction of these actors with systems regeared towards enabling extreme concentrations” (Sassen, 2014, p. 13). Here, I extend her concept of subterranean trends to that of subterranean forces, given the strong currents that seem to prevent CoLS accessing the *impenetrable system* discussed in this chapter.

shadows a collective way due to its dominant individualistic ways of being. While a deep exploration of these forces goes beyond the scope of this dissertation, below, I aim to illuminate both the existence of these forces as well as illustrate concrete ways they have manifested as barriers in the lives of participants.

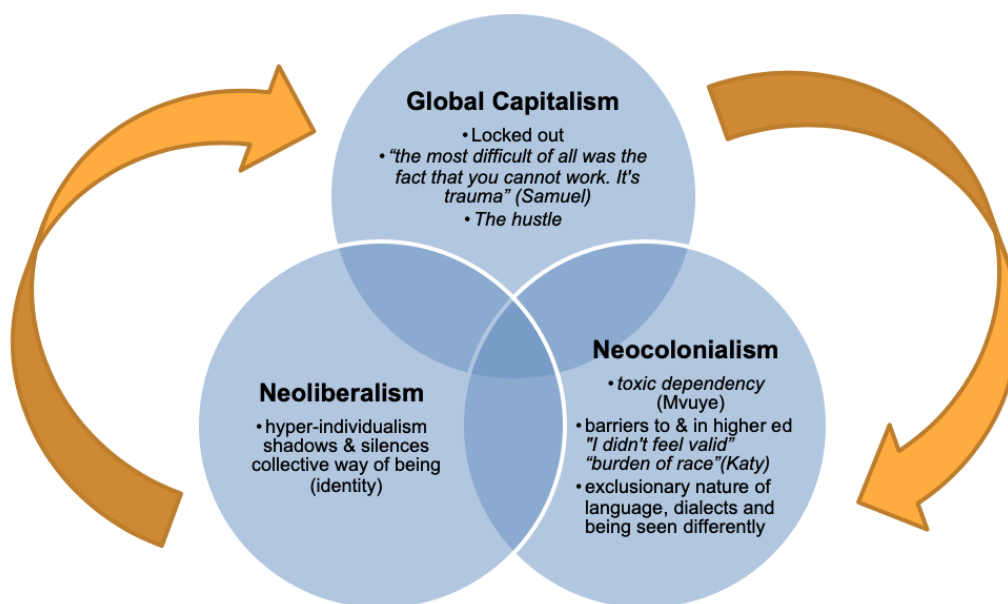


Figure 11. Impenetrable Barrier: Tri-subterranean forces.

### ***Global capitalism: locked out***

In our third group session, I asked participants to draw a picture of their life journey. Journeys, of course, are not linear and it was important that I shaped the question as broadly as possible to leave room for interpretation. I then asked participants to note three high points in their life, followed by three low points<sup>13</sup> (Bajaj, M., Canlas, M., & Aregnal, A., 2017). Among other low points, all three participants mentioned limited resources. A *lack of access* to financial resources prevents all other doors from opening,

<sup>13</sup> This activity was recommended by my committee chair and is replicated from an activity described in Bajaj, M., Canlas, M., and Aregnal, A. (2017).

leaving one feeling shut out of the system. To emphasize this point, Mvuye says, “when you are struggling with financial means... the other doors don't open... it's like you're out of the circle. You are struggling around but you don't know even how to get in because who you are with your background.” You are essentially locked out (group sessions, April 22, 2019; April 29, 2019).

As explored in more depth in Chapter 2, the world is experiencing levels of inequality never seen before in history (Oxfam, 2016; 2017). Also explored in the literature review, Sassen (2014) critically frames the growth in global inequality as a “type of expulsion” (p. 15). She suggests that we are entering a new period of global capitalism that is driving expulsions “from life projects and livelihoods, from membership, from the social contract at the center of liberal democracy” (Sassen, 2014, p. 29). In the context of the Global South, Sassen (2014) points to the growth of displaced populations as an acute form of expulsion yet, the concept also applies to the Global North.

While participants in this study originate from the Global South, they all currently reside in the Global North and they have spanned the Global South and North in many capacities. They all experienced some form of forced migration, some lived in refugee camps, some lived as refugees in urban setting, all eventually migrated to the United States, all are high school graduates, some have graduated from university and some continue to graduate studies. Yet data from this study suggest that the expulsion and lack of access to the system persists throughout these many contexts. I share a few below.



***The fact that you cannot work. It's trauma.***

The experience of lacking resources and financial exclusion is familiar to many participants. Two of the ten participants arrived in the United States seeking asylum, an arduous and lengthy process during which time very strict stipulations are placed on people applying for asylum. According to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services website (n.d.) “You cannot apply for permission to work (employment authorization) in the United States at the same time you apply for asylum.” Samuel shares how “when I got here, the most difficult of all was the fact that you cannot work. It's trauma. It really is depressing... the fact that you cannot work was the most toughest thing, even to accept.” The psychological strain compounds the financial one, and vice versa. This is an obvious statement but worth stating—without work, or even the ability to “apply for permission to work,” people are completely locked out of any ability to make money.

***The hustle.***

Many participants talked about financial struggles and juggling multiple responsibilities while in university in order to make ends meet, something Tiffany Willoughby-Herard, Professor at University of California, Irvine and speaker at the Critical Refugee Studies Collective (CRSC) Graduate Student Writing Workshop<sup>14</sup> referred to as the *hustle* (personal communications, August 7, 2019). Two of the ten participants received full scholarships freeing them up from the hustle and allowing them to explore educational opportunities more fully without worry of debt or the additional need to work. Most of the remaining eight explicitly stated working, sometimes multiple

---

<sup>14</sup> This writing workshop was a five-day writing retreat for doctoral students working on CRS-related projects. CRSC is “a University of California multi-campus research initiative.” This first writing workshop was held at University of California, San Diego. It was led by Professor Y  n L   Espiritu and included CRS scholars from around California.

jobs simultaneously, and/or receiving/pursuing partial scholarships during their post-secondary careers.

When I ask Katy about challenges, she says, “finance financially, I mean that's always a burden.” She talks about having to work a lot in her senior year and how hectic that was. She says, “I was working like 25 hours a week at [grocery store]. Plus, I was an RA and it was my third year as an RA and... I think I did like three senior courses in that year.” Amina, while she does not specifically name finances as a challenge, shares that in addition to going to school, she works three to four night shifts per week at a sorting facility for a large retailer. Samuel worked as a waiter while pursuing his undergraduate degree and drove taxis while pursuing his graduate degree. When Maya reflects on her undergraduate program, she states how she wasn't able to go to her professors' office hours because she was interning and working.

***A counter story to capitalism: Resources for the collective good***

I return back to the collective to close out this section as a way to reconnect with the collective mindset. In particular, I share a counter story to the idea of capitalism as a means of obtaining capital to obtain more capital or materials goods. Consistently throughout this study, references to capital or financial resources was in the context of addressing needs related to the collective struggle (Chapter 5). Not one person, mentioned any desire to purchase a material good or self gain in anyway. For example, Abhyas explains about his motivation to support and invest in community. Throughout our conversations, he mentions how he supports his sisters' school fees and sends money to his mother for food. He also supports his own graduate education. With all this, he continues to think about the larger community. Noting his financial limitations in

supporting everyone who may ask him for help individually, whether it be a cousin or another family member who is sick, he has come up with an idea for a community project in Uganda. Similar to a food bank, it would support the entire community in mutually beneficial and self sustaining ways. He hopes to work after graduating to earn enough money to set up the project.<sup>15</sup> He has already purchased an acre of land in preparation.

*Neocolonialism and contemporary power dynamics within refugee contexts*

In the preceding section, I stated that expulsion and lack of access to the system persists throughout many contexts participants have experienced. The same is true for neocolonialism—ranging from past experiences in countries of origin, refugee contexts as well as in present day within institutions in the United States. They are not momentary experiences but persist with time.

To introduce this section, I share a reflection about the colonial project shared by Abhyas in a group session. The pervasiveness of it and the peace efforts it continues to prevent have become a scholarly pursuit for Abhyas who shares of his interest in researching “repatriation of refugees in a collapsed state.” He is interested in South Sudan and curious about the disintegration of “the state apparatus that was supposed to be working for the people.” Based upon a conversation with one of his professors, he shares the following reflection.

all institutions, government institutions that are in Africa existed as a colonial project. So these are not an African thing. State, statehood or sovereign states developed from colonial project. And this is true because when you look at Africa in general, elections are supposed to be like free democracy and all that. But...

---

<sup>15</sup> Abhyas also mentions interest in learning how to write grant proposals in the hopes that he can fundraise for this project as well. In group, we designate our last session to fundraising.

whenever there is an election in Africa, there's a sense of fear. There's a sense that the country's going to war... what I came to realize... the existing institution, because they are colonial projects, never took the narrative of the local people so the voice of the people are not the institution. So there are two realities. One that is recognized by superstructures such as the international institution and then the ruling elite born in Africa. They understand that these are colonial projects. The local people understand that these are colonial project. (group session, April 29, 2019)

The colonial project is not new to some participants. Some have lived it for generations. In the following, I share how neocolonialism manifests in contemporary power dynamics within refugee contexts as shared by participants. Themes that arose all stratify spaces into power differentials, subjugating those without under a veil of oppression. These themes include *toxic dependency*, a term coined by Mvuye, in refugee camp settings; barriers to and in higher education; the exclusionary nature of language; and finally some implications on one's sense of self.

### ***Toxic dependency in refugee camp contexts***

I begin with examples placed in a more traditional setting of Western imperial actors in the physical location of a refugee camp in East Africa. Mvuye explicitly names the persistence of neocolonialism in refugee contexts. From his multiple experiences and intersectionalities—as a trained psychologist assisting international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) in camp contexts, as a scholar, as a former camp resident, among others—he reflects on the “long-term background from slavery to colonialism and neocolonialism” and the persistent underlying system and expectations the West has “of

people from Africa and maybe other areas that's been colonized.” There is an assumption that “Africans do not understand how to support themselves... they don't know how... [for]... if the Africans knew how to support themselves, if they had resources, if they knew the skills to support themselves, things could not be this way” (interview, February 11, 2019). The colonizer or imperial actor thus assumes a role of “helping.” Through a postcolonial lens, Hyndman (2000) looks at “power relations in Kenyan refugee camps... linking the liberal, humanitarian present with the colonial civilizing missions of the past. By placing current humanitarian operations within this framework, [she] elucidate[s] their links with colonial and neocolonial relations” (p. 118).

In our conversations, Mvuye shares multiple examples of the related power dynamics within refugee camp settings where donors and service providers hold power. In this context, refugees are beneficiaries. The providers make the decisions and the recipients receive whatever is provided, without consultation. He shares his experience of programs being delivered based on program models from other settings. Their assumed *objectiveness* excludes any need or effort to understand community cultures or local ways of being. Programs are then deemed successful given metrics that do not reflect community ways of being even as they produce harm to the community. In one such example, Mvuye shares about an INGO that brought a training on trauma healing to refugees in post-genocide Rwanda. The project entailed bringing participants to the training for a week-long period. Participants were already “struggling to afford the basic needs and now you tell them, fathers and mothers go together and spend an entire week sitting” for a training. From the perspective of the project provider, this was their job. However, for the participants, it meant that in the time they were in the training, they

were not working to try to afford their basic needs. The time spent elsewhere left them in a worse situation, ultimately adding even more stress. If the community were consulted and asked how they could be supported, Mvuye states that things could have been more helpful and productive. If consideration were given to the local culture, one would have seen that this particular community heals better when they work together (see Chapter 5). “For instance, in my culture, people could go and dig land together, build or do kinds of cooperatives [inaudible] together.” A communal and collective way could have not only addressed the topic of stress and trauma healing, there could also have been opportunity to do so in a way that also contributed to the basic needs of the community, a key contributing factor to stress (interview, February 11, 2019).

In another example, Mvuye shares about an organization that decided to distribute money to refugees, supposedly in an effort to give refugees agency to choose what food to purchase. He says that for 15 years, “you are giving us corn... then the next day you say okay, we're going to give you money. Then you give the refugees eight dollars, eight, not ten,” an insufficient amount over the period allotted to allow for people to purchase enough food to survive. Yet, the project is deemed a success by the organization because refugees can now theoretically “buy the food they want.” The one-sided decision-making process illustrates power dynamics rooted in colonial mindsets.

And yet, given the historical and ongoing currents of power and such manifestations, Mvuye highlights the duality of community responses—simultaneously feeling insulted and silenced. He says, “because of the power dynamics, it doesn't allow the truth to lead the process, processes are led by assumptions on both sides.” He further shares about the painful acceptance of support even when one knows that support will not

“make any difference in their lives.” Given the state of desperation, there is fear that if you turn away support this time, you may not receive it next time when you really need it. Since input is not sought nor welcome, and the amount of aid inconsistent or unpredictable, one can only show gratitude and receive what is given when it is given, leading to and reinforcing a dynamic of subordination.

