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Negotiating Identity, Home, and Belonging: Understanding the Experiences of African Women Refugees Resettled in the United States

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BY

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DEDICATION

To my parents, Margaret Nthenya and Peter Mutua, whose faith, love, and support
are unending. I could not be able to do this without you.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine how former African women refugees negotiate their identity, sense of belonging, and home in the context of transnational displacement. To explore this topic, I conducted in-depth interviews, participant observation, and focus group interviews with African women who came to the United States as refugees and who now live in two cities in the Southwestern and Midwestern United States. The resulting data was analyzed using both thematic and narrative analysis.

For this study, I recruited through a snowball/network sampling strategy a total of 20 former African women refugees and conducted 15 in-depth interviews, three focus groups, and participant observation. I sought to know how they articulated identity frames and negotiated identity gaps in the process of transnational displacement. The analysis yielded a total of six themes that speak to their identity negotiation post-resettlement: being Othered while working to join the American dream; maintaining traditional gender roles as well as gender role fluidity postresettlement; resisting U.S. cultural practices while affirming African cultural practices; remembering imagined homes while grappling with the future postresettlement; duty to family while attending to the harsh reality of life in the United States; and, social fluidity in home countries versus social conservatism postresettlement.

Results from this study point to how the narratives of the former African women refugees reveal identity maintenance, transformation, and resistance as they make sense of the tensions and contradictions of their fragmented, gendered selves. These narratives thus illustrate the fluidity and adaptability of their identity positions post-resettlement. Additionally, the participants' narratives suggest that former African women refugees maintain a connection to a remembered home and seek to recreate the sense of communal identity they experienced by enacting particular cultural activities here in the United States. In this process, there is a negotiation of identity along fractured geographical, affective, and cultural spaces they navigate.

This study contributes to current bodies of knowledge by offering an intercultural communication focused interrogation of the lived experiences of former African women refugees resettled in non-gateway immigrant cities. It also extends scholarship that applies the communication theory of identity's (CTI) identity frames and gap to elucidate the fragmentation of identity experienced during transnational displacement by underscoring the interpenetration of personal, enacted, relational, and communal frames in identity negotiation. Overall, this study advances a better understanding of African women refugees' lives, offering an in-depth look into how their personal, enacted, relational, and communal identities are influenced by transnationalism.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The world's imagination has been recently gripped by the Syrian refugee crisis, as it impacts Europe and other Western nations. And in the United States, government officials as well as ordinary citizens are embroiled in a public debate that focuses on refugees and their place in American society after the government issued a travel ban and hold on Syrian refugee admissions. These recent developments are part of a much larger picture, for as of December 2015, there were 65.3 million persons who have been forcibly displaced around the world (United Nations High Commission for Refugees, 2016). These individuals are either internally displaced persons (IDPs) or refugees who have fled to neighboring countries. The total number of refugees from all conflict zones in the world stood at 21.3 million at the end of 2015 with 16 million of them under the mandate of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). Of this total, refugees and asylum-seekers in Africa were 3.3 million at the end of 2013 (UNHCR, 2013). Since 1951, when the relocation of refugees officially began, resettlement of forcibly displaced individuals has become an important undertaking requiring coordination between international, national, and not-for-profit organizations and agencies. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) is the body mandated by the international community to oversee this mission.

Statement of Problem

The United States remains the world's largest country of resettlement even though its refugee admissions have been steadily declining, with the current ceiling of 85,000 refugees admitted for resettlement set in 2015 much lower than the 1980 ceiling of 213,700 (Li & Batalova, 2011; Patrick, 2004). In 2013, the United States admitted and resettled 59,548 persons (UNHCR, 2013). A significant number of those admitted are from the African continent and specifically Sub-Saharan Africa. In fact, a third of all refugee arrivals

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(32.1 percent, or 22,472) in FY 2015 came from Africa (American Immigration Council, 2016). Out of the 85,000 U.S. refugee admission ceiling for FY 2015, Africa had a cap of 25,000 (up by 9,500 compared to 2014), behind the Near East and South Asia's cap of 34,000 (down by 4,000) and East Asia's cap of 3,000 (down by 5,000) (Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, 2015; Li & Batalova, 2011). This study is of particular importance at this time in light of the increased number of forcibly displaced persons in the world, and an upsurge in the number of refugees from the African continent being resettled in non-gateway immigrant cities. The projected number of refugees needing resettlement in 2014, 1,500,000 persons, reached and surpassed 1 million for the first time since reporting of settlement needs began 30 years ago (UNHCR, 2015). Further, new and unresolved conflicts in South Sudan, Mali, Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the Central African Republic continue to increase the numbers of forcibly displaced Africans who swell the numbers of those in need of protection and resettlement.

Additionally, the Syrian refugee crisis and the U.S. travel ban against six predominantly Muslim countries have placed a spotlight on the ill-informed and misleading public perceptions of refugees and the legal rights accorded to them. An alarming number of U. S. Americans have taken a largely anti-Muslim stance, falling back onto stereotypes of immigrants as leeches on the state, coupled with the more recent one of Muslims-as-terrorists. This dissertation's goal of elucidating the lived experiences of a specific population of African refugees is one in many attempts at helping refugee-receiving communities and stakeholders gain a better understanding of the refugee resettlement process and the people who, through no fault of their own, hope for safety and security in a welcoming country.

Purpose of Research

Of significant interest to the present study is the fact that "women and girls represented, on average, 49 percent of persons of concern to the UNHCR" (UNHCR, 2015). Sub-Saharan African women and girls, who comprise a significant portion of the refugee population in the world, and are no longer under the protection of home, government, or the family structure, are particularly at risk: "They face the rigors of long journeys into exile, official harassment or indifference and frequent sexual abuse—even after reaching an apparent place of safety" (Lubbers, 2004, p. vii). Because there is increasing resettlement of African women refugees in the United States and because of the risks these women face in the process of forced migration, interrogating more clearly their experiences of living as a refugee in the United States is very important. My goal is to provide a voice for them and resources for those working to improve the lives of women refugees.

In this study, I explore and provide an understanding of two groups of former African women refugees resettled in the United States by examining their negotiation of identity, sense of belonging, and conceptualization of home. I seek to understand how these former African women refugees negotiate the risks of being a female refugee and the difficulties of determining who they are and how they deal with a new home country, shifting roles, and different cultural expectations for women after resettlement in the United States. More specifically, this research explored the narratives about identity, belonging and home of former African women refugees post-resettlement in mid-size cities in the Southwestern and Midwestern United States.

I examined the women's negotiation of identity, belonging, and home in the context of transnational displacement. To accomplish this goal, I used snowball/network sampling to select six participants in the Southwest and 14 in the Midwest United States between 2011

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and 2013, and conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with each of them. I then conducted three focus groups with both populations. As a volunteer for a refugee community program in the Southwestern United States, I conducted a participant observation exercise in the course of a year and a half. The same was repeated in the Midwestern United States over the course of one week. The specific questions that guided this study are as follows:

> RQ1: What do the identity frames and gaps enacted in the narratives of former African women refugees reveal about processes of identity negotiation in the context of resettlement in the United States?

> RQ2: What salient identity frames and gaps emerge in the former African women refugees' narratives about home and belonging in the context of transnational displacement and resettlement?

The following concepts are key terms in this dissertation: *refugee, former African women refugees, resettlement, transnationalism, identity negotiation, identity gaps, home,* and *belonging.* For the purposes of this study, a refugee, as defined in Article I (a) (2) of the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees is a person:

> Who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his [or her] nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself [or herself] of the protection of that country. (p. 2)

Refugees in popular public discourse are often subsumed under the "immigrant" label, but there are distinct legal and socio-cultural differences between the two categories. Immigrants often make the choice to move to a new country or territory, but refugees are forced to move from their homes due to conflict and other social, political, economic, or

cultural factors (Gaber, Gaber, Vincent, & Boellstorff, 2004). There are many forcibly displaced persons in the world, but refugees are under the purview of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees. For the purposes of this study, I use the term *former African women refugees* for two reasons. First, by the time the study was conducted all of the participants were either citizens or permanent U.S. residents, so their legal designation had changed from that of refugee. Second, even though their status had legally changed, the participants reported that the label *refugee* was still ascribed to them in many contexts in their professional and personal lives. I therefore made the decision to acknowledge both the saliency of this label in the everyday lives of the participants and the fact that it did not legally apply to them.

The majority of refugees, three quarters of the world's refugee population in 2015, reside in neighboring nations, are integrated into these host nations, or are eventually repatriated (UNHCR, 2015). For reasons ranging from continued conflict, persecution, or needs that cannot be addressed in their current country of refuge, less than one percent of the estimated 14.4 million refugees under UNHCR's protection worldwide are submitted for resettlement. To put that into perspective, just 0.66 percent of the world's refugees were approved for resettlement in another country in 2015 (Domonoske, 2016). The United States continues to resettle the most refugees in the world, with Australia, Canada, the Nordic countries, and new entrants Italy and South Korea joining the ranks of the 28 nation states in 2015 who accepted refugees for resettlement. For the purposes of this study, *resettlement* is the transfer of refugees from an asylum country to another State that has agreed to admit them and ultimately grant them permanent settlement (UNHCR, 2015).

To frame the accounts of their experiences of displacement across national borders, I utilize Basch, Glick-Schiller, and Blanc's (1994) definition of *transnationalism*:

We define 'transnationalism' as the process by which immigrants forge and sustain multistranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement. We call these processes transnationalism to emphasize that many immigrants today build social fields that cross geographic, cultural, and, political borders. (p. 7)

Many studies focusing on transnational movement utilize models and theories dealing with group identity to explain the identity change process inevitable for immigrants or minority group members (Ting-Toomey, 2005). For the purposes of this study, identity negotiation is the "conscious and mindful process of shifting one's worldview or cultural behaviors or both. During this process, cultural patterns of communicating and ways of seeing the world are at stake" (Jackson, 2002, p. 48). Thus, it encompasses the processes in which relational partners reach agreement on and establish mutual expectations regarding "who is who" in the communication interaction (Swann, Johnson, & Bosson, 2009). These processes can either be identity-confirming or identity-disconfirming, leading to interactants enacting strategies that bring back a sense of equilibrium in the interaction.

Identity gaps emerge from the communication theory of identity (CTI), which deals with the idea of a multiplicity of loci of identity (Hecht, 1993; Hecht, Jackson, & Ribeau, 2003; Hecht, Warren, Jung, & Krieger, 2005). There are four loci—the personal, enacted, relational, and communal layers of identity—that are interrelated and interpenetrated. According to Jung and Hecht (2004), "The four frames of identity may be analyzed independently but are not really separate from each other, which is interpenetration (mutual interdependence), perspectives on a whole, integrated identity" (p. 267). As these frames overlap, there can be contradictions and discrepancies, or enhancements that help explain the dynamic and fluid nature of identity. In this research, *identity gaps* are defined as

"discrepancies between or among the four frames of identity" (Jung & Hecht, 2004, p. 268). In this study I problematize and extend CTI, which looks at identity negotiation but only analyzes the individual perspective, by demonstrating how the responses and contributions of relational partners must be taken into account to form a more holistic picture of the identity negotiation taking place in communicative interactions.