The inconsistency and unpredictability of aid is coupled with the void in knowing who is providing that aid. Refugee life is full of uncertainties and not knowing contributes to fear. Mvuye talks about compliance and being “constantly threatened that if you criticize, if you do not appreciate” then it may not be available in the future when you need it. There is no shortage of need so if one complains, donors can just pivot the donations to someone else who doesn’t complain. In another example, he shares the following:

You are there and the food was supposed to come by January 10 and now we are January 15. We do not know who to give us the right answer, there are only rumors. We never know. We never know. It may come the next day, the following day or a month or never. We don’t know. It’s always like, hey, food may be reduced the next month, but who is reducing that food? We are not in a position of understanding what’s constituting our very fundamental lives. We are depending on strangers and when you're depending on strangers, you don't know when they're going to disappear forever or if when you need them, you will find them. (interview, February 11, 2019)

The inability to know or predict where, from whom, or even when basic needs may appear creates what Mvuye refers to as a *toxic dependency*. It appears that the

mechanisms leading to and resulting in dependency are so entrenched that those without power are simply unable to disrupt the cycle. He says, the power dynamics are such that “there is no authenticity from that side of those who are being helped” (interview, February 11, 2019). What Mvuye shares highlights the internalization of forms of historical domination, in line with Bourdieu’s (Maton, 2008; Reay, 2004) concept of *habitus*, or Fanon’s (1986) concept of the internalization of colonization, wherein unequal power dynamics are accepted as fact and perpetuated by dominant and marginalized groups.

Abhyas, whose sisters were born in a refugee camp in Uganda but don’t have the same privileges as Ugandan citizens, talks about the need for new and better strategies to address the refugee crisis. He points to the challenges and slow pace of UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency. He understands the many complexities and says, “it bugs me more than ever because you know the solution. You grew up in community, you see the problem but you just lack resources to advocate for that change.” It’s heartbreaking, he says and also angering. Power is withheld in many ways. Access, or lack thereof, to capital is one such strategy, as seen above. Even far removed from direct toxic dependency on humanitarian assistance, and tooled with the skills and knowledge to make change, Abhyas is still stuck absent of power to make that change given his lack of resources (group session, January 28, 2019).

### ***Neocolonialism in the academy***

Historically, influences of colonizing powers in education took place in educational institutions located in colonized states. I posit for consideration that perhaps within a transnational context wherein formerly colonized bodies physically partake in



education in the colonizer's state, that the colonial dynamics also exist within the walls of the institution and thus continue there as well. I look specifically within the United States given the placement of this study, and the manifestation of access, belonging, and power dynamics in educational institutions. This will not be a comprehensive picture of how a colonial project may exist in the academy but rather a sharing of themes that arose in this study.

In the opening section, I presented participant experiences of not only the challenges of accessing financial resources but *pathways to access* as well. While all participants have been successful in accessing higher education, several participants talked about the challenges of even conceiving of accessing a spot within a higher education institution and the barriers they faced.

Maya who at the time of our interview was in the process of applying to graduate school (and has since been accepted to three prestigious programs in the United States), shares feeling as though she does not merit a spot, or at least that others might deserve it more. When I ask her why, she shares many reasons such as others work hard and have skills, others are highly educated and have strong communication skills. She says, "I don't have that English." She lacks confidence in her language, she says. She is very passionate about her future studies yet she downplays her work experience working in the area of her future studies. Maya suggests that the merit of her application would be boiled down to a plea "just because I'm a refugee" and that she would be "stealing a position" from another applicant (interview, February 15, 2019).

Listening to Maya, I recognize my own sadness grow. I have known her for a number of years and have seen her skills, talents and contributions in numerous ways—as

a youth leader, an undergraduate student supporting herself after her family moved across the country just a handful of years after they moved to the United States, as a college graduate, as a non-profit employee, as a performer, as a public speaker, as a recipient of a mayoral award, and so much more.

This conversation highlights an assumed set of limited characteristics that merit a place in graduate schools, characteristics that point to Western ways of knowing and being—a certain way of communicating, a certain dialect of English, a certain way confidence is displayed. Other ways of knowing, rooted in different cultures and contexts are silenced and delegitimized by the prevalence of the Western colonial mindset. Later in our interview, Maya returns back to the topic of graduate school, saying

It's set up in a way like they don't know who I am. They see my grades and stuff like that... [but a person is] more than their grades... education is very important because it gives you a different perspective. It makes a bigger understanding and usually it's good that you have that understanding and then you can step forward with it. But if you can't attend then what are you going to do? (interview, February 15, 2019)

She then follows up by returning to her original framing i.e. “It's kind of my fault too like, I could have done better in school, but I didn't. So I cannot keep blaming the system either.” I note again here that Maya had only been in the United States for a few years when she began university. Her family moved to the East coast around this time so she supported herself through working multiple jobs while also going to school. While she is hard on herself about her grades, here, I am reminded of the larger weight of the hustle many are faced with. As Maya points out, there is a dehumanizing effect to feeling

assessed for one's merit based primarily on one's grades. The cost to her was that she did not feel seen, as well as feeling a sense of exclusion.

In addition to the challenges of access, which several other participants mentioned as well, a number of participants spoke about not feeling understood, accepted, or that they belonged once in the university setting. Katy shares of several situations where she felt reduced to a single narrative of a refugee story. In this case, her university was writing a profile piece on her and approached her with a seemingly pre-identified story of what was to be written. Reflecting on these situations, Katy says, "I didn't feel valid" and how it was challenging for her to articulate her stories and "explain things the way [the interviewer/writer] wanted." She shares how it felt both dehumanizing and reductive. In one particular story, she was represented as coming from a community of poverty (which she doesn't self-identify with) and as such, "wanted to give back to that community." The implication thus was that she only does the things she does because of her origins in poverty whereas "if a white person did something like that, let's say, who was in poverty, it wouldn't be like oh he's helping his community in poverty, it would be like, oh, this person is a philanthropist." She makes a really good point.

Katy also talks about how it was difficult finding a community in college. "I always felt like I didn't belong here nor there." To some, she wasn't American enough, to others, she was too political. In the classroom, she didn't feel that her views or contributions were welcome or her points understood in class. She mentions "many different types of hurdles, [including] not being received well in a classroom." She speaks specifically about her efforts to challenge "simple and one-sided narratives" and that not

being received. The following is a long quote worthwhile sharing given the multiple experiences and reflections that Katy shares. She says,

It's kind of like the burden, we called it the burden of race where you're not meant to educate people like it's not really my job to be in a classroom to educate people, but in a sense it's kind of just like that's why there is diversity in school. So white people can come, study and learn about other people's cultures, but then there comes a point where some people are not open to learning everything. It almost feels like there were times where the education system almost feels like I'm not here for me. I'm here so other people could look at me and be like, wow... I think that's also part of what the article made me feel again. Was I just that [to the university] so they could say they had a refugee, like, a former refugee or an immigrant? When was my dialogue, when was my narrative, when was I actually valued as a person, valued for my opinions, when were my opinions and experiences taken seriously? (interview, January 31, 2019)

Katy shares some troubling experiences unfortunately, not uncommon or unique to her experiences or her institution. Janya also speaks to similar themes. As she reflects upon her experience in graduate school, she says,

I don't feel like I belonged. I don't think I have community here. I have friends I talk to but I don't talk to them about everything... as soon as I say I'm a refugee, like I grew up in the camp... they're like, wow, they see you differently.  
(interview, April 26, 2019)

Janya does not want to be treated differently. She is aware of the many others who are “like her” and considers herself fortunate. She thinks back to her past and wonders if

being a former refugee has something to do with her feeling like she doesn't belong. She points to her experience in high school when people would say "I'm from here and I'm from here." She says there is no country she can point to and say she's from there.

I was born in Nepal, but I'm not Nepali... my parents always push me [to say] I'm from Bhutan... I don't feel Nepali because we never got accepted by Nepal. I don't feel like I'm American, but then it's like every place I go I don't feel like there's a sense of community... I'm still trying to figure out what community is.  
(interview, April 26, 2019)

The feeling of not belonging brings Sassen's (2014) work on expulsions to the fore (see *Global capitalism: locked out* section).

A couple of years after graduating from a masters program, Samuel looks back and states appreciation for his experiences. However, the patterns and dynamics in his story resonate with those in Katy and Janya's stories. Looking back, he says, "I really struggled. I really struggled a lot. I mean I'm over it now. But it's also part of the story." He likes to keep his focus on the bigger picture and his efforts advocating for refugees. But when asked, he shares about some difficulty he faced during his graduate program, feeling misunderstood by his peers and not feeling supported.

It's important to recognize the multiple and intersectional identities of all participants. It would not be fair or do justice to point to one identity and place reason for an event just on that. It is worthwhile, however, to ponder, if participants did not have refugee backgrounds, would they have been made to feel the lack of acceptance, misunderstanding, tokenism and at times, awe as they did at points in their post-secondary journey. This section illustrates that within the academy, there are multiple

tiers in the context of feeling accepted, belonging, and being heard. Not dissimilar to a neocolonial way of being, the above participants were clear that at moments during their journey, they did not feel like they were treated as equal member in the academy.

***“Language is power”: The exclusionary and subjugating nature of language***

For all participants, English is their second, third, fourth or perhaps additional language. While a few participants were exposed to the English language prior to moving to the United States, most were not. Yet all have been able to acquire enough of the language to be able to navigate college-level courses in English.

Most of the participants migrated to the United States at high-school age or older. As such, learning English was a significant challenge. Janya says, “English is not my first language and it's so hard.” When I ask Sean about barriers, the first thing he points to is language. He says, “This is a huge barrier... a huge challenge because language is a power. if you don't have the power, then how would it be possible to achieve your goal?”

Some participants shared how their experiences around language made them to feel *less than* and, in some cases, were viewed as a means for stratification. Maya shares how her self-perceived challenges communicating in English make her feel “not capable enough,” “not good enough” or undeserving. Amina speaks of the challenges of communicating through writing when she transitioned into community college.

Outside of the academy, Denpo speaks about similar challenges at work. He says, “communication (language) barriers is real.” He speaks about the “proper” way to speak “in a white collar community” (versus slang) and the insecurity that creates in him. He identifies it as code switching or speaking in a different dialect. He says, he feels like he’s still learning and “brushing up on my language and my business dialect.” He notes the

difference, however, between himself and his American-born colleagues who have “been doing this longer than I have.”

Denpo’s comments imply that the use of different dialects affect how one is seen. He also talks about the different ways “the system” sees people. He also points to how the “system is created to look at me differently versus how they would look at [my colleagues]. And I think that’s a challenge on its own, right. There’s that realistic barrier that people don’t really see but I see it because as a person of color, you can tell when people look at you differently” (interview, May 1, 2019). Inside the organization, he feels seen for himself by his colleagues and peers. Outside the organization, he is seen as a refugee and a poster child. He has learned and chosen to use that saying, “my story will sell a lot more than the average American kid... I put myself in a position because ultimately, my goal is to help out the kids that I’m working with.” So when he meets with funders, he will introduce himself with his full given Burmese name and tell them that he lived in a refugee camp, has now been a part of the organization for a number of years, is a college graduate and a full-time employee. He chooses to communicate the story of him that he thinks will compel funders in service to help the kids he works with. Yet at a higher level, he’s aware that when funders or others look at the organization, “they see a nonprofit organization that is mainly for refugees and kids of color and the only people that’s running it are white people.” There, too there is stratification.

### ***Neoliberalism and the dominance of the hyper-individual***

Neoliberalism has been engrained into our social fabric and collective common sense. It is perpetuated, reproduced, and legitimized through education (Giroux, 2004). It has become the new *social imaginary* (Lipman, 2011, p. 6). Since the 1980s, we’ve seen

a proliferation of neoliberal “discourses and ideologies that promote individual self-interest, unrestricted flows of capital, deep reductions in the cost of labor, and sharp retrenchment of the public sphere” (Lipman, 2011, p. 6). The market, functioning within a state of continuous competition serves as a significant driver.

The dominance and individualistic way of being that promotes self interest stands in stark contrast with a collective way of knowing and being as detailed in Chapter 5. I posit that the dominance of neoliberalism as the assumed imaginary both shadows and silences CoLS’ collective way of being—shadows because the hyper-individual mindset may prevent even seeing the existence of collective ways, and silences it in an attempt to wash away any tensions that may arise. As alluded to at the beginning of this chapter, situating a collective way of being in today’s dominant individualistic society also makes it tremendously difficult for those who live the former to navigate local spaces. Painfully, this can also negate or invalidate participants given their identity as collective beings, driving them further away from accessing systems.

As previous sections in this chapter argue, “unrestricted flows of capital” is restricted to the privilege of a few. Previous sections have detailed how CoLS have been locked out from access. While market competition assumes a level playing field, such an assumption negates the notion of any structural inequality or “disparities in income, wealth, employment, access to higher education, health, life span, academic achievement, and other aspects of social life and well-being.” (Lipman, 201, p. 12) It also assumes that there will be winners and many losers as well assumes that we live in a *postracial, colorblind* society. As detailed throughout this chapter, CoLS face exorbitant additional responsibilities that negate any perception of a level playing field and they bump into



structural inequalities continuously. Yet again, the idea of the collective is contrasted. For some, the collective was born from living in collective struggle and collective survival. This meant that there was no division between members of a community. They are one. As such, the idea of winners and losers also stands in stark contrast to a collective mindset that works towards collective uplift of all.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

The impenetrable barrier and forces that perpetuate exclusion are overwhelming, perhaps even debilitating at times. Yet participants persist. They keep trudging on. Powered by motivation from and duty to communities, they keep moving. Tooled with education, fueled by community, they continue to serve. The community still sees hope in them, perhaps they do in themselves. Sometimes it is difficult being the first and only one, however. The next chapter will explore what might happen by bringing multiple and diverse “first and only ones” who share in the collective mindset together.

## CHAPTER 7. RAYS OF HOPE TO COLLECTIVE HOPE: CREATING SPACE FOR COLLECTIVE HOPE AND HEROES

At the end of Chapter 6, I presented a discussion within the group around participants' perceptions of being held up as heroes within their communities. Lifted up so they may travel thousands of miles away in order to pursue an education and ultimately help the community from afar. Similar to the values of the collective struggle participants grew up with, this extends that reach transnationally. Even within diaspora, participants look back to serve their roots. As Abhyas shares in group (group sessions, April 22, 2019 & April 29, 2019), there is *always* a sense of responsibility and recognition of the common, collective need. This time, however, they are alone in a new place without the immediate support of the community within which they grew up. Without the collective to share in the struggle, they now shoulder responsibilities of extending communal support from afar whilst simultaneously navigating a new reality within a hyper-individualistic society alone.

In this new society, however, there are *droplets of hope*, a term coined by group participants. Droplets come in the form of mentors or other helpers in the community. They provide hope and guidance, love and support and help participants navigate their new realities. There is progress, however, the impenetrable barrier (Chapter 6) remains and they are still unable to penetrate that barrier, in particular as it relates to their desires for community uplift. As instrumental and valued as these droplets are, analysis of data in aggregate suggest they are individual droplets in the midst of a powerful system made up of the tri-forces of neocolonialism, global capitalism and neoliberalism (see Chapter 6). In this chapter, I share about the various ways droplets present themselves and the role

they play/ed in the lives of participants. I pull from across interview and group data given the prevalence of this across most participants.

I then explore the limitations of these droplets with the suggestion that this may be because of their presence within an individual versus a collective frame. I then share about the discussion in group (and some interviews) about the value of a new collective among participants, and close with examples of how the beginnings of such a formation took place within the group sessions. Through this, I respond to my last research question—*What are some unique benefits/outcomes/revelations/experiences that arise from the formation of a CoLS collective as modeled as part of this research study?*

### **Rays of Hope: Droplets**

#### ***The feeling of luck and gratitude in having a mentor***

A common reference made by participants throughout the interviews was that of a person who helped them along their journey, someone without whom they would not be where they are today. These people were referenced as mentor, tutor, sponsor, coach, counselor (hereinafter referred to generally as mentors) and are what group participants separately referred to as *droplets* or *rays of hope*. What is particularly interesting in these references is that within the context of the individual relationships, they demonstrate welcome and compassion, respect and humanity, and in some cases, in the words of a few participants, the formation of family. In many cases, these relationships were instrumental in guiding, assisting and/or sometimes financially supporting participants in their journeys. In *Learning a New Land*, Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, and Todorova (2008) contribute seminal research on newcomers in the U.S. The authors talk about

relationships with a caring adult as a tremendously important part of newcomer educational success.

There were a variety of pathways through which participants were first connected to mentors—such as through a non-profit organization, a school teacher or counselor—however, these relationships were not ubiquitously available. Almara for example shares not having anyone she could go to for support or guidance, and the challenges of needing to navigate and shoulder everything alone (interview, January 28, 2019).

That said, when they have been available and accessible, mentors have served instrumental function. Following are a few examples. Sean shares how he started taking community college classes while still in high school and has since enrolled in multiple post-secondary institutions, sometimes simultaneously, in order to take more units than any one college will allow individually. Navigating college system can be challenging, especially for someone relatively new to the country, culture and language, as Sean was soon before he began this practice. When I ask Sean how he even learned about these as options, he shares about a counselor at his former high school<sup>16</sup> who suggested that Sean take community college classes given his strong academic performance, potential and capacity; and later connected him to another mentor who helped him into and through college. Also beginning in high school, Amina sought out help in one of her sports coaches given her struggles with formal written English. Her coach reviewed her essays both helping her to improve and eventually obtain good grades. Katy speaks of mentors through her university—an academic mentor as well as another mentor who shared similar experiences navigating higher education and community. These examples

---

<sup>16</sup> Sean attended an international high school revered for its holistic approach and community programs.

illustrate that pathways do exist within institutions. However, as mentioned, they are not ubiquitous and sometimes may even be happenstance, even within the same university. (interviews, April 24, 2019; March 8, 2019; January 31, 2019, respectively).

Several participants mentioned mentors or tutors they were connected to through local organizations and how those relationships evolved into familial relationships. Maya's mother was connected with a tutor through a local organization soon after their family moved to the United States. Maya says "even though she wasn't my tutor, without her I wouldn't be where I'm at right now" (interview, February 15, 2019). She continues sharing about her appreciation for her mother's tutor or her mentor as someone from a different background yet "so welcoming." She shares how her mentor hired a tutor to help her with her SAT studies when she was applying for college. When her family moved to the East Coast when Maya was in her freshman year at university, her mentor took her in for a semester. She was able to afford college through a mixture of financial aid, her mentor helping her with rent, and a job to help pay for food and other essentials. They are still very close.

Janya shares meeting her tutor through the same organization as the one Maya's mother was connected to her tutor. Janya says that her tutor "really helped me understand the value of education" (interview, April 26, 2019). While they were connected in high school, Janya, now a graduate student also has an ongoing relationship with her mentor saying, "we talk every day. I text with her when I have a question and she helps because I need help. She calls me and whenever she has time, she visits my family. It's like family now." She, too states gratitude for everyone she has met on her journey and how she wouldn't be where she is now without them.

Abhyas also talks about the formation of family soon after his family arrived in the United States. He shares about the challenge of finding a home for his large family of seven and being connected to a local organization. He says, “we didn't have any place to go and we were in between places and we eventually met [my mentor] and she became one of my best friends and my mom, I consider her a mom” (group session, April 22, 2019) Abhyas shares how his mentor was supportive throughout his education and how he considers himself “really, really lucky to meet family members in the U.S. here.” The word lucky comes up again later when he says, “throughout my immigration story, I would say, I'm very lucky to have met a lot of good people who care, who took proactive role... steer me forward to pursue that dream I have.... those gesture of kindness reinforces the bigger picture.” He mentions how by becoming a part of one local organization, he met the author; and how later, an internship in a law organization fostered another positive friendship. He says these experiences “inspire me to even pursue my call even more and to motivate me to even to farther” (group session, April 22, 2019).

In the examples above, mentors serve a role in boosting or helping participants along their journey, and in some cases becoming significant members of participants' family circles. While Suárez-Orozco et al. (2008) note no formal organization or path through which immigrant youth were able to find such supports, some of the participants in this study were connected to mentors through their school or a local non-profit organization. And yet, for various reasons, this was not ubiquitous. As mentioned, participants expressed deep appreciation for the mentors in their lives as well as the

sentiment of feeling lucky. In fact, Maya, with agreement from others, says that the droplets “totally depends on the people you know and your luck.”

### ***Helpful droplets but need rain***

The impact of mentors in the lives of participants is significant. All participants who mentioned having mentors also mentioned progressing further in their own unique ways in their lives specifically due to the help of their mentors. However, when explored more deeply in group, participants mentioned the continuance of an impenetrable barrier such that even with the significant boost with mentors, it was unfortunately not enough to penetrate the larger system outlined at the beginning.

We explored why this might be in group. Group participants spoke about mentors as droplets coming down from the impenetrable barrier above. They originate from the system above and choose to reach down to support and pull participants up. In addition to the practical help they provide, they are also symbols of hope, or as participants coined, *rays of hope*, depicted in Figure 12 by yellow arrows reaching down. Yet, in order to grow and fully access the systems above, they need more than droplets. They need rain and they need openings in the barrier above.

Given these limitations, and as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, CoLS remain in a void largely alone in this dark space, underneath the systemic barriers. They are lifted up by their communities simultaneously trying to lift their communities, and further helped and pulled forward by mentors but remain stuck in transition. “The system is too solid for you” and the transition period “can be forever” (group session, April 29, 2019). In group, Mvuye further shares how droplets come down from the system giving a sense of hope. “You are a little ahead of the dryer areas around you but you’re not quite

there yet.” He says that if you lose your connections with those who are helping to sustain you in the transition, “you will fall down.” Hence, the mentor connections are significant, however, the inference is that there is no safety net below should one fall. Up until this point, the interchange is very charged. There is a lot of agreement and sometimes laughter throughout. I note the following in my jottings, “the laughter throughout feels like a release... it's not funny, there's like pain in the agreement and speaking aloud of this reality. At one point, I notice that one of the participants in particular seems really heavy hearted.” It's at this point that a heaviness drapes the conversation in the room. The conversation and inquiry seems complete. As I facilitate the discussion, I take a deep breath and acknowledge the heaviness of the situation.

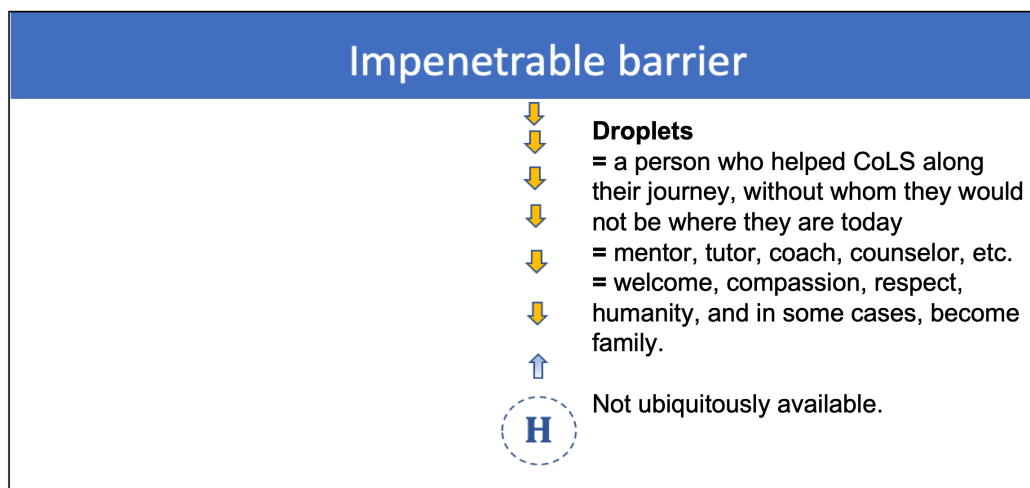


Figure 12. Droplets and rays of hope.

***Droplets land on individuals and don't see the collective***

It is after many rounds of sitting with data and the words of participants, that the fine lines between conversations become clear. There was always a thread of the collective. However, the presence of it, even if indirect becomes almost ubiquitous. After all, it is about a collective way of knowing and being. In this case, the data suggest that a



reason for the limitations of droplets is that it is limited to the individual droplet and recipient. That is, droplets recognize the individual. Sometimes the recognition begins because they know the individual. At times, they might even know something about the community. Those who see beyond the individual are those that may also see the mission the individual represents. However, as a couple of the participants say, perhaps part of why the wall is “too strong to break” is because of the lack of understanding of why CoLS are in the transition zone and what they are trying to accomplish. CoLS are there for *community*. It’s not about them pursuing their own dreams or aspirations. It’s beyond that. It’s about the collective community. In Chapter 5 and 6, I referenced the dominance of neoliberalism and the focus on the hyper-individual and suggested that given this hyper-focus, the collective may not be seen nor even considered as a possibility. I suggest that a neoliberal hegemony permeates even these spaces, itself causing a barrier to understanding and therefore acknowledgement.

This is not to negate the significance of mentors. They matter. Rays of hope matter. They are still hope. Yet they shine on those that happen to be within visible reach missing those who may be just as worthy or just as desirous but unseen in shadows. Rays also shine down on the individual or smaller units of collectives such as a family. In this case, they shine on CoLS. However, given that the core of CoLS is rooted in collective beyond self and beyond family and for larger community health and well being, while a model of individual droplets providing rays of hope to individual CoLS is deeply appreciated and helpful, it is still limited and partial as it relates to CoLS desires to serve communities. As such, CoLS are still left navigating a complex system largely alone.

The live verbal and drawn representation of Figure 12 brought what felt like both a sense of relief and lifting of weight by the mere process of having expressed and articulated such a burden. The naming of the problem strengthened the cohesive resonance and tie to each other in the room. For once named, all felt a deep connectedness to this overwhelming problem and perhaps each other—another shared experience and understanding was articulated. Yet sitting back immediately after to look at the drawing and representation of this larger issue simultaneously brought an overwhelming flood of somberness into the room.

Chapter 6 further explores systemic barriers and why it is so incredibly difficult for CoLS to break through those barriers. I will not repeat those here. Rather, in the next section, I turn to roles that group can uniquely play to support each other in CoLS journeys, given this discussion and in order to move closer to their desires.

### **Building on Collective Roots: Collective Hope & Heroes**

#### ***Significance***

The design of this study was informed by a hypothesis that there would be value in forming a collective given the author's past experiences working and being in community with CoLS. This led to the inclusion of group sessions as part of the research methodology to supplement, compare and potentially validate data from individual interviews. What became immediately apparent in the process of group sessions was a need and desire as well as the possibility of a community forming. Here was a unique space of those with different contexts and backgrounds but common/similar life experiences—all pursuing higher education/graduate school (Chapter 4), all committed to helping lift their communities (Chapter 5), all struggling with an impenetrable barrier and

the challenge of balancing survival simultaneously (Chapter 6). I provide details and evidence of community forming in the next section. I precede this below, however, with the significance of such a collective forming.