The concepts of *home* and *belonging* have been explored in a number of ways by scholars in the social sciences. These concepts are said to have both pragmatic (physical place or buildings) and emotional/cultural attributes (customs and traditions), and have nationalistic as well as patriotic connotations (Chaitin, Linstroth, & Hiller, 2010; Duncan & Lambert, 2004). With increased globalization, the link to distinct cultural and ethnic places becomes important (Den Boer, 2015). This is especially significant in narratives of displaced people who cluster around remembered or "imagined" homelands (Anderson, 1983). With displacement, as Jansen and Löfving (2007) argued, the "essentialized" definition of "home" as a timeless entity in an unchanging context of origin should be discarded, for the "home" of refugees has been left behind in another place and time. For the purposes of this study, conceptions of *home* are "dynamic processes, involving acts of imagining, creating, unmaking, changing, losing, and moving 'home'" (Al-Ali & Koser, 2002, p. 6). *Belonging*, on the other hand, is "feeling 'rooted' somewhere—like you 'belong'…feeling 'part of something', that you are secure and there is a sense of possibility for the future—is intimately tied to ideas of home" (Mason, 2007, p. 274).

Significance of Research

Across disciplines, specific studies focusing on refugee and asylum-seeking women from sub-Saharan Africa have examined group counseling for traumatized East African women (Loewy, Williams, & Keleta, 2002; Kumsa, 2008), health care interventions (Carroll,

Epstein, Fiscella, Volpe, Diaz, & Omar, 2007; Pavlish, Noor, & Brandt, 2001; Upvall,

Mohammed, & Dodge, 2009), language learning and inclusion (Warriner, 2007),

discrimination experienced by refugee women (Pittaway & Bartolomie, 2001), the asylum

process within Africa (Schafer, 2002), life in refugee camps (Ager, Ager, & Long, 1995;

Daley, 1991; Kibreab, 1995), the role of religion in the lives of refugee women in the West

(De Voe, 2002; McMichael, 2002), gender construction in the workforce (Koyama, 2014),

and asylum and resettlement in North America (McSpadden & Moussa, 1993). These

previous studies show that much of the research on refugees typically is either applied work

or work intended to have applied impact, with topics closely linked to policy and programs.

Other research focusing on women engages issues like health and diet, basic protection

issues, women's employment, education, childcare, and language training and is produced in

disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, and refugee studies (Indra, 1989).

Although communication studies is a discipline with a significant body of knowledge

surrounding immigrant identity, not many studies explore refugee-lived experiences

specifically. In the field of intercultural communication, few studies have explored African

refugees' lives in the United States after resettlement, with notable ones being the

racialization of the "lost boys" of Sudan (McKinnon, 2008), the negotiation of dialectical

tensions during cultural adaptation (Semlak, Pearson, Amundson, & Kudak, 2008), and

identity performance in a U.S. Citizenship class (Craig, 2012). What this dissertation

contributes to this scholarship is a focus on the process of identity negotiation among

former African women refugees in the United States, an exploration of notions of home and

sense of belonging as articulated by a forcibly and permanently displaced population, and an

understanding of the narratives about lived experiences by women refugees resettled in

smaller cities in the United States—cities that are non-traditional immigrant gateways.

With the recent rise in global transnational movements characterized by increased human migration and forced displacements, it is imperative to cultivate a better understanding of the lived experiences of refugees and how they articulate such experiences through communication. Yet, studies about former and current African women refugees' experiences in the United States are scarce in communication scholarship. This limited scholarship could be due to the fact that the larger immigration discourse in the United States surrounds undocumented migration from south of the border, leading to abundant research focusing on belonging and membership in relations to the experiences of Latinos/as and Chicanos/as (Warriner, 2007). A few studies focusing on African women refugees in the United States have specifically looked at health outcomes of Somali women (Carroll, Epstein, Fiscella, Volpe, Diaz, & Omar, 2007; Pavlish, Noor, & Brandt, 2001; Upvall, Mohammed, & Dodge, 2009), which, again, are focused on the material life of the refugees resettled in the United States. Interrogating identity negotiation shifts back to illuminating the lived experiences of former African women refugees for whom claims to specific national and cultural identity have been violently disrupted. Counter to essentialist theories of identity that argue that people and place have a natural bond, de-territorialized theories of identity take a post-modern view, emphasizing the globalized movement of people in our world today (Lambo, 2012).

This dissertation also contributes to scholarship by providing understanding of the concepts of *home* and *belonging*. Home is often thought of as a geographical place, and belonging is articulated with notions of citizenship and nation. As persons who have been forcibly removed from a geographical home, refugees are uniquely placed to study and expand already existing definitions of what home and belonging mean in the context of resettlement.

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A final contribution of this dissertation is providing an understanding of the experiences of former African women refugees resettled in non-traditional immigrant gateway cities. Historically, gateways were the traditional cities where immigrants settled, including port cities such as Boston, Chicago, New York, and San Francisco. These were so named because they were natural entry/border points into the United States and home to industries and employment opportunities offering residents good jobs and a "gateway" to the American Dream (AS/COA, 2013). Immigration studies have thus traditionally focused on "large gateway cities—Los Angeles, New York, Miami, San Francisco, Chicago, Dallas, and Houston" as places of first settlement (Waters & Jiménez, 2005). However, this is not true of refugees who are at the mercy of resettlement sponsoring agencies as to the choice of where they end up in the United States. The largest African refugee community is the Somali community in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area of Minnesota, and many studies have centered on their experiences in this context. The cities in the Southwest and Midwest United States that are the sites for this study are much different, and I chose to focus this study in these two places for a number of reasons: they are small to mid-size cities with populations of 557,69 for the former and 40,641 for the latter (US Census Bureau, 2014); their refugee/immigrant populations are a small percentage of the general population; and they are non-traditional immigrant gateways, meaning they have few, if any, established immigrant associations and networks compared to the traditional immigrant gateway cities.

Chapter Outline

In Chapter 2, I provide a background of the countries from which the former African women refugees interviewed came, giving a historical overview, a discussion of the factors that led to the conflict(s), and the impact those conflicts had on the countries' citizens. Chapter 3 provides a review of literature, focusing on relevant theoretical

frameworks and empirical research in the areas of intercultural communication, gender studies, U.S. refugee and resettlement policies, and transnational and refugee studies. Chapter 4 focuses on the methodological procedures for data collection and analysis. Chapter 5 provides an in-depth discussion of what the identity frames and gaps enacted in the narratives of former African women refugees reveal about identity negotiation in the process of resettlement in the United States. Chapter 6 provides an in-depth discussion of what salient identity frames and gaps emerge in the former African women refugees' narratives about home and belonging in the context of transnational displacement and resettlement. Finally, chapter 7 offers final discussion and conclusions, with explication of the significance and implications of the study, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2: History of the Countries of Origin, Factors that Led to the Conflict,

Impact on Civilians, and the U.S. Context

The former African women refugees who participated in this study come from the following countries: Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. To better understand the circumstances that lead to their resettlement in the United States, it is important to interrogate the historical, cultural, and political context of these countries and the factors that contributed to the conflicts that displaced the former African women refugees. Since 1970, no less than thirty wars have been fought in Africa, with most being intrastate (Adejumobi, 2001). Moreover, a significant number of the nation-states on the continent are either currently embroiled in flare-ups of ethnic and political-induced turmoil, in the middle of a civil war involving international players trying to broker peace, or trying to rebuild their country after a devastating war. In this chapter, I present a short history of each country, the factors that lead to civil war in the past and the current situation in the country, and the impact the wars had and continue to have on the civilians.

Somalia

A Short History

Somalia is a country in East Africa that is located at the tip of the Horn of Africa. It borders Djibouti in the north, Ethiopia in the northwest, Kenya in the southwest, the Indian Ocean in the south, and the Gulf of Aden in the north. Somalia became independent in July of 1960 when the former British Somaliland merged with the former Italian Somaliland (Central Intelligence Agency, 2017). From independence until October 1969, the country had different political parties participating in democratic elections, until a faction led by Major General Siad Barre staged a military coup that overthrew the elected government of

Somalia's second president, Abdirashid Ali Shermarke. Somalia became a member of the Arab League, established the Somali Revolutionary Socialist Party (SRPS), and developed strong ties to the Soviet Union and other East European countries (Bongartz, 1991).

Somalia entered into a war, commonly referred to as the Ogaden War, with Ethiopia in 1977 and 1978 over the Ogaden region of Ethiopia. The cause of the war was a desire by the government of Siad Barre to annex the southern parts of Hararghe and Bale in Ethiopia that are mainly inhabited by ethnic Somalis (The Polynational War Memorial, 207). The Soviet Union and Cuba aided Ethiopia, while the U.S. was forced to aid Somalia in this war, in line with Cold War politics. Somalia's loss in this war set the stage for the civil war of the 1980s, when growing opposition to Siad Barre's government culminated in a civil war in 1988.

The Factors that led to Civil War

A major contributing factor to the civil war in Somalia is the segmentation of the population into clans that determine political, social, and economic life. Furthermore, clans pledge their support to specific political parties. For a long time what held the country together, despite these clan divisions, was a strong national pride and a shared myth of a common origin (Bongartz, 1991). With the nation weakened after defeat in the Ogaden War with Ethiopia, many people started to feel disenfranchised, especially after Siad Barre's clan gained more control as others were sidelined. Matters were made worse by a military coup d'état carried out in April 1978. One important player that emerged was the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF), established in 1978 with the main objective of overthrowing President Siad Barre. The SSDF took Ethiopia's side in border wars in the early 1980s, but it eventually split into two factions in 1986. Even though one group chose amnesty from the Somali government, the other fled to Kenya and continued its efforts to

move Somalia away from military power to a system of parliamentary democracy. However, the SSDF was not taken seriously by opposition groups because it did not have trained fighters or artillery.

A second organized political group that arose at the same time had what the SSDF lacked: strong military presence. The Somali National Movement (SNM) was founded by Somalis in London in April 1981. This movement launched a military operation against the Somali government, leading to a crackdown of members of the two clans that made up the movement. Like the SSDF, the SNM also split, this time along clan lines, in 1986. In 1988, a bilateral agreement between the Somali and Ethiopian governments to stop support of opposition groups attacking each respective government led to further weakening of the SNM. Alienated in their Ethiopian base, SNM decided to launch a major attack on the northern part of Somalia in May 1988. SNM's capture of parts of Hargeisa, Burao, and Berbera in July of that year led to government bombardment and efforts to reclaim these territories (Lewis, 1990). The government's efforts destroyed SNM military and civilian targets in northern Somalia, killing 50,000 people and forcing 500,000 to flee to Ethiopia (Greenfield, 1989).