As the previous section states, by the time we had reached the third session, there was deep resonance within the group in both the rapidity and depth of the interactions. Even the rate at which participants were referring to others' comments and building upon them increased in this discussion. However, as also mentioned, it climaxed into a somber pause given the weight and heaviness of the unbreakable wall. I investigate further, however, shifting the conversation towards what could be done given these barriers.

I start asking questions about possibilities. Given the droplet analogy, I ask, if there are enough droplets [while drawing them on the poster paper], might that be sufficient to break through the system? Mvuye responds, "Enough for you at least to stay where you are" (group session, April 29, 2019). The room is filled with laughter. Maya follows up saying that "especially in America, if we're talking about financial resources there isn't a lack of it, it just depends on, who you know and navigating where it is to connect with it." So I ask who it is they feel they need to know. Pointing to others like them who have also received degrees, Abhyas says, "you have this degree, but you lack the means to exercise that education. So in a way, you need those people in those fields to advance or to integrate into the system that has been pushing you down." That is, it's not enough to just have a higher education degree, networks are needed to access the system. Perhaps I can call this vertical networks that connect droplets to CoLS and vicer versa. Maya adds that it's "very important [to have a] network of people who are in the transition, for instance, I feel like this is a great platform for us to connect and see like

yes, we come from different parts of the world, but there are people still in that system. We're not the only one. And I think that network is, especially when you're feeling hopelessness, I think it helps to see there are other people struggling and we are all trying our best. And all we can do is try.” Here, Maya introduces horizontal networks among and with other CoLS. This is an interesting set of statements. Connections to those in the system are necessary and as Maya points out, networking with others also in transition is necessary—representing both vertical as well as horizontal representations of relationships. It strikes me that the horizontal relationship is also that reflective of prior representations of collective struggle (see Chapter 5).

I return to the poster paper with Figure 12 drawn and ask while drawing, *what if we did this?* At this point, I add additional Hs (representing multiple heroes) being lifted up by different communities alongside each other in the space of transition. What then? (see Figure 13).

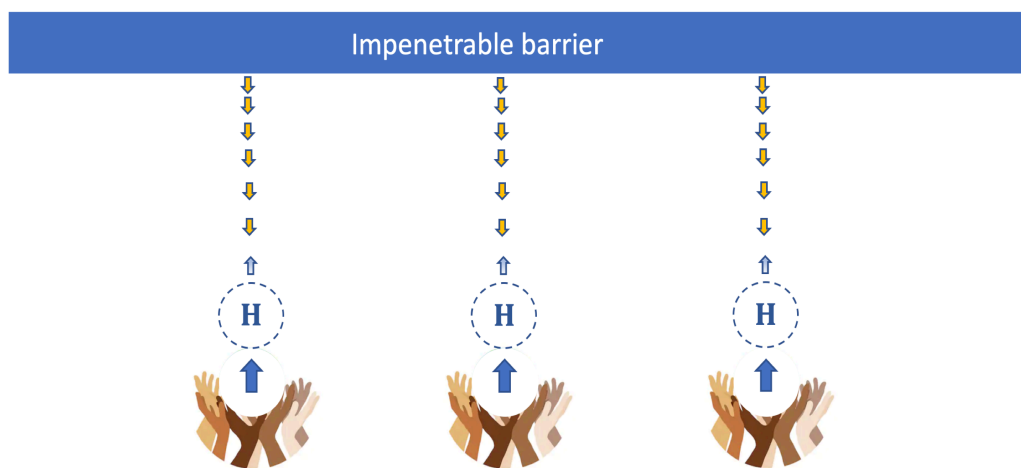


Figure 13. Multiple heroes being lifted up by different communities.

Abhyas says that by connecting all the *Hs* together, “you create another layer of hope because now, you're not alone. Now you are with similar people who are in the same position and you are able to connect these people to meet in a very constructive

way” (group session, April 29, 2019). He says that *Hs* would “have like minded aspirations” because the people that lift them all come from the same place. Where before CoLS felt alone, there is now recognition of others like them and hope for new community to form. Abhyas then makes a comparison back to the collective struggle in refugee camp settings. He says that in those settings,

you don't depend on UN rations for a month because it's 10 kg but what you depend on is your neighbors or the next person of whom you know. You network what you have, you trade with what you have or you borrow what you don't have from someone. So in that way, you are creating a network of these people to actually network themselves because each of them knows someone who knows somebody. So in a sense, you are now creating a way to beat the system, to break the ice. Not just by one person but with a group. (group session, April 29, 2019)

There is strong agreement by Maya. She continues saying, it's very important to remember the power of people and the power of hope. Yes, there is big power that is almost unbreakable... [however] most of the time in history, its the people coming together. I think it creates that network. Like there's a very thin layer of that community... that represents the power of hope. Like they break the barrier and something happens. So I think it's just the hope and the aspirations that keeps people going in that layer. Cuz you know, if you go back, it's worse. But there [referring back to the image], it can be something like, it's like a direction. You know like, you're not there yet but the community makes you feel like you're [heading] in that direction. (group session, April 29, 2019).

The image of an additional layer resonates as something that provides the fuel to move forward and “fuel[s] that power of hope” (group, April 29, 2019). Further, it would come from the same category or layer of community, hence, it would be seen as empowerment. Again, there is explicit mention of the collective struggle, juxtaposed to the individual struggle. Maya points out that the people in that collective are also those who create a safety net to lift you up if you fall. As described in depth in Chapter 5, it’s not a quid pro quo but a collective survival and support. Maya says, “so that we can support each other so that we can break the system, so we can create a path for ourselves and future generations.”

As Mvuye points out, connecting the *Hs* creates a system onto itself. And by making that system, the *Hs* now *belong* along with others in the system. Being a part of the same system also means that there are shared struggles as well as opportunities as the system intends to bring support back to the family that supports the *Hs*. It is also a source of knowledge sharing that can ultimately help others.

In Figure 14, *Hs* no longer float in isolation but rather are now connected and collectively form an additional layer from which to work collectively. There are now bigger arrows emanating out of this new layer. Dotted lines around the *Hs* and the formerly impenetrable barrier represent open systems, now accessible. Here, counter-hegemonic forces take form and carve new spaces within the dominant order, suggesting the possibilities of a new social order.

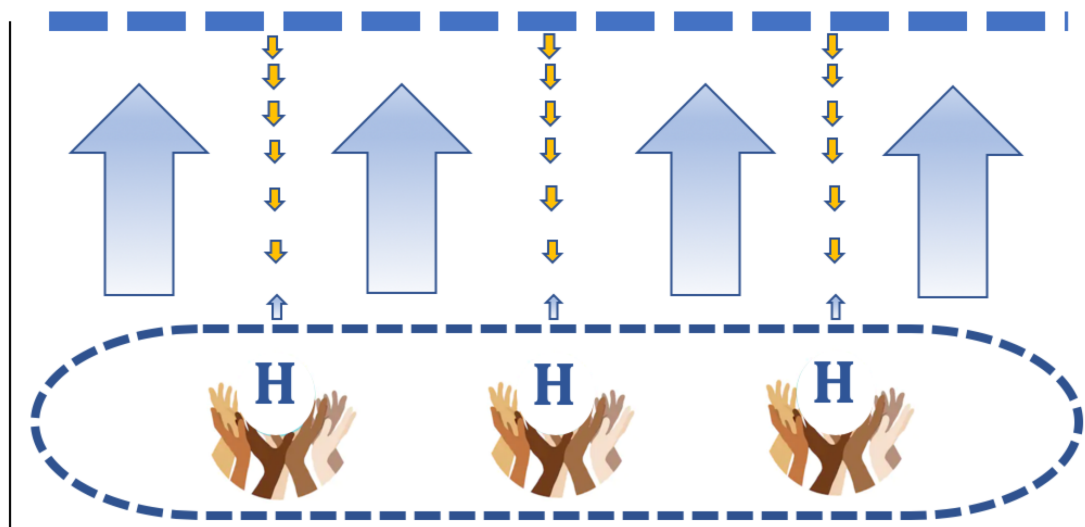


Figure 14. Collective hope.

What becomes really clear is that the values of collective struggle participants are speaking of in this context are the same values they have known their whole lives. The ones that continue to motivate them to work towards collective uplift. Such a community of *Hs* would be tapping into the deep ways of being that have fueled and guided CoLS their whole lives yet at a different level, one beyond survival and one towards collective well-being. Thus, it wouldn't be about learning a new way, nor would it be about trying to make sense of a collective way of being in a hyper-individualistic society, but rather, it would be building upon the deeply rooted and inherent strengths of the collective, coupled with new knowledge and education to together fuel each other and move forward for the *greater* collective good. The idea is to break through and bridge gaps for communities to reach the system above. Mvuye adds:

the system needs these people, needs these *Hs* because it is these *Hs* who are doing work that the system cannot do for some reasons... if these *Hs* are connected, they have power to influence the system that is feeding

them compared to when it is just an individual trying to face a system. But also sharing resources, they're sharing resources.... So there is again shared struggles that enhance the knowledge of what is needed to get into the system or at least get more drops. Not to an individual, but to move more individuals and more drops. (group session, April 29, 2019)

*A unique space of belonging, support, inspiration, and practice*

This is a unique space for participants. Whereas a school community might be focused on academics or may have a community of students with greater life privileges, the sense of belonging and shared understanding is not the same as it is in this space. In an academic setting, Abhyas reflects that interactions with classmates tend to remain at a more professional level. He says, "I'm not going to ask you what you're struggling with. Even if I asked you, you're not going to open up to me... so you tend to leave those kind of things out" (April 29, 2019). He then references the project he had previously shared about in Uganda, stating that he had been wanting to work on this project since he was in high school. Yet, he says, he wouldn't share about this project with his professional circle as they would not understand the weight of the community or have a shared background to understand in order to even envision the project in their minds. Having a community for this, however, would provide a support system that would help reduce that weight. Mvuye says,

I don't know from where we start but I see that as a system of these leaders... in this situation... now are connected for a purpose. We already have privileges connecting and supporting with whatever resources we can afford... and form a community... especially which strengthen our community... for the purpose of



helping those communities... We are more aware of the problems we are facing and where they're coming from... more than anyone else. So there's so much that this community of *Hs* can do, if they are connected. (group session, April 29, 2019)

Like Abhyas, Mvuye also differentiates this group from his academic environment where he says he is in the system but does not feel like people understand. In that environment, he says it's "a community of privileges. There is a level you cannot go because you feel like it's too far." The sense of hopefulness as well as hopelessness are not things he says he can always bring into those spaces. It's the idea that academics are separated from community and the whole.<sup>17</sup> Further the idea of taking care of self is foreign and uncomfortable to Mvuye, specifically in the idea of creating opportunities from which he benefits. The understanding of community is that it's a collective working together. His ideal situation therefore is to support the community, not self. And perhaps it's through the support of community that self is also supported.

Maya also explores the uniqueness of this group and the importance of finding a balance. She is in the process of applying for graduate school so while not in that space (yet), she says she does have conversations with colleagues about policies. She also speaks about community events through work but them not being a place for sharing stories, ideas and experiences such as in group. Through her performance group, however, they have explored the group's community story as well as learned about experiences from other countries, making the connections as well as learning different perspectives related to forced displacement more broadly.

---

<sup>17</sup> Baja et al. (2017) introduce the notion of socio-politically relevant pedagogy (SPRP) to address situations such as this.

Interviews also revealed the role of support, influence as well as inspiration participants gained from other CoLS in the group. In fact, in my interview with Abhyas, he suggests taking group beyond the scope of my research and build out a monthly conversation that would include a check in with each member. This would help in those moments when people feel as though they don't have help around them. It would also be an opportunity to "see how everybody is progressing whether in terms of education or their career" (interview, April 26, 2019). Perhaps it could include a discussion about a current event such as "new legislation about immigration... just something that is related to our vision of what kind of change we want to see."

*A story of the beginnings of a formation of a new CoLS collective*

In this final section, I attempt to illustrate how community started to grow within group, what it looked like, and how participants responded. While interviews were designed to get to know each individual, group was designed to explore a deeper level of ideas that came up in interviews as well as to cultivate critical dialogue among a smaller set of participants. Research questions were specifically formulated in a way to be open ended in order to be guided by participant responses and their dialogue. Discussions often included a combination of lived experiences intermixed with related intellectual explorations and critical reflections. As Abhyas reflected, "when you're outside of the box, you see a lot more than when you were in there" (group session, April 22, 2019). As the researcher, it was important to make space for all of this so that participants felt that their full selves were welcome. As such, in addition to bringing a new layer of hope, power, fuel, and belonging, group sessions often included ongoing knowledge sharing—not only within the facilitated conversations but also when participants sought out

information for something they were working on outside this study. This included a research project, a community project, or applications for school or a job. Some of these interests were longer term, some more immediate but all contributed to the development of a shared space for learning.

By the time of the first group session, each participant had heard of others in the group or had met in person. All had a solid understanding of why they had been asked to join and each demonstrated a genuine desire to be there. I believe part of that had to do with a desire to contribute to the larger collective as this study aims to do, as well as a sense of shared community with the author. As outlined in my positionality statement (Chapter 3), I had known each participant prior to the beginning of this research study. Each served a role in inspiring and shaping this study. By the time of the first meeting, it felt that there was even some co-ownership in the care of the study. After reviewing the study purpose at the beginning of the first session together, to ensure that we were all aligned, I opened up the floor for any feedback, questions or concerns. Mvuye responds with “as long as I can contribute to your research, on my side, I’m open for that” (group session, January 28, 2019). Abhyas says,

I’m very happy that you guys were able to decide to help Jane to bring our story to [inaudible]. This is not just story about us but... there are so many people at the bottom, their voices can never be known or heard. And I think this kind of project you're doing gives us some sense of hope.... So I want to thank you guys and I want to thank you for coming up with such a wonderful research thesis and I can't wait to read it [all laugh]. (group session, January 28, 2019)

As I reflect back on these words after data completion is complete, I realize that perhaps, the collective had already begun before we even walked into the room that first session.

All group sessions took place in a classroom on a university campus, a convenient location for most but also because this represented a space of shared learning. Because I had multiple different connections with each participant, it was important to find a space that was non-hierarchical. Before each session, I assembled two tables in the middle of the room to form a square, placing four chairs around the table. There was no head of the table. Each session, I brought a hot dinner with tea. Some included a dessert, including one session where I brought a cake in celebration of Maya's acceptance into several graduate programs. In many cultures, food and the assembly around food provides a symbolic place for family and community. This is what I was hoping to channel into the room, but also because participants would be coming directly from class or work. Each session, I prepared food (one time, I purchased food given time limitations) from a different cuisine, keeping in mind participants' food restrictions and preferences, offering openings of discussion beginning with food. Group sessions were full of many dynamics ranging from joy and laughter to heaviness, from extemporaneous or thinking aloud to deep contemplative sharing. We also built in time to pause and sit with ideas in silence. Starting with the second group session, we also opened each session with a moment of silence. I wasn't sure what the response would be to this when I first introduced the idea hence, noted how seriously participants responded, taking time to ground and center themselves in the moment.

To also help bring everyone together, I began the first session with a name activity in which each person would share a) their name and then b) a word that started with the first letter of their name while also representing something about themselves. For example, my name is Jane and I chose the word justice. For the sake of anonymity, I do not share the specific personal stories of the names here. However, what was really interesting and unexpected in this activity was how deeply these stories gave a window into each participant's life experiences. One participant shared how many years ago, a teacher misspelled his name on a form. He wasn't aware of it at the time but when he needed to travel, he learned his name spelling had been changed on his records. He has used that spelling ever since. Another participant's name means *light* in her native language. Another participant shares having multiple names throughout his life. When he was baptized, his local name was not accepted so he was "kind of forced" to select from a range of Christian names which he was not previously familiar. Later in his life as an adult, he adopted another name. He states that the reasons for that were complex but that he "had to obey for some reasons" (group session, January 28, 2019). Names are a vital part of identity and hence, these changes to names—whether forced or accidental—raise questions about power—power to change one's name or change it back.<sup>18</sup> What was designed to be a simple get-to-know-you activity ended up opening up a space for deeper

---

<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, names also came up as a theme among interviewees. In fact, half of the interview participants mentioned a story related to their names. The spelling of Almara's name was changed on her documents. Amina's birth name was later changed given the absence of documentation of her birth during a census taking in the refugee camp where she lived. She shares how her mother left the documentation in their home of origin but still had documentation of Amina's older sister's birth who had died at an early age. In order to clear census, she adopted her sister's documentation records in order to be allowed to stay in the camp. Denpo shared recently adopting and using his full given name versus an abbreviated version and the two corresponding identities that come with those names.

levels of sharing, and to some extent, the beginning of the exploration of the role of power (over names) and hope (light) in the lives of participants.

In addition to these personal interactions, throughout group sessions, participants also sought out very practical information from each other and from myself. Topics ranged from research methodology and practices, editing assistance suggestions and practices for graduate papers, graduate school applications and experiences, fundraising, etc. Participants shared contact information in order to set up other times to meet to continue some of these conversations and offer each other support, which they have continued to do. Participants also shared about community events they were organizing. There were also thematic sharings across intellectual spaces and historical experiences. For example, one participant was working on a research study related to ethnic cleansing in his country of origin, prompting interest from another participant also trying to understand her native place through the lens of ethnic cleansing.

Participant projects and life stories were diverse and unique. As Mvuye points out having refugee experiences within refugee camp settings in Eastern Africa and hence, that may not necessarily mirror other people's experiences. Maya grew up in a refugee camp in Nepal. Abhyas mentioned experiences in camp settings but notably chooses not to share too much about his life before coming to the United States except for in more generalized terms and intellectual reflections. It's critical that these unique spaces be held as they are. Participants also note, however, shared understanding and experiences across these differences and a collective desire to move forward together. As Abhyas reflected, "where we come from the varied background, we need a lot of us" (group session, January 28, 2019). Or as Maya says,

this is the smaller version of the system we were talking about. And in a way, it's important to have the bigger circle but at the same time, the smaller circle is very important because we get to talk about different ideas... I think about how are we going to change this... it's very helpful for me to see... other realities too that's equally important and equally if not even more urgent... I think when we break this barrier, this system and ... hopefully we will be there. We are already creating that network, trust. And it's very important to have people when we break this barrier, to find people who were there when we were struggling so that then we know about each other... We know about your perspective... there's the micro perspective and the macro perspective and I think it's important to [think about it all] from different spaces, different countries, different cultures. So thank you.

(group session, April 29, 2019)

The dialogue and reflections shared in this chapter took place in the context of collective sharing and support based on a growing and deepening appreciation of shared experiences, understanding, and even larger desires of community uplift. Each interaction also contributed to a growing sense of community, reinforcing trust and a sense of belonging.

At the beginning of the first group session, I had brought up the idea of mutuality and reciprocity and the desire to contribute back to the group hence, this was on my mind throughout. At our last group session (session 4), Abhyas suggests continuing group after the study's end. In introducing the idea of continuing meetings, Abhyas states "just having this kind of meeting is somewhat revolutionary because had [Jane] not done this, then I would never know you." Since the end of the fourth and final formal session, the

group has since met on multiple occasions: one for a workshop on fundraising (by request of participants), a second informal meet up at a community event around World Refugee Day, and a third for a more informal dinner at my home. I've also met individually with each participant on several occasions to serve as a sounding board on project ideas, write a recommendation letter, or sit in on a presentation. I'm delighted to also share that participants have also been checking in with each other, sharing knowledge and even collaborating on projects. Of course, with everyone's busy schedule, it can be difficult to schedule times when everyone is available. However, connections were formed throughout this process as well as an opportunity to carve space for the collective.

Since I've known group participants, I've continued to be moved and my thoughts deepened through their shared wisdom. The following statement is just one example. Pointing to the reinforcing nature of group as a practice for bigger community efforts in the future, Abhyas says,

if I want to see peace in South Sudan and I want to see integration, integration rather than disintegration of interethnic communities, I have to be able to exercise that... You have to be able to exercise that role you aspire to have in this broader aspiration. So, if you can conceive this is possible in a small group, it's possible to consider it in a bigger collective group because now you know, you understand how your community works. You understand how to listen to other perspectives. And that gives you that sense of leadership and role of ownership to really push for your aspiration and see it come through. Whether in terms of education, in terms of talking about peace, all of those come from learned value you see around



you. You're being taught by your parents and those lessons can only be productive when its being reinforced by community.

Reflecting on the research question—*What are some unique benefits/outcomes/revelations/experiences that arise from the formation of a CoLS collective as modeled as part of this research study?*—among many outcomes was that of collective hope and healing. Group sessions served as a birth place of a new layer of community, a place where CoLS can be there full selves and a place where CoLS can practice and reinforce values and skills for larger collective aspirations ahead. In the next and final chapter, I share overall reflections and implications of this study.

## CHAPTER 8. REFLECTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

### Researcher Reflections

As I sit and reflect upon this study, as I have numerous times throughout, I am reminded of a few constants. First is CoLS' commitment to community. Second is my desire to also serve community. My fear of getting it wrong was a key motivation for diligence, listening and thoughtful questioning, and continued deep reflection. Sometimes this came at the cost of time when I felt I should have been writing or even reading more literature. Given often segregated disciplines of study, my goal was to learn enough about multiple disciplines that collectively touch upon or inform a more holistic space—such as this research attempts—in order to make non-superficial and meaningful connections. The challenge of course, is time. For some bodies of literature are extremely robust, dense and hold long histories and works. Of course, this comes with the territory of never feeling like I know enough. But I also reflected, as I often have in the past, of the limitations of the uni-disciplinary approach. For this disaggregates the whole. And even with attempts to aggregate the disaggregated parts, there are bound to be gaps.

At these times of second guessing and fear, frustrations with the disaggregated ways of being—even in research and in the academy—there was one practice I had, and only realized part way through my writing, that helped to ground me. Focus on the participants. Focus on the community—theirs, mine and ours collectively and holistically. Listen to their words—both in person and unspoken. Sit with them. Reflect upon them.

The group sessions, or more traditionally, focus groups, added an integral piece to this study. Interviews allowed space for new discovery of participants. Group sessions

did as well, but they also offered opportunity to push conversations further given more time and group dialogue. The two methods reinforced each other. My initial design was to include four to six people in group. I ended up with three. I would not change that for this study given the richness in conversations and depth we were able to go. Yet, while I would not change this for this study, moving forward if I were to replicate this study in a different/like context, I would aim for a slightly larger group (but not too large).

As earlier chapters show, the collective way of being arose as a deep and pervasive theme throughout this study. There were moments when I thought I understood this only to later discover that in fact, it went deeper than I realized. I found this extremely interesting given my own struggles navigating sometimes conflated, sometimes contradicting spaces of collective and individual ways of being growing up. It's something I have explicitly pondered upon in the past so I assumed I understood this. In fact, I didn't. Certainly not to the level to which participants spoke about in group sessions.

This collective way of being, as also stated in chapters before, is shadowed and thus silenced in our predominately neoliberal world that center markets and the individual, competition and the aim of winning over public and collective well-being. In and of itself, I've reflected often on the harm of this, especially as it gets fiercer in its dominance but also in its ways, inspiring ruthlessness and self-gain at the cost of all else. However, juxtaposed to these deep reflections of my new understanding of a truly deep and inherent collective way of being that live in most participants, I found myself mostly pained but also hopeful. Pained because of the cost this has on the lives of the collective—silencing, invalidating, reducing, dehumanizing. Hopeful because now that I

understand this better (although perhaps still not fully), I see hope in this new way. Hope in carving spaces grounded in the collective. Connecting CoLS to each other for an even greater collective good. A space of belonging and trust, nurturing and growing, learning and teaching, respectively questioning and challenging, and collectively finding ways for community well-being moving forward. With the validation and fuel of the collective together, I see collective hope.

In reality, the neoliberal order and counter-hegemonic forces exist simultaneously. By critically juxtaposing these forces, new meaning—both critical and nuanced—is formed. For example, neoliberal logics dictate the importance of education and ‘access to more powerful people’ as a means towards advancement yet, as this study reveals, they also silence collective ways of being. Concepts of service are shadowed by those of aspirations; responsibility and giving back are measured through more transactional notions of remittances, fluid notions of collectivity such as *tea* is disaggregated into a collection of individuals. The ‘neoliberal order has taken us away from understanding this as a natural way of being’ (personal communication, S. Koirala-Azad, December 2019). Yet, while neoliberal logics are harmful to these ways of being, they are also the same instruments sought to obtain access, platforms, authority and eventually aid social change. There is a great deal more to be explored in this tension.

Thus, I complete this dissertation, with a deepened commitment, informed by participants and collective ways of being. As a wise professor once said to me, ‘People think that a dissertation needs to be book-ready. But it’s just your first draft’ (personal communication, Y. L. Espiritu, August 2019). I have been thinking and working and

volunteering in these liminal spaces for what seems my entire life. I move forward feeling more informed, better equipped and more committed than ever.

### **Theoretical Implications**

There are several theoretical implications that may arise from this study. I name solely the key ones here. First is what I temporarily term, *multi-generational resistance*. Mirroring literature on multi-generational trauma and postmemory (Hirsch in Espiritu, 2014), and drawing from but not fully mirroring literature around Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2005), familial capital (Shapiro, 2019), and transformative agency (Bajaj, 2018), I posit possibility for an extended theoretical frame that simultaneously brings together cultural wealth horizontally across a community as well as vertically across generations. Similar to multi-generational trauma, multi-generational resistance informs a person's ways of knowing through stories passed on and the development of postmemory. It centers collective epistemologies informed by refugee and other life experiences. This frame, however, needs further development as resistance can mean different things in different contexts. Here, it may begin with the idea of resistance against political and economic forces, neoliberalism, oppressive regimes, or even barriers to and within higher education. In the context of multi-generational resistance, it is stories of the previous generations' actions of resistance that gets passed on and adopted by the next generation and enacted upon towards social change in the long-term. In this sense, it seems that *resistance* is just the beginning and that another word that goes beyond this is necessary. That is the focus of a future study, however, I plant the seed here.

The second key area where I believe there might be some theoretical implications is in the understanding of the collective way of being and knowing. With dominant ways

of knowing rooted in Western, imperialist and neoliberal ideals, I posit that this is not widely understood nor seen, including in the academy or referenced literature. However, it seems that newer literature is surfacing that speaks to motivations, including “ethnic community as extension of family,” a sense of responsibility and duty (Dryden-Peterson & Reddick, 2019). Perhaps too fine a point or too nuanced, however, it still seems that there is space to ponder these findings with an explicit starting point of a collective way of being. Either way, these studies take an important strengths-based lens to their work and I look forward to reading these and future studies more closely. In addition to collective ways of being generally, however, there are also theoretical implications related to thinking about a collective way of being *across* CoLS with refugee experiences from *different* regions of the world and particular conditions.