This civil war in the north signaled the beginning of the collapse of the Mogadishu government, with the SNM successfully blocking the government's efforts to regain control over the northern territory (Bongartz, 1991). There was trouble also brewing in the southern part of the country, with the United Somali Congress (USC) and the Somali Patriotic Movement (SPM) formed in 1989. In the summer of 1989, both movements launched sustained and successful attacks on the government in Mogadishu and surrounding areas with the express intention of toppling President Siad Barre. By 1990, the country was truly divided with many soldiers deserting the National Army to fight alongside the opposition

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groups, form paramilitary groups, or become bandits and a deadly threat to civilians. Much of the country, barring major towns like Mogadishu, Hargeisa, Burao, and Kismayo, came under the control of various rebel groups. At this time Siad Barred was dubbed the "mayor of Mogadishu," which aptly captured the fact that he frankly controlled nothing more than Mogadishu.

During this time, some events within the country are important to note. The more important one is a document, known as "Manifesto No. 1," signed by more than 100 influential political, cultural, and religious leaders, which was forwarded to Siad Barre on May 15, 1990. It was blessed by elders from all the major Somali clans, and it beseeched the president to convene a national conference for reconciliation and salvation (Bongartz, 1991). Not only did Siad Barre not listen, but he had 40 of the signatories arrested. They were eventually released after internal and external pressure. The Manifesto emboldened the SSDF, SPM, and USC in a renewed push against the government, consolidating their military activities. The year 1990 saw efforts by the government to scale back the growing support the opposition was enjoying, but it also saw the presidential guards, the Red Brigades, inflict untold brutality on the people. The USC forces captured parts of Mogadishu in late December 1990, and by January 1991 had ousted Siad Barre.

Impact on Civilians

From December 1991 to March 1992, the country was torn apart by clan-based warfare. In the capital of Mogadishu, an estimated 25,000 people were killed, 1.5 million fled the country, and 2 million were internally displaced over a four-month period. Compounding the suffering of the civilians, Somalia suffered a severe famine from 1991 to 1993. Up to 280,000 people died, and 2 million were internally displaced (Zapata, 2012). Many of the civilians fled to the Dadaab camp in northern Kenyan, which was opened in

1991 to absorb the fleeing refugees. Intended to host 90,000 people, by 2012 it hosted more than 463,000 refugees, including some 10,000 third-generation refugees born in Dadaab to refugee parents who were also born there (UNHCR, 2012). By 2016, there were at least 263,000 Somalis who were in the process of being voluntarily repatriated back to Somalia because the Kenyan government intends to close the camp (Human Rights Watch, 2016). Since September 2001, 99,726 Somali refugees have been resettled in the United States with 9,020 admitted in the fiscal year 2016 (Pew Research Center, 2017). As of March 2017, there are 883,057 Somali refugees in the following African and Middle Eastern nations: Kenya, Yemen, Ethiopia, Uganda, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, and Tanzania (UNHCR, 2017).

Sudan and South Sudan

A Short History

Sudan is a country located in northeastern Africa. Countries that share a border with Sudan include Chad and the Central African Republic to the west; Egypt and Libya to the north; Ethiopia and Eritrea to the east; and Kenya, Uganda, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the south. The Red Sea lies along nearly 500 miles of the northeastern border, while the River Nile runs northward through the central part of the country (Thyne, n.d.). Sudan gained independence in 1956 from British colonial rule. Since then, military regimes favoring Islamic-oriented governments have been in power (Central Intelligence Agency, 2017). The northern, largely Muslim Arab, part of the country has dominated economically, politically, and socially over the southern, largely non-Muslim, non-Arab region. This resulted in two civil wars—one that began in 1956 and ended in 1972, and the other that began in 1983 and ended in 2005. The second civil war resulted in a referendum and independence for Southern Sudan on 9 July 2011.

The Factors that led to Civil War

The second Sudanese civil war of 1983-2005 is the one I focus on for the purposes of this dissertation. The collision of cultures, religions, and ethnicities in Sudan—including those of sub-Saharan Africa and those of the Arab Islamic world—have led to nearly 50 years of civil war (Frontline World, 2005). The second civil war in 1983 was ignited when the military regime of the day attempted to create a federated Sudan including states in Southern Sudan that had been granted extensive autonomy in a peace agreement after the first civil war of 1955-1972 (Thyne, n.d). The government also attempted to impose sharia law in both the northern and southern regions of the country in accordance with its policy to make the whole country an Islamic state.

There are a number of reasons why this conflict started and continued for so long: the usual economic and ethno-religious reasons often cited as well as worsening ecological problems in the region, scarcity of resources, and the severe drought of the 1980s (The Inventory of Conflict and Environment, 2017). The rebellion was led by the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), also known as the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), headed by John Garang. The SPLA eventually splintered in 1991 into two warring factions between the Dinka and the Nuer, two of the largest ethnic groups in the South. The rebel groups originally had the same fundamental goal of overthrowing the government but after the splintering, goals diverged with some wanting complete secession and others seeking regional autonomy, religious freedom, and revenue from natural resource extraction (Thyne, n.d.).

The buildup to the second civil war was precipitated by the military government of President Jaafar al Nimeiri, which blatantly chipped away at the conditions set in the Addis Ababa Accord that had ended the first civil war in 1972. This peace agreement had given

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the South regional autonomy. Additionally, the discovery of vast reserves of oil in the southern region of Sudan intensified the causes of rebellion because of the government's refusal to build refineries where the oil wells were and instead transporting the oil to the Northern region while leaving the oil-rich South impoverished. Peace seemed possible in 1989 between the government and southern opposition groups, but all this was scuttled when Omar al-Bashir, a politically and religiously extreme military leader, successfully led a coup to become the new leader of the Sudan. He continued to lead a government that was bent on pursuing an Islamist agenda.

The conflict was further complicated when, in early 2003, a new rebellion swelled up in the western province of Darfur. This occurred when the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/A) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) took up arms against the Khartoum government, accusing it of politically and economically marginalizing the non-Arab population of the region (Peace Direct, 2015). In the early 2000s, international pressure led to the north-south peace process, culminating in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) that was signed by the SPLA/M and Bashir's National Congress Party (NCP) in 2005. This ended the civil war and allowed for a referendum and eventual South Sudanese independence in 2011. However, since South Sudan's independence, there has been renewed conflict between the new government and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile States. A new civil war erupted in 2013, pitting those loyal to President Salva Kiir, who is from the Dinka tribe, and his former Vice President Riek Machar, who is Nuer (Enough, 2014). In 2015, a peace agreement was signed, and it was destroyed in mid-2016 in renewed fighting between these two factions. As of December 2016 the UN High Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan predicted more catastrophic conflict in the young country (Rowe, 2016).

Impact on Civilians

Since gaining independence from Britain in 1956, Sudan has had only ten years of relative peace. The most recent struggle, the second Sudanese civil war of 1983-2005, resulted in over 2 million deaths and internally displaced 4 million people (CIA Factbook, 2005). Another 6 million civilians fled the area, moving mostly to Kenya and Uganda (Althaus, 1999). The Darfur conflict displaced nearly two million people and caused an estimated 200,000 to 400,000 deaths. Violence in Darfur in 2013 resulted in an additional estimated 6,000 civilians killed and 500,000 displaced. As of March 2017, there are 1,598,499 South Sudanese refugees either registered or awaiting registration with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR, 2017).

Rwanda

A Short History

Rwanda is a small land-locked country in east-central Africa. By 1994, Rwanda's population stood at more than 7 million people from three ethnic communities: the Hutu (about 85 percent), the Tutsi (14 percent), and the Twa (1 percent). After the European partition of colonized Africa, it became part of German East Africa in the 1890s but was placed under Belgian rule after WWI. Rwanda has had a couple of ethnic conflict flare-ups, with the first occurring in 1959 as a Hutu uprising in which hundreds of Tutsi were killed and thousands displaced and forced to flee to neighboring countries (UN, n.d.). Rwanda gained independence from Belgium in 1962 amidst tensions over domination of the country between the majority Hutu who had been marginalized in colonial times, and the minority Tutsi who had enjoyed the perks of an imposed racial hierarchy (UN, n.d.).

Decades of strife followed with many Tutsis becoming refugees in the neighboring countries of Burundi, Uganda, Zaire, and Tanzania. A political and military movement

known as the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) was formed in Kampala, Uganda, in 1988.

The RPF was composed mainly of Tutsi refugees who had gained combat skills fighting in

Uganda in the National Resistance Army (NRA) led by President Yoweri Museveni. The

RPF launched attacks on Rwanda starting in October 1990. Increased persecution of the

Tutsi minority within Rwanda and continued fighting between government forces of the

Hutu-led government and the Tutsi-led RPF culminated in peacemaking efforts by the

Organization of African Unity (OAU) in August 1993. The Arusha peace agreement seemed

to have brought some peace but all hell broke loss on April 6 1994 when the deaths of the

Presidents of Burundi and Rwanda in a plane crash caused by a rocket attack led to weeks of

intense and systematic massacres (UN, n.d.). The Rwandan genocide came to an end in early

July 1994 when the RPF gained control of the entire country.

The Factors that led to Civil War

The root of the problem of Rwanda is the manner in which the fight for dominance

and control over political power and social and economic privilege has been polarized and

interpreted in ethnic terms (Van Der Meeren, 1996). According to Lemarchand (1994):

"The root cause of ethnic violence in Rwanda must be found in the extent to which

collective identities have been reactivated, mythologized, and manipulated for political

advantage." This quote points to the need to establish an understanding of the complex

ethnic history of Rwanda in order to illuminate the factors that led to the genocide of 1994.

The Germans who first colonized Rwanda were quick to note hierarchical social categories

as well as physical differences between the three communities in Rwanda—the Hutu, Tutsi,

and Twa. The Germans, the Belgian trustee administration that followed after the First

World War, and the missionaries of the Catholic Church all perpetuated a narrative of the

racial superiority of the Tutsi. Indirect rule was established around an ideology advanced to

protect the power of the Mwami (the king) of the Rwandan kingdom and the supporting

Tutsi aristocracy (Van Der Meeren, 1996). What this did was reify the caste-like divisions

between the Tutsi and the Hutu. The Tutsi were thought of as of superior intelligence and

possessing idealized physical characteristics of a tall and slender physique and long noses.

The Hutu on the other hand were thought of as simple "peasants" who were dominated and

outwitted by the superior Tutsi and not given the same access to education and resources

post-independence (Van Der Meeren, 1996).

The introduction of identity cards establishing ethnic categorizations by the Belgian

administration in 1930 introduced a rigidity to the social hierarchy that precluded social

mobility and were used to choose who could do forced labor (Hutu) and who gained entry

to administrative school (Tutsi only). This, of course, continued the perpetuation of the

superiority of the Tutsi. Frustrated and denied state employment, a Catholic-educated Hutu

intelligentsia launched the Hutu Social Movement to achieve emancipation and political

power for the Hutu majority (Van Der Meeren, 1996). The agitation by the UN with

support of the Mwami and leading Tutsi for Belgium to grant both Rwanda and Burundi

independence in the 1950s forced the Belgians and the Church to transfer their support to

the Hutu to delay independence. A Belgian-supported coup d'état proclaimed a republic,

causing a further rift between the Hutu and Tutsi who were vying for power in Rwanda

post-independence (UN, n.d.).

Many of the Hutus who were now put in charge were unprepared and most were

unfit for the exercise of power (Lemachand, 1970). Between 1959 and 1963, an estimated

20,000 Rwandan Tutsis became refugees in neighboring countries. To dismantle the Tutsi

privilege, the ethnic justification that had been established for decades was erased by Hutu

leaders and in its place the Hutu myth emerged. The Tutsi were represented as illegitimate

invaders from the north, who had tricked the Hutu into giving up their land and their political autonomy (Malkki, 1995). Further, identity cards were used in the ensuing ethnic marginalization of the Tutsi and succeeded in singling out those of Tutsi ethnicity for reprisals after border raids by refugees, after scares of attempted coup d'états, and in 1994, for genocide (Van Der Meeren, 1996). These identity cards had been established by the Belgian administration as a marker of difference and were continued by the Hutu government post-independence.

The Tutsi refugees in neighboring countries tried through the decades to return home to Rwanda, and to reestablish their position in the social order, continuously launching cross-border attacks that served to justify the Hutu myth of illegitimate invaders and continued reprisals against the Tutsis still living in the country. With the establishment of the RPF, the military attacks further intensified, and by the time they initially invaded from Uganda in October 1990, throughout the peace process, and up to the signing of the Arusha Accord in 1994, the stage was set for a lethal clash. The match that lit the flame occurred on April 6 1994 when Rwandan President Juvenal Habyarimana and Burundi's President Cyprien Ntaryamira were killed in a rocket attack in their plane. This triggered a 100-day orgy of violence, perpetrated mainly by Hutu militias against Tutsis and moderate Hutus.

The genocide in Rwanda cannot be explained simply by echoing an oft-repeated refrain about African conflicts—that ancient tribal hatred is at the root of all the conflicts on the continent. For both Rwanda and Burundi, the similarities are too striking for this to be the simple explanation. Hutu and Tutsi speak the same language–Kirundi in Burundi and Kinyarwanda in Rwanda—share the same customs, and lived in relative harmony side by side with each other for centuries before the advent of colonial rule (Lemarchand, 1994). Rather, a new consensus points to a multiplicity of contributing factors: the colonial

manipulation of ethnicity in Rwanda, the planning and organization of the genocide before it happened, and the responsibility of specific Rwandans in fomenting the genocide (Straus, 2013).

Impact on Civilians

During the 100-day intensive and sustained massacred of mostly Tutsis and moderate Hutus in Rwanda, between 700,000 and 1 million people lost their lives. Rape and other forms of physical and psychological violence and torture were also committed. The people who carried out this government-sanctioned violence included members of the military, young men organized into paramilitary groups, and ordinary people including neighbors and even family members in ethnically mixed families (Staub, Pearlman, Gubin, & Hagengimana, 2005).

Government officials, soldiers and militia who had participated in the genocide fled to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), then known as Zaire, taking with them 1.4 million civilians, most of them Hutu who had been told that the RPF could kill them (UN, n.d.). Beginning in 1996, the DRC turned into the battleground for continuing armed conflict between Rwanda's new government and the perpetrators of the 1994 violence who fled there. An estimated five million people have died in the ongoing conflict in the DRC in the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2014).

<p align="center">Burundi</p>

A Short History

Burundi is a land-locked country in central Africa, bordered by three countries: Rwanda, Tanzania, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Analogous to Rwanda's ethnic make-up, Burundi has the following ethnic groupings: Hutu (85 percent), Tutsi (14 percent) and, Twa (1 percent) (CIA Factbook, 2017). The territory was first established in

the 17th century as the kingdom of Burundi, and between the 1890s and 1962 was under

German rule and then Belgian administration after the First World War (Cornwell & De

Beer, 1999). During colonial rule there were peasant uprisings, and the colonial authorities

violently curbed the rebellion, while at the same time they were using forced labor and taxing

the Burundian people (Uvin, 1999). In 1959, Burundi's king, Mwami Mwambusta IV,

requested independence from Belgium, with the first democratic elections taking place in

1961 (Weinstein & Schrere, 1976). Since independence in 1962, it has been plagued by

tension between the dominant minority Tutsi and the Hutu majority. After a string of

assassinations of royal family members, the last king of Burundi, Ntare V, was deposed in a

coup led by Prime Minister Captain Michel Micombero (Uvin, 1999).

The period starting in 1972 to 2005 was a time of much violence and instability in

Burundi (Lemarchand, 2012). In 1990, Burundi moved slowly towards a more democratic

political system. The regime enacted constitutional change, ending ethnically aligned

political parties and ushering in a non-ethnic government. Melchior Ndadaye, from the

mainly Hutu Front for Democracy in Burundi (FRODEBU) Party, was elected president in

1993 (Uvin, 1999).

The Factors that led to Civil War

It is important to note that Rwanda and Burundi cannot be understood

independently of each other. Historically and to this day, ethnic strife in the former has had

a profound effect on the destinies of the latter and vice versa (Lemarchand, 1994). In both

countries, the interplay between ethnic realities and their subjective reconstruction or

manipulation by political elites are the harbinger of the Hutu-Tutsi conflict. In the late

1950s and early 1960s the Belgians left the region and a Hutu rebellion broke out in Rwanda.

Masses of Hutu removed the Tutsi monarchy, and with the support of Belgium, held

democratic elections. The newly elected Hutus began a massacre of Tutsis and as a result

destabilized Burundi (The Combat Genocide Association, 2017). After 1966 when the

military regime of Colonel Michel Micombero gained power, this new regime, led by Tutsi

officers established a policy of severe discrimination against the Hutu. The year 1971 saw a

failed coup that created internal strife and weakened the military regime. On April 29, 1972,

a group of Hutu rebels organized themselves in Tanzania and invaded parts of western

Burundi, where massacres of Tutsis were carried out.

The moment the Hutu rebellion ended, the organized slaughter of Burundian Hutus

began. Hutus and moderate Tutsis of all ages, genders, socio-economic, and professional

classes were rounded up and killed. By the end of August, more than 200,000 people had

been reported killed and thousands more had fled to neighboring countries (CGA, 2017).

The Hutu massacre paved the way for 20 years of Tutsi hegemony and gave rise to a

reconstruction of group identities—the dehumanization of Tutsi by Hutu and the denial of

Hutu identity by Tutsi (Lemarchand, 1994).

Burundi's first democratically elected president was assassinated in October 1993

after only 100 days in office, triggering widespread ethnic violence between Hutu and Tutsi

factions. Civil war broke out and more than 200,000 Burundians perished during the

conflict that spanned almost a dozen years. Hundreds of thousands of Burundians were

internally displaced or became refugees in neighboring countries. An internationally

brokered power-sharing agreement between the Tutsi-dominated government and the Hutu

rebels in 2003 paved the way for a transition process that integrated defense forces, and

established a new constitution and elected a majority Hutu government in 2005. The

government of President Pierre Nkurunzinza, who was re-elected in 2001 and again in a

disputed election in 2015, continues to face many political and economic challenges (Lemarchand, 1994).

Impact on Civilians

From 1993 to 2005 tens of thousands of civilians escaped a civil war in Burundi that left 300,000 dead (Dubuis, 2016). This is in addition to the tens of thousands of Hutu refugees who fled the mass killings by the Tutsi-dominated army in Burundi in 1972 and have been living in refugees camps ever since. Burundians fled their country in large numbers in 1972, 1988, and 1993-2001, eventually forming one of Africa's largest groups of refugees. The wars in Kivu in eastern Congo since 1993 have resulted in one of the world's worst situations of internal displacement. In addition, the long-term presence of Rwandan and Burundian refugees has had a divisive effect on the domestic politics of the main host states, Congo, Tanzania, Uganda, and of course Rwanda and Burundi themselves, which have both hosted large numbers of refugees from each other. As of March 2017, there are 44,794 Burundi refugees in the following African nations: Tanzania, Rwanda, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Uganda, Kenya, Mozambique, Zambia, and Malawi (UNHCR, 2017).

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)

A Short History

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is a country located in central Africa. It is the second largest country on the continent. Congo shares a border to the north with the Central African Republic and South Sudan; to the east with Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, and Tanzania; to the southeast with Zambia; to the southwest with Angola, and; to the west with the country's short Atlantic coastline, the Angolan enclave of Cabinda, and Congo (Brazzaville) (Cordell, Payanzo, Lemarchand, & Wiese, 2016).

The country is also referred to as Congo (Kinshasa), with the capital city added parenthetically, to distinguish it from the other Congo republic, which is officially called the Republic of the Congo and is often referred to as Congo (Brazzaville) (Cordell et al., 2016). What started as the Kongo empire in the 14th century ended up King Leopold II's of Belgium's personal colony in 1885 (Baregu, 2002). Millions of Congolese were killed or worked to death during Leopold's control of the territory (BBC, 2017). Congo gained independence from Belgium in 1960 and from 199-1997 was officially known as the Republic of Zaire, named for a term meaning "great river" in local African languages by then-ruler General Mobutu Sese Seko (Cordell et al., 2016).

The Factors that led to Civil War

Mobutu was overthrown in 1997 by Laurent Kabila and his Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (AFDL), with the country subsequently reverting back to its original name. The new president did not tolerate dissent and was accused of human rights abuses, leading to a rebellion from a past ally in 1998. Kabila was assassinated in 2001 and succeeded by his son, Joseph. The rebellion that had started in 1998 marked the start of what became a devastating five-year civil war that drew in several countries. Previous peace talks had not brought peace but finally, in December 2002, an agreement reached in Pretoria, South Africa, provided for the establishment of a power-sharing transitional government and an end to the war; an agreement that was ratified in 2003 (Cordell et al., 2016). However, fighting remained in the eastern part of the country, and in 2004, Kabila's government survived two attempted coups.

The year 2008 saw a peace agreement to end the fighting in the east being signed, but it was shortly violated by rebels led by Laurent Nkunda. He was defeated by Congolese and Rwandan troops, forced to flee, arrested, and indicted for war crimes by the Congolese

government. Disputed presidential elections were held in 2011, and Kabila was declared winner amid the objections of his main rival, Etienne Tshisekedi.

In the lead-up to the December 9, 2016, deadline that marked the end of President Joseph Kabila's constitutionally mandated two-term limited, there had been much bloodshed and brutal political repression in the country. A mediated agreement mandates that presidential elections be held before the end of 2017 but many do not have confidence that Kabila and his close allies are committed to ensuring free and fair democratic elections. Continued government operations against the political opposition, media, and civil society groups continue. Violent conflicts have intensified across the country, with many armed groups that include government security forces attacking civilians (Human Rights Watch, 2017).