Finally, the emerging field of Critical Refugee Studies (CRS) carves out space that challenges power dynamics; critically juxtaposes disciplines to reveal new ideas and tensions; and centers refugee epistemologies and refugee stories (Critical Refugee Studies Collective, n.d.; Espiritu, 2014). CRS shifts the focus on refugees from objects of study to producers of knowledge. I can only hope that through this study, inspired by CRS, that the knowledge produced and shared by participants can contribute in this way.

### **Future Research**

This study ignites a desire to pursue further explorations of *multigenerational resistance* as it relates to CoLS, both from the intention of theory development but also to research and document this phenomenon. Informally, I have come across numerous case studies yet to be documented, both within family settings but also across freedom movements that began in one nation and has now become transnational through diaspora

movements over generations. An anthology of case studies documenting such examples would contribute to a better understanding of this phenomena thereby informing future research and potentially future movements.

Given the aforementioned theoretical implications on collective ways of being, a future study may also include a literature review that specifically and explicitly investigates researchers' framing of similar studies, however, with an attempt to revealing roots of the study as individual or collective ways of knowing; and further exploring how the latter frame could alter or complicate findings.

Finally, in my work and studies, I have met CoLS who reside in numerous settings around the globe. This study focused on CoLS living, working and/or studying in the San Francisco Bay Area. Future research may include replicating a similar study in other refugee settings. Collectively, a growing body of similar research could contribute to a larger body of evidence to influence policy and/or praxis as indicated in the next section. It would also contribute to the building of global solidarity across diverse CoLS in this setting.

### **Practical Implications**

Some of the systemic barriers CoLS identified are overwhelming to contemplate. They are rooted in power, as earlier chapters depict, and in deep historical roots in colonialism, capitalism, and neoliberalism. Many of these barriers manifest in daily occurrences that go unnoticed by those who don't experience them. Sometimes these barriers even exist within well-intentioned spaces, such as in the case of higher education institutions. A very straight forward implication for consideration within these higher education spaces is to reduce systemic barriers CoLS face as it relates to scholarships. As

indicated in Chapter 6, of the tri-subterranean forces, it is the barrier to resources that prevent all else from being accessed. Many participants shared in their experiences of *the hustle*, that is, working multiple jobs while simultaneously going to school and supporting family members and other loved ones. While higher education admissions in itself can be a barrier, once admitted, financial resources can prevent someone from attending college or perhaps allow them to attend but under extreme pressures with multiple other responsibilities that other classroom peers may not understand or also hold. In this light, higher education institutions might consider working towards full funding of CoLS through full scholarships that cover tuition, room and board.

Another practical implication of this study is to introduce findings to service organizations and higher education institutions that work with CoLS and others with refugee experiences. This study offers counter-hegemonic ways of being and frames that may inform how institutions approach their work and services. Whether it be through a strength-based lens, or collective understanding, or one that leverages multi-generational resistance, these offer new frames to consider in collaboration and community with CoLS. Further, as the field of migration studies grows, these frames of reference can also inform curricula and pedagogical approaches.

Group participants shared a desire to continue meeting. Gatherings would include checking in with each other thereby providing support and keeping each other accountable in their forward movement around their community activities, a learning opportunity with a purpose, and the continual nurturance of collective hope. My hope is to continue this and the organic growth that may take place, inviting other CoLS along the way. There is of course also the very practical application of networking and



collective support as well as the critical scholarly exchange that has been taking place in groups. These exchanges challenge and further thinking and could theoretically support future community initiatives. In addition to this, I lean back on the words of participants regarding the reinforcing nature of community, especially in the context of validating and supporting the pursuit of increasing larger aspirations.

As Chapter 7 indicated, there is an opportunity in a CoLS collective to form another layer of community that can together create a **space for belonging** as well as collectively working to break through those impenetrable barriers in a way that would benefit the collective versus just one lone individual. Data in this study suggested a need for **horizontal community** to practice working collaboratively across a diverse group of CoLS that would reinforce and grow community and collective impact; **vertical community** to create strong networks, help make connections, and help provide access to larger platforms; **capacity building** for CoLS to learn the systems beyond their reach in order to access and work within them when they choose; **capital and resources** to fund and sustain community projects, initiatives, and social ventures; and a means to **capture narratives** to fill in blanks in history and serve as tools for advocacy.

This study has sparked conversations with other CoLS and colleagues about such possibilities. My mind races with excitement, hope and commitment as we collectively investigate the next phase of this work.

## REFERENCES

- ACLU. (n.d.a). Immigrants' rights. Retrieved from  
<https://www.aclu.org/issues/immigrants-rights>
- ACLU. (n.d.b). Timeline of the Muslim ban. Retrieved from  
<https://www.aclu-wa.org/pages/timeline-muslim-ban>
- Adichie, C. N. (2009, July). *The danger of a single story* [Video]. Retrieved from  
[https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda\\_adichie\\_the\\_danger\\_of\\_a\\_single\\_story?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story?language=en)
- Alexander, K. B., Allen, J. R., Allen, T. W., Bednarek, J. M., Campbell, J. F., Chiarelli, P. W.,  
 ... Zinni, A. C. (2019). [*Letter to President Donald J. Trump*]. Retrieved from  
<https://int.nyt.com/data/documenthelper/1694-generals-letter-refugee/46f652adbef5a13c2c0/optimized/full.pdf#page=1>
- Anderson, B. (1991). *Imagined Communities*. New York, NY: Verso. (Original work published in 1983).
- Angrosino, M. V. (2005). Recontextualizing observation: Ethnography, pedagogy, and the prospects for a progressive political agenda. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The sage handbook of qualitative research third edition* (pp. 729-745). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Arbour, L. (2018, December 18). *Statement by Louise Arbour, Special Representative of the*

*Secretary-General for International Migration*. Closing remarks at Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM), Marrakesh, MAR.

Retrieved from

<http://www.un.org/en/conf/migration/assets/pdf/GCM->

[Statements/closingremarksarbour.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/conf/migration/assets/pdf/GCM-Statements/closingremarksarbour.pdf)

Bajaj, M. (2018). Conceptualizing transformative agency in education for peace, human rights, and social justice. *International Journal of Human Rights Education*, 2(1), 1-21. Retrieved from <https://repository.usfca.edu/ijhre/vol2/iss1/13>

Bajaj, M., Canlas, M., & Aregnal, A. (2017). Between rights and realities: Human rights education for immigrant and refugee youth in an urban public high school.

*Anthropology & Education Quarterly*. 48(2), 124-140.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/aeq.12189>

Barnett, L. (2002). Global governance and the evolution of the international refugee regime.

*International Journal of Refugee Law*. 14(2 and 3), 238-262.

[https://doi.org/10.1093/ijrl/14.2\\_and\\_3.238](https://doi.org/10.1093/ijrl/14.2_and_3.238)

Brinkerhoff, J. (2011). Diasporas and conflict societies: Conflict entrepreneurs, competing interests or contributors to stability and development? *Conflict,*

*Security & Development*, 11(2), 115-143.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/14678802.2011.572453>

Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Davis, J. H., & Shear, M. D. (2019, September 6). Trump administration considers a drastic

cut in refugees allowed to enter U.S. *New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/06/us/politics/trump-refugees-united-states.html>

Department of Homeland Security. (2019, January 24). Migrant protection protocols.

Retrieved from <https://www.dhs.gov/news/2019/01/24/migrant-protection-protocols>

Dryden-Peterson, S., Reddick, C. (2019). 'What I believe can rescue that nation':

Diaspora

working to transform education in fragility and conflict. *Comparative Education Review*. 63(2), 213-235. <https://doi.org/10.1086/702610>

Eilperin, J. & Dennis, B. (2017, February 7). Trump administration to approve final

permit for Dakota access pipeline. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/energy-environment/wp/2017/02/07/trump-administration-to-approve-final-permit-for-dakota-access-pipeline/?utm\\_term=.12fe29682daf](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/energy-environment/wp/2017/02/07/trump-administration-to-approve-final-permit-for-dakota-access-pipeline/?utm_term=.12fe29682daf)

Espiritu, Y. L. (2006). Toward a critical refugee study: The Vietnamese refugee subject in US scholarship. *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, 1(1-2), 410-433.

<https://doi.org/10.1525/vs.2006.1.1-2.410>

Espiritu, Y. L. (2014). *Body counts: The Vietnam War and militarized refuge(es)*.

Oakland, CA: University of California Press.

Espiritu, Y. L. (2016). Ghosts and other unfinished conversations. *MELUS: Multi-Ethnic*

*Literature of the United States*, 41(3), 194-198.

Espiritu, Y. L. (2017). Critical refugee studies and native pacific studies: A transpacific critique. *American Quarterly*, 69(3), 483-490.

<https://doi.org/10.1353/aq.2017.0042>

Fanon, F. (1986). *Black skin white mask*. London, UK. Pluto Press.

Freire, P. (2018). *Pedagogy of the oppressed: 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury Publishing. (Original work published in 1970).

Giroux, H. (2004). Public pedagogy and the politics of neo-liberalism: Making the political more pedagogical. *Policy Futures in Education*, 2(3), 494-503.

<https://doi.org/10.2304/pfie.2004.2.3.5>

Gladstone, R. (2017, December 3). U.S. quits migration pact, saying it infringes on sovereignty. *New York Times*. Retrieved from

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/03/world/americas/united-nations-migration-pact.html>

Gladwell, C., Hollow, D., Robinson, A., Norman, B., Bowerman, E., Mitchell, J., Floremont, F., Hutchinson, P. (2016). Higher education for refugees in low-resource environments: research study. *Jigsaw Consult*. Retrieved from

<https://www.jigsawconsult.com/stories/15-higher-education-for-refugees>

Hessen, T. (2019, July 18). Trump officials pressing to slash refugee admissions to zero next

year. *Politico*. Retrieved from <https://www.politico.com/story/2019/07/18/trump-officials-refugee-zero-1603503>

Hyndman, J. (2000). *Managing displacement: Refugees and the politics of humanitarianism*.

Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Khanna, P. (n.d.). These 25 Companies are more powerful than many countries.

*Foreign Policy*. Retrieved from

<https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/03/15/these-25-companies-are-more-powerful-than-many-countries-multinational-corporate-wealth-power/>

Koirala-Azad, S. (2010). Exploring the intersection of philanthropy, research and scholarship in a 'third world' context." *Social Justice*, 36(4), 84-97. Retrieved from [www.jstor.org/stable/29768563](http://www.jstor.org/stable/29768563)

Koirala-Azad, S., Zanoni, K., & Argenal, A. (2018). Critical reflections on the positionality of

human rights educators working in diverse contexts. In S. M. Akpovo, M. J. Moran, & R. Brookshire (Eds.), *Collaborative cross-cultural research methodologies in early care and education contexts* (pp. 81–98). New York: Routledge.

Krogstad, J. M. (2019, October 7). Key facts about refugees to the U.S. *Pew Research Center*.

Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/10/07/key-facts-about-refugees-to-the-u-s/>

Kumashiro, K. (2012). *Bad teacher!: How blaming teachers distorts the bigger picture*.

New

York, NY: Teachers College Press.

- Levitt, P., & Jaworsky, B. N. (2007). Transnational migration studies: Past developments and future trends. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 33, 129–156.  
Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/29737757>
- Levitt, P., & Lamba-Nieves, D. (2011). Social remittances revisited. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, (1), 1-22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2011.521361>
- Lipman, P. (2011). *The new political economy of urban education*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Lindley, A. (2009). The early-morning phonecall: Remittances from a refugee diaspora perspective. *Journal of Ethnic & Migration Studies*, 35(8), 1315–1334.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13691830903123112>
- Lum, B., Nikolko, M., Samy, Y., & Carment, D. (2013). Diasporas, Remittances and State Fragility: Assessing the Linkages. *Ethnopolitics*, 12(2), 201-219.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17449057.2012.744217>
- Lyons, T. (2007). Conflict-generated diasporas and transnational politics in Ethiopia. *Conflict, Security & Development*. 7(4), 529-549.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14678800701692951>
- Maton, K. Habitus. (2008). In M. Grenfell (Ed.), *Pierre Bourdieu: Key concepts*. (pp. 48-64).  
New York, NY: Routledge.
- Menashy, F. & Zakharia, Z. (2017). *Investing in the crisis: Private participation in the education of Syrian refugees*. Retrieved from [https://eie.org/en/woe\\_homepage/woe\\_detail/15094/investing-in-the-crisis-private-participation-in-the-education-of-syrian-refugees](https://eie.org/en/woe_homepage/woe_detail/15094/investing-in-the-crisis-private-participation-in-the-education-of-syrian-refugees)

- Mills, D. (2018, August 1). White house weighs another reduction in refugees admitted to U.S. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/01/us/politics/trump-refugees-reduction.html>
- Mukpo, A. (2019). Asylum-seekers stranded in Mexico face homelessness, kidnapping, and sexual violence. *ACLU*. Retrieved from <https://www.aclu.org/issues/immigrants-rights/immigrants-rights-and-detention/asylum-seekers-stranded-mexico-face>
- Nguyen, L. (2013). Recalling the refugee: Culture clash and melancholic racial formation in *Daughter from Danang*. *Amerasia Journal*, 39(3), 103-121. <https://doi.org/10.17953/amer.39.3.011250v83t83xuxv>
- Oxfam International. (2016, January 18). *62 people own the same as half the world, reveals Oxfam Davos report* [Press Release]. Retrieved from <https://www.oxfam.org/en/pressroom/pressreleases/2016-01-18/62-people-own-same-half-world-reveals-oxfam-davos-report>
- Oxfam International. (2017, January). *An economy for the 99%*. Retrieved from <https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/economy-99>
- Reay, D. (2004). 'It's all becoming a habitus': Beyond the habitual use of habitus in educational research, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 25(4), 431-444. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0142569042000236934>
- Refugee and Immigrant Transitions. (2019). *Refugee and Immigrant Transitions*. Retrieved from



<https://www.reftrans.org/>

Refugee Processing Center. (n.d.). Admissions & arrivals. Retrieved from

<https://www.wrapsnet.org/admissions-and-arrivals/>

Rodriguez, R. M. (2015). Globalization. In C. J. Schlund-Vials, L. T. Vö, & K. S. Wong (Eds.), *Keywords for Asian American studies* (pp. 119-120). New York, NY: New York University Press.