Impact on Civilians

Since 1998, more than 5.5 million people have died in Congo from fighting, disease and malnutrition; 2.5 million people have been internally displaced; and some 500,000 have fled the country's lengthy conflict, with the vast majority living in refugee camps in the Great Lakes and Horn of Africa regions. Congolese refugees form the sixth-largest refugee population in the world and 9 percent of the total refugee population in Africa (Wilson, 2015). As of March 2017, there were 460,923 DRC refugees in the following African nations: Uganda, Rwanda, Tanzania, Burundi, Kenya, South Sudan, Congo (Brazzaville), Central African Republic, Sudan, and Ethiopia (UNHCR, 2017).

Chapter 3: Literature Review

The goal of this study is to explore and provide an understanding of how the narratives of two groups of former African women refugees resettled in the Unites States, one in the Southwestern and the other in the Midwestern region, communicate their sense of identity and belonging in their host communities. Towards this goal, this chapter delves into the interrogation of scholarly research on identity, identity negotiation, gender identity, and refugee resettlement and immigration across national borders informing my approach to this topic, as a way of situating my study within relevant bodies of knowledge.

With identity as a central concept, the first section of this review discusses theories of identity formation and gender identity construction, with a primary focus on intercultural communication identity theories, identity gap theorizing, identity negotiation theory, and gender identity theories with a focus on feminist standpoint theory and African womanism. In the second section of this chapter, I examine the history and macro context of U.S. refugee and resettlement policies that affect the conditions of refugee resettlement in the United States. This examination offers a contextualization necessary for the deeper understanding of structural and historical factors that influence individual and group narratives shared by the participants in this study. The third section then focuses on theorization and empirical research on refugees and transnationalism and its impact on identity, focusing on the experiences of African refugees in refugee camps pre-resettlement and in the cities of resettlement in North America.

Theorizing Identity

In this section, I provide an overview of the concept of identity for it constitutes a relevant framework for this study. I first discuss formative theories of identity advanced in various disciplines that have influence foundational work in communication studies as well

as more recent theorizing on identity construction. I then explore theories of identity

formation and gender identity construction, with a primary focus on intercultural

communication theories of identity, identity negotiation, and the concept of identity gaps.

This study, which focuses on narratives of identity, draws primarily on Hecht's (1993)

communication theory of identity and concept of identity gaps, as well as Ting-Toomey's

(1993) identity negotiation theory for knowledge building.

Formative Theories of Identity

Identity theories have a foundation in the field of social psychology, with earlier

theories like identity theory (Stryker, 1987) taking a sociological approach while the social

identity theory (SIT) of intergroup relations (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and self-categorization

theory (SCT) (Turner et al., 1987) take a psychological approach. Various disciplines have

approached the question of identity in different ways, looking at either intrinsic personal

idiosyncrasies or the collection of social roles that people enact in various contexts.

According to Stryker's (1968) identity theory, the various identities that comprise the self

exist in a hierarchy of salience where the identities that are ranked highest are most likely to

be invoked in situations that involve different aspects of the self. Stryker's (1968) identity

theory also links self-attitudes (identities) to role relationships and role-related behavior of

individuals. From this perspective, former African women refugees, for whom the gender-

socialized roles of wife and mother are most salient as emphasized in their cultures, would

most likely encounter a renegotiation of self-attitudes (identities) given the socio-cultural

context of countries of resettlement in the west, which emphasizes different gender-role

values compared to their countries of origin.

Social identity processes are fundamental to understanding collective behavior, and

the contributing framework for my work examining refugee identity. According to social

identity theory, the self-concept is comprised of a personal-identity which includes idiosyncratic characteristics such as bodily attributes, abilities, psychological traits, and interests, as well as a social identity incorporating salient group classifications. Social identification has been conceptualized as that aspect of a person's self-concept based on their group memberships; it is a person's definition of self in terms of some social group membership with the associated value connotations and emotional significance (e.g., a self-definition as "us women" or "we African refugees") (Turner, 1999). These tenets of social identity theory stipulate that the social category a person identifies or feels they belong to defines who the person is (Turner, 1982), partially answering the question, "Who am I?" (Stryker & Serpe, 1982; Turner, 1982).

Hall (1997) posited that, in addition to being what is narrated within one's own self, identity, "as a process, as a narrative, as a discourse…is always told from the position of the other" (p. 49). This notion of identity is further explicated in social identity theory in that the definitions of others and of the self are largely "relational and comparative" but also of various degrees, depending on how positively individuals view certain personas (Tajfel & Turner, 1985, p. 6). In thinking about the processes of flight, residence in refugee camps, and permanent resettlement in welcoming nation-states, this study stands in an opportune position to explicate what happens to identities violently challenged and/or forever changed during communication between the former refugees and host communities.

This dissertation seeks to elucidate identity construction and negotiation among former African women refugees in the specific context of forced transnational migration and permanent resettlement in the United States. An alternative formative approach, the symbolic interaction approach, is also relevant for explicating former African women refugees' identity formation in contexts-in-flux, as it posits that the self and the social

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environment shape each other through communication. Symbolic interactionism focuses on the nature of interaction—the dynamic social activities taking place between persons (Charon, 1979)—and rests on the assumptions that the self is defined in term of others who exist outside of the individual person doing the experiencing and that knowledge is acquired through interaction with others. This also centers communication as the guiding force in identity formation.

Blumer (1969) outlined three premises of social interactionism: humans act towards things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them; the meanings of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with others; these meanings are handled in and modified through an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things that he/she encounters. Scholars of symbolic interactionism examine how people create meaning through social interaction, how they present and construct the self (or identity), and how they define situations of social interaction. Central to this study is the idea of how people present and construct the self. According to Mead (1934) individuals can acquire identity only in interaction with others, thus the resonance of this perspective with my interrogation of former African women refugees' identity formation in the process of forced migration and resettlement in the United States. The process of forced migration and resettlement forces them to form identities in contexts not of their choosing and ones that are often very different from what the women refugees were used to in their countries of origin.

More recently in the discipline of communication studies, Ting-Toomey (2005) has stated that "identity refers to our reflective views of ourselves and other perceptions of our self-images—at both the social identity and personal identity levels" (p. 212). Harré (1979) theorized the self as two-sided, made up of a social being (person) and a personal being

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(self), learned through a history of interaction with other people. From this perspective, self-categories define people as unique in terms of their individual differences from other (in-group) persons. Social identities include cultural or ethnic membership, gender, sexual orientation, social class, age or (dis)ability, while personal identities can encompass "any unique attributes that we associate with our individuated self in comparison to those of others" (Ting-Toomey, 2005, p. 22). Given the uncertainty created in contexts of civil strife encountered by refugees, with markers of identity such as cultural and ethnic membership often used as the raison d'être for violence, how would these self-categories fare?

The goal of this study is to uncover the socio-cultural, historical, and political forces at play in former African women refugees' narratives of resettlement in non-gateway cities in the Southwestern and Midwestern United States. As outlined in this section, various scholarly disciplines have approached the concept of identity using different perspectives. In the next section, I discuss identity as conceptualized in the field of intercultural communication in which this study is situated.

Identity in Intercultural Communication

Early approaches to the concept of identity in the intercultural communication field were offered primarily through the lenses of positivist and interpretive paradigms, while critical perspectives have emerged in more recent decades (Mendoza, Halualani, & Drzewiecka, 2002). The positivist and post-positivist approaches within the social scientific paradigm explored identity as static categorizations, which implied that all members of a group invoke the same set of distinct meanings and symbols in the same way and to the same degree, leading to an understanding of the behavior expected of such members and remaining a mainstay of our discipline (Halualani, 2000). Such studies have helped shape our understanding of specific national or ethnic identities and their resultant communication

behavior. Examples of such studies relevant to this dissertation are ones focusing on women from the developing world who are repeatedly presented as a monolithic whole. However, in this approach the reliance on scientific methods such as surveys "may not necessarily explore the nature of cultural identification, or what it means to be a member of a particular ethnic group" (Halualani, 2000, p. 584).

Intercultural communication scholars who conduct research from interpretive and/or critical perspectives have provided a different set of lenses from which to interrogate identity. Scholars such as Mendoza et al. (2002), for example, have pointed to the possibility of further exploration that would engage cultural identification from a more historically and politically situated view. Indeed, this has been partially achieved by interpretive intercultural communication scholars. Most research in this paradigm has focused on cultural identities in terms of shared meanings and values (Carbaugh, 1990; Collier & Thomas, 1988; Hecht, 1993; Hecht, Ribeau, & Alberts, 1989; Philipsen, 1975). Moving beyond "demonstrated identity practices (using the language code, referring to symbolic forms, and creating shared interpretations)" (Mendoza et al., 2002), p. 34), interpretivist scholars give prominence to historical, contextual, and power-laden aspects of identity in their discussions of the ascribed self (or the social definitions and perceptions of "who I am") and the avowed self (one's self-perception) (Collier & Thomas, 1989). This study, which interrogates narratives of former African women refugees is well situated within the interpretivist paradigm's focus on historical, contextual, and power-laden aspects of the ascribed and avowed self because of the socio-cultural and political forces that give rise to the categorization of refugee and the processes of transnational adaptation post-resettlement in the United States.

When discussing the progressive move in the intercultural communication approach to identity, Mendoza et al. (2002) have discussed the limitations of past intercultural

communication research that focused "on the co-construction of identity through social interaction (the interdependent nature of avowal and ascription processes) at the expense of larger politicized forms of social ascription (governmental/state categories of identity, historical myths about who groups are, a group's constructions of authenticity), forms that may further explain the enacted communication practices and place them in a dialogic context between structural constructions of identity and re-created group identities by cultural members themselves" (p. 34). As Mendoza et al. (2002) have argued, the value of such analysis "lies in its potential for revealing new analytical insights about cultural groups" (p. 35).

A substantial number of studies in the discipline of communication explore the relationship between identity and communication, emerging from Goffman's (1959) formative work and continuing in research that seeks to understand how individuals "perform" their selves (Jung & Hecht, 2004). For example, Jung and Hecht (2004) posited that a person's ascribed identities are related to both the person's self-image and their social behavior in social interaction with others. Communication researchers interested in the interplay of identity, social interaction, and social relations study the direct connection between communication and identity. In intercultural communication, Ting-Toomey (1999) focused on identity negotiation, and Collier (1988, 1997, 1998; Collier & Thomas, 1988) studied the co-creation of identity in relationships to others and emergent in communication. Hecht, Jackson, and Ribeau (2003) employed the communication theory of identity to show that communication builds, sustains, and transforms identity, while at the same time, identity is expressed through communication. "These communicative perspectives on identity note the close association between communication and identity, especially, the influences of communication on identity" (Jung & Hecht, 2004, p. 266). This study, which focuses on

narratives of identity, is informed by Hecht's (1993) communication theory of identity, Jung and Hecht's (2004) identity gaps, as well as Ting-Toomey's (1993) identity negotiation theory as explicated in the next section.