Ross, A. (2015, November 18). Why a history lesson about World War II refugees went viral. *TIME*. Retrieved from <http://time.com/4118178/paris-attacks-jews-syrian-refugees-history/>

Sassen, S. (2014). *Expulsions: Brutality and complexity in the global economy*.

Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Schlund-Vials, C. J. (2016). The subjects of 1975: Delineating the necessity of critical refugee studies. *Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States*, 41(3), 199-203.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/melus/mlw019>

Shapiro, S. (2018). Familial capital, narratives of agency, and the college transition process

for refugee-background youth. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 51(3-4), 332-

346. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2018.1546151>

Suárez-Orozco, C.; Suárez-Orozco, M., & Todorova. (2008). *Learning a new land:*

*Immigrant*

*students in American society*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard

University Press.

Tavanti, M., Abdi, C., & MacHarg, B. (2016). Gender democracy and women's self-

empowerment: A case of Somali diaspora civil society. In C. Shwabenland, C. Lange, J. Onyx, & S. Nakagawa (Eds.), *Women's emancipation and civil society organizations: Challenging or maintaining the status quo?* (pp. 209-234). Bristol, UK: Policy Press.

Tharoor, I. (2015, November 19). Yes, the comparison between Jewish and Syrian refugees matters. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/11/19/yes-the-comparison-between-jewish-and-syrian-refugees-matters/?utm\\_term=.cfb7c4ad28d3](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/11/19/yes-the-comparison-between-jewish-and-syrian-refugees-matters/?utm_term=.cfb7c4ad28d3)

The Critical Refugee Studies Collective. (n.d.) Retrieved from <https://criticalrefugeestudies.com/>

UNHCR. (2010). *Convention and protocol relating to the status of refugees*. Retrieved from <http://www.unhcr.org/protection/basic/3b66c2aa10/convention-protocol-relating-status-refugees.html>

UNHCR. (2011). *The 1951 convention relating to the status of refugees and its 1967 protocol*.

Retrieved from <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/about-us/background/4ec262df9/1951-convention-relating-status-refugees-its-1967-protocol.html>

UNHCR. (2019). *Global trends: Forced displacement 2018*. Retrieved from <https://www.unhcr.org/5d08d7ee7.pdf>

UNHCR. (n.d.). DAFI Programme. Retrieved from <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/dafi-scholarships.html>

United Nations. (1948, December 10). *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.

Retrieved from <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights>

United Nations. (2015a, October). *Resolution adopted by the General*

*Assembly on 25 September 2015: Transforming our world: the 2030 agenda for sustainable development*. Retrieved from

[http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E)

United Nations. (2015b). *The Millennium Development Goals Report 2015*. New York.

Retrieved from

[http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/MDG/english/UNDP\\_MDG\\_Report\\_2015.pdf](http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/MDG/english/UNDP_MDG_Report_2015.pdf)

United Nations. (2016, October 3). *Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 19*

*September 2016: New York declaration for refugees and migrants*. Retrieved

from [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/71/1](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/71/1)

United Nations Statistic Division. (2019). Methodology: Standard country or area codes for

statistical use (M49). Retrieved from

<https://unstats.un.org/unsd/methodology/m49/#fn4>

University of Oxford. (2017). *Refugee Studies Centre: Annual report 2016-2017*.

Retrieved from <https://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/about/annual-reports>

United States Census Bureau. (2018). QuickFacts. Retrieved from

<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/CA,US/POP645217>

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service. (n.d.). Asylum. Retrieved from

<https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/refugees-asylum/asylum>

U.S. Department of State. (2017, October 4). Proposed refugee admissions for fiscal year 2018. Retrieved from

<https://www.state.gov/j/prm/releases/docsforcongress/274613.htm>

U.S. Department of State. (2018, September 24). Proposed refugee admissions for fiscal year 2019. Retrieved from

<https://www.state.gov/remarks-and-releases-bureau-of-population-refugees-and-migration/proposed-refugee-admissions-for-fiscal-year-2019/>

U.S. Department of State. (n.d.a). Special Immigrant Visas (SIVs) for Iraqi and Afghan translators/interpreters. Retrieved from

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/immigrate/siv-iraqi-afghan-translators-interpreters.html>

U.S. Department of State. (n.d.b). Special Immigrant Visas for Iraqis - who were employed by/on behalf of the U.S. Government. Retrieved from

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/immigrate/special-immg-visas-iraqis-employed-us-gov.html>

U.S. Department of State. (n.d.c). Special Immigrant Visas for Afghans - who were employed by/on behalf of the U.S. Government. Retrieved from

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/immigrate/special-immg-visa-afghans-employed-us-gov.html>

Van Hear, N. (2003). From durable solutions to transnational relations: home and exile among

refugee diasporas. *UNHCR Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit*. Retrieved from <https://www.unhcr.org/3e71f8984.pdf>

- Van Hear, N. (2014). Refugees, diasporas, and transnationalism. *The Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies*.  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199652433.013.0016>
- Vargas-Silva, C. (2016). *Literature review: Remittances sent to and from refugees and internally displaced persons* [Working paper]. Knomad. Retrieved from  
<https://www.knomad.org/sites/default/files/2017-04/KNOMAD%20WP%2012%20Lit%20Review%20Remittances%20tofrom%20Refugees%20and%20IDPs.pdf>
- Weng, S. S., & Lee, J. S. (2016). Why do immigrants and refugees give back to their communities and what can we learn from their civic engagement? *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 27(2), 509-524.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-015-9636-5>
- White House. (2017, January 27). Executive order protecting the nation from foreign terrorist entry into the United States. Retrieved from  
<https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/executive-order-protecting-nation-foreign-terrorist-entry-united-states/>
- White House. (2019, November 1). Presidential determination on refugee admissions for fiscal year 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/presidential-determination-refugee-admissions-fiscal-year-2020/>
- Yosso, T. J. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community

cultural wealth. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 8(1), 69-91.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/1361332052000341006>

Zagor, M. (2011). Recognition and narrative identities: The legal creation, alienation and liberation of the refugee. *The Australian National University College of Law*.

<https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1906507>

## APPENDIX I. CONSENT FORM



### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Below is a description of the research procedures and an explanation of your rights as a research participant. You should read this information carefully. If you agree to participate, you will sign in the space provided to indicate that you have read and understand the information on this consent form. You are entitled to and will receive a copy of this form.

You have been asked to participate in a research study entitled, *Agents of change born of refugee experiences: Motivators, systemic barriers, and strategies for community leadership and resilience* (working title), conducted by Jane Pak, doctoral candidate in the School of Education.

#### WHAT THE STUDY IS ABOUT:

The purpose of this study is to investigate goals, motivations, challenges, and strategies towards collective uplift, including but not limited to peace and justice efforts in countries of origin, transit, or residence among “agents of change” (AoCs).

#### WHAT WE WILL ASK YOU TO DO:

During the individual interview and group sessions (for Level 2 participants), you will be asked about your goals, motivations, challenges, and strategies toward collective uplift efforts, including but not limited to peace and justice efforts. Questions will be open ended.

#### DURATION AND LOCATION OF THE STUDY:

Your participation in this study will involve the following.

Level 1 participants: one or more individual interviews (TBC) of 30-90 minutes each.

Level 2 participants: in addition to the above, if you are a Level 2 participant, you will also be asked to participate in the following.

- Participate in 3 – 5 collective group meetings to dialogue, explore challenges and strategies with other participants.
- Writing monthly journal entries in response to prompts provided by the researcher (based on ongoing dialogue, themes in the data, and/or current events);
- Share your personal statements for college and graduate (if applicable) admissions;
- Share past transcripts from the college and graduate (if applicable) levels (TBC).

**POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS:**

We do not anticipate any risks or discomforts to you from participating in this research. If you wish, you may choose to withdraw your consent and discontinue your participation at any time during the study without penalty.

**BENEFITS:**

You will receive no direct benefit from your participation in this study; however, the possible indirect benefits for level 2 participants include those derived from group dialogue and strategizing around related goals for collective community uplift.

**PRIVACY/CONFIDENTIALITY:**

Any data you provide in this study will be kept confidential unless disclosure is required by law. In any report we publish, we will not include information that will make it possible to identify you or any individual participant. You will have the option to select a pseudonym for yourself and may also choose to use your legal name if that is your preference.

All data collected will be stored on password-protected devices. Consent forms and any spreadsheet linking participants to pseudonyms will be destroyed 3 years from the close of the study, which we estimate to be December 2022.

**COMPENSATION/PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION:**

There is no payment or other form of compensation for your participation in this study.

**VOLUNTARY NATURE OF THE STUDY:**

Your participation is voluntary and you may refuse to participate without penalty or loss of benefits. Furthermore, you may skip any questions or tasks that make you uncomfortable and may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty. In addition, the researcher has the right to withdraw you from participation in the study at any time.

**OFFER TO ANSWER QUESTIONS:**

Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you should contact the principal investigator: Jane Pak at 415-794-6174 or [jpak3@dons.usfca.edu](mailto:jpak3@dons.usfca.edu). If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact the University of San Francisco Institutional Review Board at [IRBPHS@usfca.edu](mailto:IRBPHS@usfca.edu).

**I HAVE READ THE ABOVE INFORMATION. ANY QUESTIONS I HAVE ASKED HAVE BEEN ANSWERED. I AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT AND I WILL RECEIVE A COPY OF THIS CONSENT FORM.**

---

*PARTICIPANT'S SIGNATURE*

*DATE*

---

*PARTICIPANT'S NAME (please print)*



## APPENDIX II. DRAFT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Note: this is an initial draft and was significantly simplified over time.

### Demographic information to be collected (TBC):

- Name (plus choice of pseudonym)
- Gender identity
- Place of birth
- Age
- Year migrated to the United States
- Current residence
- Communities identified
- University major(s) and degree(s)

### Interview #1:

1. Please share how you've participated in your community (please define) in the past and present. (Explore various definitions and community spaces.)
2. Are you involved with your community now? If so, how?
3. What are your aspirations, hopes and dreams for yourself, your family, your communities (define each)?
4. What are the key drivers that inspire and/or motivate you in these aspirations, hopes and dreams?
5. What have you done in your life (planned or not) to prepare for/support you in realizing these aspirations, hopes and dreams? And what other supports/things might you need to pursue to help you in the future to pursue these hopes and dreams?
6. Have there been any individuals who have helped/challenge/influence you in your journey? If so, who and how?
7. What has been the role of education in your life?
8. What inspired you to pursue higher education? What do/did you study and why? (Explore potential connections with aspirations, hopes and dreams.)
9. What has been the role of higher education in preparing you for/contributing (and not) to your aspirations, hopes and dreams?
10. What are some challenges you have come across that have limited your ability in moving towards these aspirations, hopes and dreams?
11. How has higher education affected/supported/changed/negated (or not) how you think about your aspirations, hopes and dreams?
12. Have you faced any challenges within the higher education system/spaces? If so, please share more. Are these specific/not to your efforts pursuing your aspirations, hopes and dreams?
13. In your opinion, how do you think higher education can change things for individual refugees and refugee populations at large? Either directly or through the others?
14. In your opinion or based on experiences, what gaps do you think exist in preparing/supporting refugees in realizing their aspirations, hopes and dreams

either within higher education environments? Outside higher education environments?

15. What thoughts do you have as you think about your aspirations, hopes and dreams now and how to approach them?

**Interview #2 (TBC):**

Whether an additional interview happens depends on how the study evolves. Should this take place, it would include sharing and requesting feedback on key themes/gaps from focus group data (below). Pending how the study evolves and timing, this may take the form of direct interviews OR surveys.

**Focus Group questions (Level 2 participants only):**

Collective conversations and dialogue with Level 2 participants will include conversation prompts similar to those questions outlined in Interview #1. The remaining conversations will be very organic and will be guided by the interest, needs, and curiosities of the group.

### APPENDIX III. GROUP SESSIONS ANNOTATED OUTLINES

All group sessions took place on a Monday evening after participants finished work and classes. We met in a classroom with white walls, rows of table that could seat two comfortable, all facing forward towards a blackboard and instructor's desk up front. Windows were usually open, bringing in outside noise from cars passing by. To create a more communal environment, I arrived early each session to set up. In the center of the room, I adjoined two tables to make a square, placed a bright and warm tablecloth on top, and placed four chairs around, two on each side. For each session, I brought a warm dinner with hot chai tea and a dessert on a couple of occasions. I asked about food restrictions prior to the first session. I knew Mvuye liked chicken so made a point to always include chicken in the meal. Abhyas preferred hot food sharing that he doesn't know why but for some reason, he can't eat cold food at night. Maya was flexible. Not a big cook myself but wanting to create nice meals for communal sharing and community building, I did my best to make warm comfort foods, sampling from different cuisines. All meals were well eaten. Nobody got sick.

#### **Group 1. Theme: aspirations, hopes and dreams.**

January 28, 2019

*For dinner: Thai coconut chicken curry with rice, chai tea*

- Meet & greet
  - Go around the room, share your name and one word that starts with the first letter of your name and represents you in some way i.e. Jane, justice.
  - Share why you think you were invited here tonight
- Thank you and sharing of inspiration for this study
- Review of who participants are i.e. unifying connectors in the group
- Overview of study to bring everyone together and answer any questions
  - Because all participants are interested in research and have/are doing research, I went into more detail here, opening up a space to share about each other's research. Later, participants would ask questions related to research in general.
  - Also tried to set expectations for group sessions i.e. dialogic (framed in Freire, humanizing pedagogies, etc.)
  - Discussed data requests
    - Did not end up using personal statements as I did not receive them from everyone
    - Did not end up using journals. I distributed journals but as time went on, participants didn't use them. Abhyas used his to jot down his thesis ideas though!
- Discussed principles of mutuality and reciprocity and what that might look like for participants
- Reflection activity:
  - Individual:
    - Distributed 11 ½ x 17 construction paper

- Asked participants to write/draw/represent their aspirations, hopes & dreams (images available in appendix)
  - Group share/discussion
- Questions/suggestions/concerns/feedback

## **Group 2. Theme: what (higher) education means to participants**

March 4, 2019

*For dinner: homemade Japanese curry and rice, chai tea*

- Moment of silence/greetings
- Review of last meeting: aspirations, hopes & dreams... any changes, updates, etc.
- How does the collective group that you are hoping to serve, etc. represent (or not) community? How do you define community?
- Group, including question about individual vs collectives
- Why did you pursue higher education and what role does it (undergraduate, graduate, etc.) play (or not) in your aspirations, hopes & dreams?
- Challenges, barriers
- Group discussion
- Other challenges → hopes, dreams & aspirations
- Group discussion
- Q&A, loose ends, next meeting
- Closing with a moment of silence

## **Group 3. Life journeys, highs and lows**

April 22, 2019

*Dinner: Moroccan ginger lemon chicken with rice, chai tea (also brought a cake to celebrate Maya's acceptance into graduate schools)*

- Opening moment of silence and coming together
- Greetings and updates
- Life journeys (20 minutes)
  - draw your life map or life journey
  - Note down at least 3 high points and 3 low points.
- Group decided to do a share first and then verbally describe what relates to aspirations and what doesn't
- Identify 3 more high points and 3 more low points on your journey
- Cake!
- Barriers:
  - Share
  - Discussion
  - Preview next session: Given these barriers, responsibilities, stress & rewards of being away from family and being expected to ..., what would be helpful... this context?

**Group 4.**

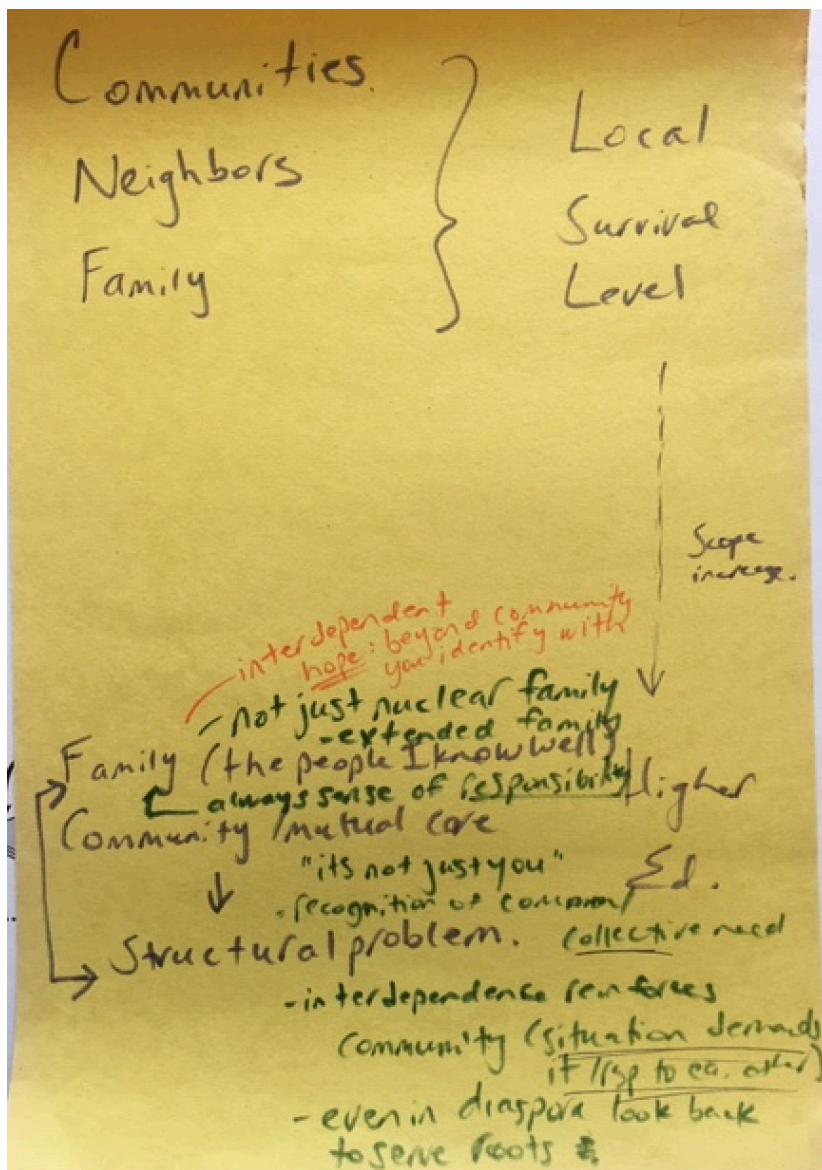
April 29, 2019

*Dinner: pizza (with chicken!)*

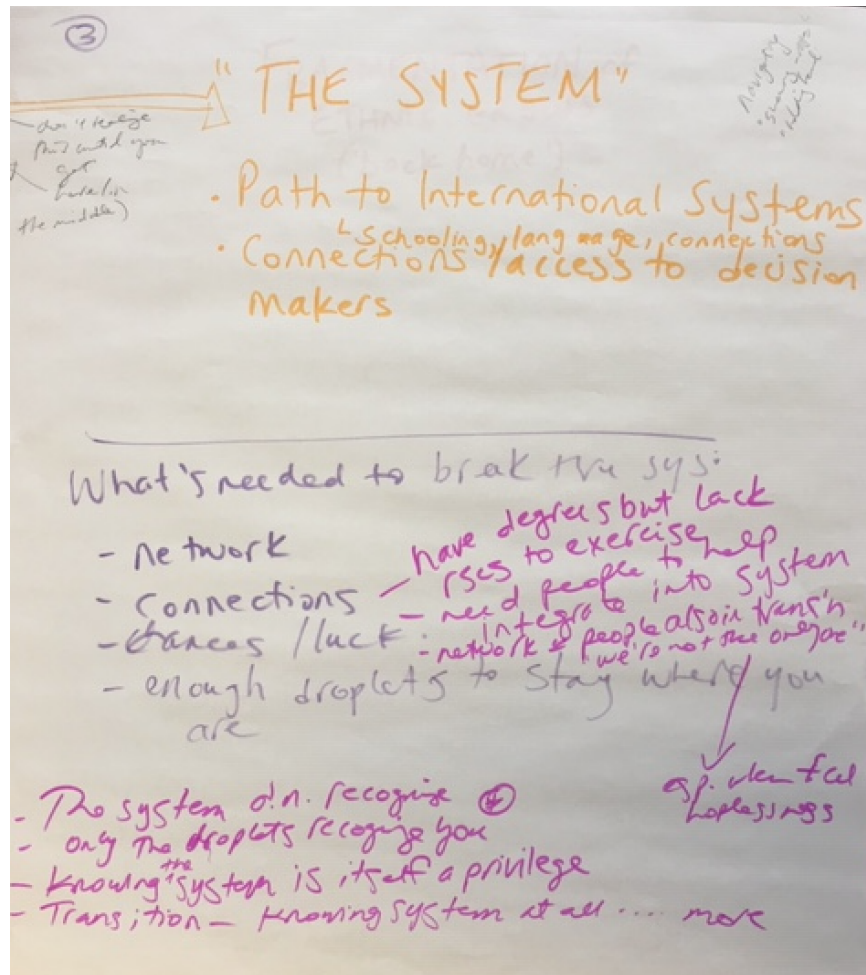
- **Begin with themes from Group #3 (review/revise) (see summary of these in the next appendix)**
- **Given these barriers, responsibilities, stressors, etc....**
  - What role can this community/group/collective **UNIQUELY** play to support you in your efforts/this journey, help you realize or move closer to your desires?
  - What are some unique revelations/experiences that arose for you from these group gatherings?
- **Concluded session (last session for research part)**
  - Decided to continue meeting given the value and set a time for the next session.

APPENDIX IV. IMAGES FROM GROUP SESSIONS

Group work: Community



### Group work: Challenges, “the system”



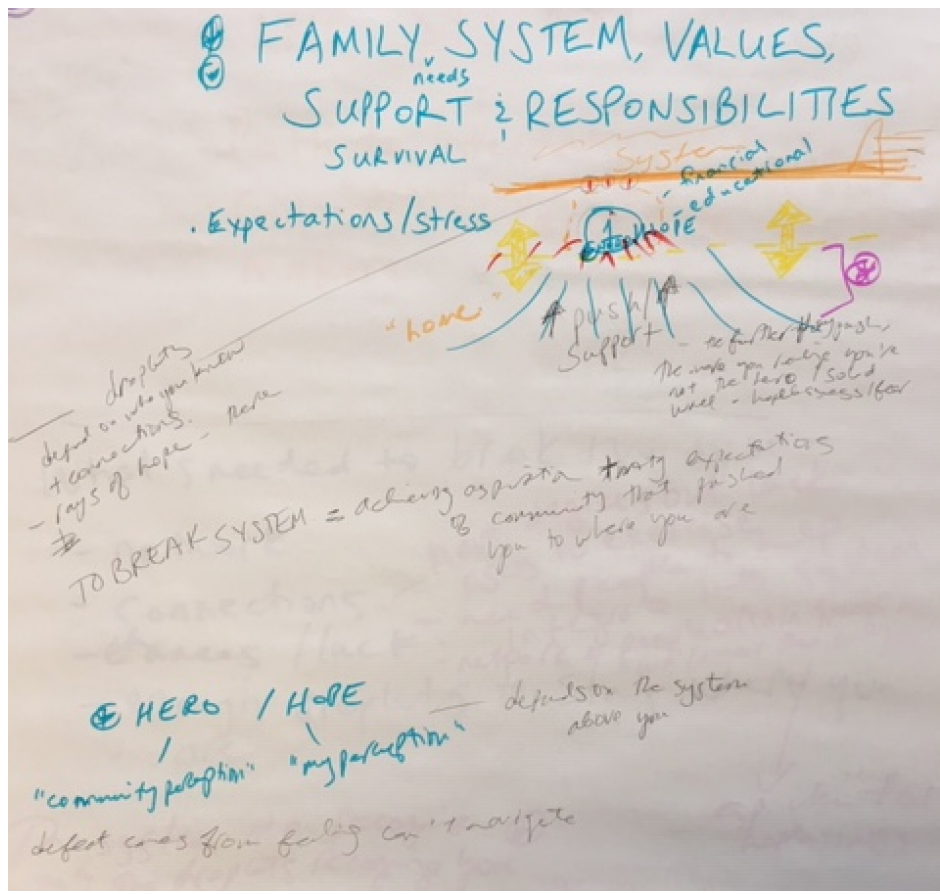
### Group work: major themes identified for barriers

1. Financial resources + access to financial resources...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to financial means, prevents other doors from opening, “out of the circle,” can’t even get in</li> <li>• TENSION: Want to break circle and break barriers - small chance but try, but also struggling to survive...</li> <li>• TENSION: struggle (i.e. take on huge debt to do something meaningful) and try to do something OR go back?</li> </ul>
2. Immediate needs: family responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Family needs is itself a system”</li> <li>• Value you learn from your community i.e. support family and community you</li> </ul>

	<p>belong to, how you were raised, how you survived...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expectations: Travel here, far away, lot expected, lot to overcome financially, educationally...</li> <li>• TENSION: value/responsibility + expectations/stress associated with supporting family (or guilt if can't or other tensions)</li> <li>• TENSION: family oriented + tug to simultaneously pursue own dreams (individual or larger collective)</li> <li>• <b>TENSION: "seen as a hero but you know you're not"</b></li> </ul>
<p>3. The system</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• grades/schooling/degree</li> <li>• language</li> <li>• path into international systems</li> <li>• connections</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>If you are struggling and you don't have the person to take your hand...</u></li> <li>• <u>Navigating the system...</u></li> <li>• Influence and access to decision makers and who is listening (context: available through grad school)</li> <li>• <b>"No financial resources for you to do your ideal project, ideal service to the people/community you believe you should be in the position to serve well"</b></li> </ul>



Group work: Family needs/systems, values, and responsibilities



Group work: Impenetrable barrier with an overlay of collective hope (Hs)