Communication theory of identity. The communication theory of identity (CTI) conceives identity as communicative; that is, identity as constructed, maintained, and re-created through a communicative process (Hecht, 2005). This theory developed from a series of projects describing the intra-ethnic and interethnic communication of African American and Mexican American groups. Their findings led researchers to conclude that "communication was an *enactment* of identity" (Hecht, 2005, p. 26). CTI integrated social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1985, 1986) and identity theory in the tradition of symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969; Hecht, 1993; Mead, 1934). To explain the communicative nature of identity, Hecht, Collier and Ribeau (1993) proposed two ways in which communication is integral to the construction of identity. The first is in social interactions when individuals' usage of symbolic meanings is linked to understandings of self. The second is in individuals' situating themselves in socially recognizable categories, and through social interaction, confirming and validating the relevance of these categories to them. In these social interactions and categorizations, there are various expectations and motivations; expectations that are specific to certain identities and influence individuals' communication strategies. "Hence, identity is internalized from, as well as externalized to, social interaction through expectations attached to identities and other social categories" (Hecht, Warren, Jung, & Krieger, 2005, p. 262).

CTI, taking into consideration the direct connection between identity and communication, has advanced the idea of a multiplicity of loci of identity (Hecht, 1993; Hecht et al., 2003; Hecht et al., 2005). Borrowing from postmodernism notions of the self,

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Hecht et al. (2005) labeled these loci the personal, enacted, relational, and communal layers. These four frames provide an integrative framework for understanding both the individual and social aspects of self. These four interrelated and interpenetrated layers represent where identity resides. The personal layer characterizes an individual's self-concept—an understanding of how one defines oneself. The enactment layer has communication as the locus of identity, with identity being performed, or expressed in communication. In the relational layer, relationship is the locus of identity. This layer is further broken down into three levels: formation of identity that is influenced by other people's ascriptions in social interaction; identification through relationships with others in social groups; and the unification of two identities (e.g. a couple as a unit) to form a new identity. The communal layer emphasizes group members' shared history and characteristics' role in shaping identity. Hecht (1993) proposed a reading of the four layers as interpenetrated, with one, two, three, or all of them integral to showing various aspects of identity in multiple situations.

A complete analysis of how these frames relate to each other, what CTI refers to as interpenetration or juxtaposition of identities, is best suited for the present study. Specifically, Jung and Hecht (2004) have offered the theoretical construct of identity gaps to help explain the dynamic and fluid aspects of identity in various situations. One way to understand interpenetration of the four frames of identity is to think of them as sometimes being contradictory or exclusive to each other. The authors explained that even when dialectical interpenetration occurs, which is when there is discrepancy between frames (for example a contradiction between the personal and relational frames), the frames still co-exist and work together as part of identity. These discrepancies or contradictions, different from the times when interpenetration involves frames that enhance each other positively, have been identified as a valuable way of explicating the dynamic and fluid nature of identity.

Further, "Identity gaps are defined as discrepancies between or among the four frames of identity" (Jung & Hecht, 2004, p. 268). Identity gaps are unavoidable when individuals communicate, "the issue is the degree and type of gap, as well as the implications of these gaps for social relations" (Jung & Hecht, 2004, p. 268). Researchers have discussed 11 possible identity gaps. In one instance, Jung and Hecht (2004) carried out a study seeking to understand the role of identity in social relationships where they focused on two of these gaps, between personal and relational frames and between personal and enacted frames. For their relevance to this study, I will discuss these two gaps in the following sections.

Personal-relational identity gap. As theorized by Jung and Hecht (2004), this is the discrepancy between an individual's personal identity and ascribed relational identity. It is essentially an incongruity between how one views him/herself and one's perception of how others view him/her. Building upon theories that have dealt with the idea that an individual's identity includes how others see the person, and how often times there are discrepancies in these views that people seek to reduce or avoid (Cooley, 1902; Giesler & Swann, 1999; Hyland, 1987; Mead, 1934; Stryker & Burke, 2000), Jung and Hecht (2004) conceptualized the personal-relational identity gap as "starting from the assumption that others' appraisals are internalized and form part of identity" (p. 269). They go one step further by foregrounding the discrepancies that occur during communication of people's concept of themselves and others' appraisal of them.

Personal-enacted identity gap. A second identity gap identified in previous research posits that one's personal identity can differ from his or her enacted identity (Jung & Hecht, 2004). This means that an individual's self-views and the identities expressed in communication are different. For example, one can think of oneself as impartial but then refuse to engage in a conversation with a person who holds differing political views. Thus,

the enacted identity (refusing to engage in conversation) differs from the self-image (impartiality). This identity gap builds upon ideas about self-presentation, impression management, and private information control but goes beyond active and passive expressions of managing the self to address both expressed and unexpressed selves and the implications they have for identities in communication (Goffman, 1959; Jack, 1999; Petronio, 1991).

As I mentioned earlier, researchers have posited that there are 11 possible identity gaps but so far have explored the personal-enacted identity gap, the personal-relational, the personal-enacted-relational, and the relational-enacted frames (Drummond & Orbe, 2009; Jung, Hecht, & Wadsworth, 2007; Jung & Hecht, 2008; Kam & Hecht, 2009; Urban & Orbe, 2001; Wadsworth, Hecht, & Jung, 2008). One early study that applied the concept of identity gaps is Jung and Hecht's (2004) study where they selected two identity gaps, between personal and relational frames and between personal and enacted identities, and tested these gaps' relationship with communication satisfaction, feeling understood, and conversational appropriateness and effectiveness. On the basis of quantitative methods of measurement, they found high negative correlations between each of the identity gaps and each of the communication outcomes. Specifically, larger identity gaps were associated with less understanding as well as less satisfying, appropriate, and effective communication.

Scholars have also specifically focused on how the contexts of intercultural communication relate to identity issues. Drummond and Orbe (2009) examined identity gaps in intraracial communication encounters. They found that the complexity of these encounters resulted in the manifestation of personal-relational, personal-relational-enacted, or both identity gaps for different ethnicities. What was most important was "that

participants could describe experiencing identity gaps as part of satisfying communication—as long as racial similarities were recognized as salient as any ethnic differences" (p. 86).

In a study that also looked at an intercultural context, Jung, Hecht, and Wadsworth (2007) examined what effects international students' identity gaps formed in interaction with U.S. American students had on their depression levels. The study found significant support for the international students' personal-enacted identity gap having a strong effect on their mental health, and not so much for the personal-relational identity gaps. The authors explained that expressions of the self seem to be more important for mental health than others' appraisal, especially in the case of international students who probably already view U.S. Americans they encounter as possessing inaccurate appraisals that stem from biases and perceived communication limitations.

Identity negotiation theory. Communication researchers have proposed many models and theories dealing with group identity formation and transformation that can be applied to the explication of identity formation processes experienced by immigrants or minority group members (Ting-Toomey, 2005). One of these, the identity negotiation theory (INT), posits that people's identities are asserted, defined, and/or change in mutual communication activities (Ting-Toomey, 1999). The negotiation part basically then is "the exchange of verbal and nonverbal messages between two or more communicators in maintaining, threatening, or uplifting the various socio-cultural group-based identity images of the other *in situ*" (p. 48). Pertinent to this dissertation then is the view that in a multicultural-immigrant society, which is where the former African women refugees find themselves post-resettlement in the United States, "ethnic and cultural identity salience issues and intergroup concerns play a prominent role in the INT framework" (Ting-Toomey, 2015p. 419).

Similar to CTI's claim that identity is constructed, maintained, and re-created through a communicative process (Hecht, 2005), INT's first core assumption posits that "the core dynamics of people's group membership identities (e.g., cultural and ethnic memberships) and personal identities (e.g. unique attributes) are formed via symbolic communication with others" (Ting-Toomey, 2015, p. 419). One other assumption addresses identity consistency and change over time. It posits that in culturally familiar environments, individual identities tend to remain consistent whereas in culturally unfamiliar environments, individual identities tend to experience change or identity chaos (Ting-Toomey, 2005). This identity change is "a sense of identity dislocation and stretch in the spiraling cross-boundary intercultural contact experiences" (Ting-Toomey, 2005, p. 22). Many factors influence this socialization process including the climate in the host culture towards new arrivals, individuals' own expectations of the migration experience, and the types of social networks already available in the place of settlement. I should point out that these types of factors have been explored in research about immigrants, but not so much to highlight the experiences of resettled refugees from Africa (Kim, 1995, 2001; Ting-Toomey, 1999). In the next section, I shift the focus to review relevant literature that has examined the concept of gender identity in particular, as gender is a central category of analysis in this dissertation.

Gender and Identity

Gender is an important structuring category in society that has long functioned to explain individuals' understandings of being either a boy or a girl (Volman & ten Dam, 1998). In particular, discussions of gender identity have centered on the question of gender inequality. Since the 1970s in the United States, the question of gender has been advanced by a feminist perspective. This approach to gender was deployed as an alternative to the narrative of biology (sex) as a basis of explanation for the perceived differences between

men and women, "and to assert, instead, that meanings attributed to sex differences are defined in historically specific ways through culture and politics and, as 'man-made' interpretations, secure male dominance over women" (McCann & Kim, 2003, p. 3). Rubin (2006) introduced the theory of a sex/gender system in a formative essay in 1975 that builds upon sex differences as the basis of later gender conditioning that produces the woman as subordinate through various kinship systems.

Countering this earlier presumed natural progression from sex roles to gender are feminists who assume a poststructuralist view (or their work does, even if they themselves do not avow that label). One of the influential scholars in this perspective is Butler (1990), who challenged the sex-gender binary and introduced the concept of gender "performativity." In this thread, postmodernism, queer theory, transgendered politics, and activism by intersexed persons have provided a complexity to the women's movement by introducing an often overlooked linkage between bodies, sexes, sexualities, and genders (McCann & Kim, 2003).

Further, within feminism itself, the concept of difference arose from women of color who challenged the universalized version of gender, which assumed all women are struggling for the same causes, and only against men. Sex and gender were the focus of much literature that was being produced in the Western academy, mostly by white women. Spelman (1988) argued that "such a focus obscures the difference in women's experiences as women that are shaped by the interconnections of race, ethnicity, nation, and class with gender" (as cited in McCann & Kim, 2003, p. 5). This study focusing on the experiences of former African women refugees stems from these critiques of earlier feminist research and foregrounds the voices of a group of women of color not often heard from in discussions of the lives of women in our world.

The feminist discursive approach to gender identity, arising from poststructuralist perspectives, recognizes the concept of gender as socially constructed, subject to change, and riddled with internal contradictions. "Gender is defined as a layered concept; it is not only a category of individual identity, but also of symbolic constructions and a dimension of social relations and social organization" (Volman & ten Dam, 1998, pp. 531-532). Moreover, gender interacts in complex ways with other identity categories such as ethnicity, class, and age. This interconnectedness of identities is exemplified by the ongoing challenges to the description of a shared "common experience" among women; with women of color and those from third world countries disputing the dominance of white and Western women's issues in feminism. This in turn has brought to the forefront alternative narratives based on women of color and third world women's experiences, focusing on identity politics. "Identity politics are based on the premise that those who experience specific configurations of oppression are best suited to articulate an adequate theory of that oppression and an adequate strategy for change" (McCann & Kim, 2003, p. 7). This is illustrated by Basu (2003), who posited that issues of poverty and basic needs are often the ones raised by women from the non-industrialized countries, as opposed to Western feminism's focus on individual sexual issues.

To overcome this perceived dilemma, Basu advocated for looking at women's issues in specific historical times and places. Hearkening to this call and to aid my exploration of former African women refugees' negotiation of identity in post-resettlement, I turn to a discussion of feminist standpoint theory, Walker's (1983; 2004) womanism theory, and Ogunyemi's (1985; 1996) African womanism theory.

Feminist standpoint theory (FST) is an extensive and versatile approach to theorizing about women (Dow & Wood, 2006; Harding, 2004; Heckman, 1997; Wood, 2005). Its

premise is that "knowledge is situated and perspectival and that there are multiple standpoints from which knowledge is produced" (Heckman, 1997, p. 342). FST understands identity from women's perspectives of their own lives, and situates power as residing in agency (Fraser, Brown, Wright & Kiruswa, 2012). In the tradition of much feminist theorizing, FST has political inclinations, recognizing that "power relations authorize designating distinct social groups and, following that, privileged or subordinate status for members of those groups" (Wood, 2005, p. 63). This ascription of a particular social positioning is instructive for my dissertation on how former African women refugees are positioned/position themselves within the larger immigration and refugee resettlement discursive structure in the United States.

Feminist standpoint theory also focuses on the ways that social location shapes knowledge and allows for a critique of existing power relations and the inequality produced in individuals' lives (Wood, 2005). FST proposes a number of key arguments. First, society is structured hierarchically by power relations, resulting in unequal social locations for women and men. With men being in the privileged group and women in the marginalized group, their experiences are different, and in turn shape these two groups' knowledge and understanding of cultural life. Second, knowledge that is "more accurate" or "less false" is generated within the marginalized social location because of a number of reasons. Those in privileged social locations are unlikely to recognize the inequalities that enable their privilege; marginalized group members experience a "double consciousness"—they understand their own social location and that of the dominant group, as opposed to the reverse being true; and because of their subordinated social location, members of this group would be more likely to question the power imbalance status quo.

Third, the double consciousness generated by their social location (of outsider-within) is an asset for subordinated group members. Their ability to be at once outside of the dominant group, but also within it, allows for close scrutiny and therefore understanding of the dominant group; knowledge that is inaccessible to members of privileged groups. Fourth, having a standpoint also involves a critical understanding of social location and group membership and the experiences that arise from these, as constituent of and re-created within "larger social and political contexts and, specifically, discourses" (Wood, 2005, p. 62). These standpoints arise from some form of political struggle that counters the dominant worldview. Lastly, there is multiplicity of standpoints shaped by membership in various social groups, and individuals can enact all of these standpoints in varying degrees in disparate communicative contexts.

The epistemic advantage afforded to those who have an outsider-within social location is a view FST shares with black feminist theories (Bowell, n.d.). It is best captured in hooks's (1984) description of growing up in Kentucky: "Living as we did—on the edge—we developed a particular way of seeing reality. We looked both from the outside in and from the inside out…we understood both" (p. vii). Alice Walker (1983; 2004) advanced her theory of womanism specifically as an approach that focused on black women's identity and commitment to gender issues. As a response to the absence of minority voices in early feminist theorizing, Walker's theory implies that "womanists are concerned with not only overcoming gender discrimination, but also discrimination based on race and socioeconomic status" (Arndt, 2000, p. 7). A similar, yet distinctive theory focusing on black women is Ogunyemi's African womanism (1985; 1996). Though it has parallels to Walker's womanism theory, African womanism sought to include African peculiarities missing in both feminism and African-American womanism. To the author, the question surrounding gender can be

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dealt with only in the context of other issues relevant to African women (Arndt, 2000). Going beyond the "race-class-gender approach" (Arndt, 2000, p. 72), those identifying as African womanists must deal with and incorporate into their philosophy issues including "interethnic skirmishes and cleansing...religious fundamentalism…the language issue, gerontoc-racy and in-lawism (Ogunyemi, 1997, p. 4).

This study sought to interrogate the lived experiences of former African women refugees in the context of resettlement in the United States and incorporation of these two black-women-centered theories necessary. These two related theories of womanism are important for an in-depth analysis of black women's lived experiences because they allow room for acts of oppression and resistance to be exposed and advocate the inclusion of the traditionally oppressed and marginalized, as well as promote consciousness-raising for both oppressor and oppressed (Patton, 2006). To this end, this dissertation foregrounds the standpoint(s) of the former African women refugees in its interrogation of their negotiation of identity post-resettlement in the United States.

Refugee and Resettlement Policies

Since the 1950s, when the United Nations' effort to oversee the relocation of refugees officially began, resettlement of forcibly displaced individuals has become an important undertaking requiring coordination between international and national faith-based and not-for-profit organizations. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) is the body mandated by the international community to oversee this undertaking. The UNHCR was formed in 1951 by the United Nations General Assembly to resettle European refugees left homeless after World War II (United Nations High Commission for Refugees, 2011). Article I (a) (2) of the *1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees* defines a refugee as a person

Who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion,

nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside

the country of his [or her] nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is

unwilling to avail himself [or herself] of the protection of that country. (p. 2)

The UNHCR is mandated to assist people who cannot return home, "to find them

homes either in the asylum country where they are living or in third countries where they can

be permanently resettled" (UNHCR, 200, p. 2). However, resettlement is not the top option

when handling the cases of refugees by the UNHCR. The top two aims of refugee-

processing programs are repatriation and asylum in neighboring countries from where the

refugees can easily go back to their native countries if, or when, the circumstances that led to

flight in the first place are reversed or eliminated. Many of the world's refugees are actually

found in asylum countries, often neighboring countries, and many remain in those countries'

refugee camps for decades. The refugees who are resettled are usually identified by the

UNHCR, which in turn works with nation states that have agreed to admit them and

ultimately grant them permanent settlement. Out of the 10.5 million identified refugees in

the world, the UNHCR resettles only about one percent (UNHCR, 2015).

According to the UNHCR, few countries in the world participate in the resettlement

of refugees. Australia, Canada, the Nordic countries, and the United States are regarded as

the traditional countries of refugee resettlement. In recent years there has been an increase

in the number of countries involved in resettlement in Europe and Latin America, mostly on

a year-to-year ad hoc basis (Gaber, Gaber, Vincent, & Boellstorff, 2004). The United States

conventionally has been the largest refugee resettlement country in the world. In 2015, the

United States admitted and resettled 69,933 refugees (Zong & Batalova, 2015).

The treatment of refugees resettled in the United States is ruled by the Refugee Act of 1980. In INA § 101 (a) (42) (A), 8 U.S.C § 1101 (a) (42) (A), the United States defines a refugee as:

> Any person who is outside any country of such person's nationality or, in the case of a person having no nationality, is outside any country in which such person last habitually resided, and who is unable or unwilling to return to, and is unable or unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of that country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.

Under US law, a refugee is someone who has been determined to meet the refugee criteria, either overseas or in a refugee camp, by US immigration officials. Then if there are sufficient visas available and discretion is favorably exercised, they enter the US on a refugee visa. Refugees can also be determined to meet the definition while within the United States. However, the process and legal terminology is different because they may then, on a purely discretionary basis, be granted asylum, either in an affirmative application or as a successful defense in deportation proceedings.

Prior to the Refugee Act of 1980, the U.S. government handled refugee resettlement on an ad hoc basis. U.S. resettlement processing involves a series of interviews with a number of agencies. Most applicants, but not all, are first interviewed by the UNHCR. If the UNHCR refers the applicant's case to the U.S. authorities, they will have interviews with staff of a Resettlement Support Center (RSC) working on behalf of the U.S. Department of State, and then with staff of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Only the DHS can make the final decision about whether the applicant will be accepted for U.S. resettlement (UNHCR, 2013). The federal agency in the U.S. Department of Health and

Human Services that addresses the issues of refugees is the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) that was established by the Refugee Act of 1980. Apart from maintaining the U.S. refugee database, the ORR is charged with providing each state with the funds to help refugees in their transition to life in the United States (Gaber et al., 2004). Subsequently, at the state level, federal funds are disbursed to private organizations that help refugees settle in the United States with the goal of achieving economic self-sufficiency within four months (Gaber et al., 2004).

Determination of eligibility for refugee status in the United States is a process that can take up to two years, leaving individuals in a state of uncertainty and statelessness for long periods of time (Park & Buchanan, 2017). It is determined on a case-by-case basis by the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS, formerly known as the Immigration and Naturalization Service, INS). After being found eligible under section 101 (a) (42) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), each refugee case is assigned a private volunteer agency (for example, Catholic Charities or Lutheran Immigrant and Refugee Service) that provides sponsorship and initial resettlement assistance into a host community.

The number of refugees from a particular country resettled in the United States in a particular year is largely determined by a constellation of factors: world events; the number of refugees the U.S. President, in consultation with Congress, determines will be admitted in an upcoming fiscal year; and the resources and capabilities available to the private charitable organizations that handle refugee resettlement at the state level (Gaber et al., 2004). For example, in the last few years, the resettlement numbers of Iraqi refugees have increased, as have the special services offered to them by the U.S. State Department. From 202 and 608 Iraqi refugees resettled in 2006 and 2007 respectively, the U.S. Refugees Admissions Program (USRAP) increased resettlement numbers for this group, with up to 8,000 Iraqi

refugees resettled in the United States in 2009 and 2010 (Bernstein, Epstein, Faust, & Hassouri, 2010). In addition, in 2008 the U.S. government set up priority settlement and special immigrant visa programs and doubled the grant for newly arrived Iraqi refugees in 2010. These special policies extended to a particular group of refugees can be read in the context of the recent global events and the ties the U.S. government has to Iraq and the Iraqi people due to the recently ended war that began in 2003.

Refugees exist within the framework of international and national immigration laws that determine their status and the rights and privileges to which they are entitled. Given this state of affairs, refugees' conceptualization of who they are and where they belong is different from other groups of migrants, as they are forced to flee their homes and exist in a state of transnational dislocation for as long as the institutions of benevolent nation-states take to process their applications. These experiences of dislocation and adaptation, occasioned by forced displacement, position the refugee in a different context than the immigrant who leaves his or her country voluntarily for different reasons. In the next section, I look at literature that address refugee acculturation and adaptation, with a focus on how transnationalism engendered by these experiences affects identity.

Transnationalism and Its Impact on Immigrant/Refugee Identity. An upsurge in international migration, coupled with advances in communication technology, has led to an increased awareness of the interconnectedness of human experiences and social relations across national contexts. People are now able to communicate with each other and carry on social relations far beyond the borders of a particular nation-state. These experiences and relations have given rise to the concept of transnationalism to explicate the increased connections beyond, and not between or within nation-states. With this increasing interconnectedness, how migrants and refugees perceive themselves and others is an

important factor in academic studies that seek to understand transnationalism and immigrant identity construction.

In general, the study of transnationalism has led to an understanding of the myriad ways immigrants' lives are impacted by the experience of migration. Research on contemporary immigrant communities has posited that these maintain a split positioning of duality in two countries (Ghorashi, 2004). For instance, when Basch, Glick-Schiller, and Blanc (1994) studied Caribbean and Filipino immigrants to the United States, they described how these migrants' social, economic, political and cultural connections are spread between their country of origin and country of settlement. The authors explained these connections using the concept of transnationalism:

> We define 'transnationalism' as the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multistranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement. We call these processes transnationalism to emphasize that many immigrants today build social fields that cross geographic, cultural, and political borders. (p. 7)

According to Anonyuo (2006), immigrants live transnational lives when they maintain trans-border social ties, participate simultaneously in multi-local social relations, and engage in self-transforming identity negotiations that also impact their host societies and their communities of origin.

This approach to transnationalism draws on a rethinking of the concept of identity. Rather than viewing identity as fixed and deterministic, it focuses on the processes involved in constructing, imagining, and changing identities. "In doing so, researchers who take this view emphasize the workings of intersecting systems of social inequality in identity construction and highlight identities in contexts by focusing on the interactive processes

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between individuals' identity practices and macro identity dynamics in society" (Park, 2007, p. 202).

Contemporary immigrants possess dual citizenship and dual lives, sustaining their connection to their country of origin through remittances, visits to family, and continued participation in social, economic, and political matters. In this dissertation, I focus on the refugee population in particular, taking into consideration that refugee populations would offer a richer understanding of transnationalism given that the circumstances of the refugee experience stem from displacement (in many cases violent and permanent) from their country of origin or the place they call home, conditions of statelessness and submission to the conditions of international and national laws of host countries beyond their control, and the ascription of the status and identity of refugees in a host country.

Another set of research studies on immigrants' identities has taken into consideration the immigrants' pre-migration experiences to discuss how the history and social structures of the immigrants' countries of origin shape the way immigrants understand and interact with social, economic and cultural forces found in the host nations (Burns, 1999; Charles, 1992; Levitt, 2001; Park, 2007; Waters, 1999). Studies in this area provide insights into how pre-migration experiences, interpretations and actions of migrants influence their interpretations and actions post-migration leading to adaptation, wellbeing/health, and the decision whether to stay or leave (Bürgelt, Morgan, & Pernice, 2008). This inclusion of immigrants' pre-migration experience provides a more nuanced interrogation of the processes involved in the construction, negotiation, and reproduction of individual and group identities. The study of refugee communities from this angle would provide a comparable inquiry into how forced displacement, statelessness, and refugee labeling are implicated in the construction, negotiation, and reproduction of individual and group identities.

Other studies of transnational identity construction processes have discussed the bi-(or multi-) local organizing as well as multilayered and fluid interpretations of identities among many immigrants who have "their feet in two societies" (Chaney, 1979; Park, 2007). However, this inquiry has not been extensively extended into studies on refugee resettlement, which offers a unique context given that most refugees come from countries experiencing sustained conflict, and may not have access to this one geographic place anymore but may maintain links to multiple localities across borders.

The connection immigrants have with their countries of origin is often ongoing and can affect in varying degrees their daily lives and communities through the economic and social connections they keep with communities back home (Park, 2007; Portes, Guarnizo, & Landolt, 1999). These transnational flows are made possible by newer, cheaper, and more efficient modes of communication and transportation. In addition, shifting political and economic circumstances in both host and countries of origin also contribute to immigrants' transnational experiences. They have enabled migrants' capacity for political organization in both countries, advanced a more positive view of emigrants in their countries of origin, and highlighted the impact of migrant remittances on local economies and labor markets (Vertovec, 2001).

The transnational connections have significant socio-cultural, economic, and political impact on immigrants and their communities in host nations and nations of origin. According to Levitt (2001), many immigrants to the United States live in extensive flows of "social remittances" that concurrently shape their current lives as well as contribute to changes in their communities of origin. According to Levitt and Lamba-Nieves (2011)

Migrants from the developing world bring with them social remittances—defined as

ideas, know-how, practices, and skills—that shape their encounters with and

integration into their host societies. They also send back social remittances that

promote and impede development in their countries of origin. (para 3)

Socially and culturally, many migrant communities maintain linkages and exchanges with

their countries of origin such as marriage alliances, religious activity, media and commodity

consumption. Specifically, transnational connections have a bearing on the practices of

constructing, maintaining, and negotiating collective identities (Portes et al., 1999; Smith and

Guarnizo, 1998).

In addition to social remittances, economic remittances—or the direct financial

assistance sent by refugees to relatives and communities in their country of origin—are

another source of transnational flows. Economically, it has a powerful impact, as the

economies of numerous developing countries are increasingly reliant on remittances that

exceed $60 billion globally each year. The money sent by immigrants supports families, but

it may also progressively rework gender relations, support education and the acquisition of

professional skills, and facilitate local community development (Vertovec, 2004).

The political impact centers on issues of belonging as well as involvement with

political and social movements. This could be with regard to questions of citizenship and

homeland politics (Vertovec, 2004). Immigrants claim membership in more than one place,

leading to the holding of dual or multiple citizenships by immigrants whose countries of

origin allow this. According to Itzigsohn (2000), migration movements have always brought

tension to the idea of citizenship since "the guaranteeing of citizenship rights for the

inhabitants of a certain territory defined by the political boundaries of a state has been the

idea that has structured modern citizenship" (p. 26). Thus increased international migration

has given rise to a unique re-negotiation of the notion of citizenship and loyalty to nation-

states, reconfiguring how we look at borders and belonging, and impacting the policies and laws of many countries regarding immigration.

These discussions of the condition and impact of belonging to neither here nor there for immigrants can be further explored by expanding the scope to include refugees. How can the notion of transnationalism be extended to the refugee experience given that the conditions for movement and the ties to their home country are more complex than those of voluntary migrants? This dissertation examined former African women refugees' experiences to enhance this understanding and provide grounds for comparative approaches between migrants in general and women refugees in particular within the literature on transnationalism. The next section discusses relevant literature focusing on refugee experience with a focus on the gendered experiences of former African women refugees.

Gender, Identity, and the Refugee Experience

Refugees by definition are individuals displaced for reasons beyond their control, often unable to return to their countries of origin, and either living in refugee camps in neighboring countries or resettled in third countries, often in the West. As Harrell-Bond and Voutira (2007) point out, refugees today have largely been reduced to invisibility in research. According to these scholars and others involved in the Refugee Studies Programme, this lack of refugee voices is the result of silencing by aid bureaucracies and governments (Indra, 1989). This continued absence of refugee voices in research is compounded by challenges faced by researchers trying to access "the 'refugee' as a *persona*, as a *person*, and as a public *perception* within spaces that are visible and identifiable" (p. 283). Given all these challenges, it is imperative to engage in scholarly research that foregrounds the voices of refugees in the context of globalization, as well as changing root causes and numbers of continued displacement.

The research on African women refugees in particular has focused primarily on women from sub-Saharan Africa and has examined the asylum process within Africa (Schafer, 2002), life in refugee camps (Ager, Ager, & Long, 995; Daley, 99; Kibreab, 1995), the uses of group counseling for traumatized East African women (Loewy, Williams & Keleta, 2002; Kumsa, 2008), the role of religion in the lives of refugee women in the West (De Voe, 2002; McMichael, 2002), educational experiences of adolescent refugees (Mugisha, 2015; Nwosu, 2014; Sallu, 2012), and asylum and resettlement in North America (McSpadden & Moussa, 1993). These studies foreground the differing impact of gender identity in discussions of the refugee experience. However, these studies are not carried out in the discipline of intercultural communication, and neither have they focused on resettlement in small cities in the Southwestern and Midwestern United States, geographical places that have a unique socio-cultural and political history in respect to the issue of migrant communities.

In this section I discuss relevant research across disciplines that has focused on African refugees and explored the impact of gender on their experiences of asylum and resettlement. Much of the research on women refugees is typically either applied work or work intended to have applied impact, with topics closely linked to policy and programs. For instance, much research focusing on women engages traditional women issues like health and diet, basic protection issues, women's employment, education, childcare, and language training (Indra, 1989). Studies on policy and programs tend to interrogate the material life of refugees in particular places focusing on problematic issues with the aim of suggesting solutions for the future that would ensure better standards of living for the refugees. For example, Ager, Ager, and Long (1995) conducted a study on the differential impact of assistance policies and programs on Mozambican men and women refugees in

Malawi. They found that because of underlying factors such as unequal access to education, failure of vocational training for income generating activities, and the reality of heavier work burdens on women, any assistance policies put in place generally reinforced the underlying gender inequalities where women were always disadvantaged, and their lot did not improve. Even though the policies and programs aimed to move the refugees from assistance to development, men benefitted more than women did, and the women's circumstances did not change.

Similarly, Armstrong (1988) studied the wellbeing of refugees at a Tanzanian planned refugee settlement. The surrounding local community imputed a privileged identity on the refugees because of their perception of the relative wealth of settlement programs which were generous in land allocation, provision of physical and social infrastructure, and delivery of a range of social and economic services exceeding the levels of the surrounding poor communities. However, even with the provision of these generous material resources, actual living standards and conditions were low, and the refugees did not perceive these settlements as desirable at all.

Another group of research studies has interrogated strategies refugees enact to cope with life in the asylum and resettlement process. Given new environments loaded with practices that seem alien, refugees have been known to find ways to assert their known way of life. De Voe (2002) examined how the religious practice of wearing a *hijab* was used by parents and other adult members of the Somali community to define ethnic boundaries and to enforce gender-based ethical and appropriate behavior for young Somali women. Utilizing a multi-layered approach, she explained that the wearing of the *hijab* served to act as a marker of identity which at the same time disciplined the conduct of the Somali young women in the new refugee resettlement environment, tying them to a desired moral code.

The findings of this study have been supported in research on first generation refugee communities where particular cultural practices are enacted as a way to cope with the new socio-cultural environment the refugees find themselves in.

In the same vein, McMichael (2002) investigated Islam's role in the lives of Somali refugee women in Melbourne, Australia. She interrogated the ways in which this religious practice provided a "home" (not of the physical kind, but conceptualized as a mobile anchor) for these women as they resettled in a new country. She also discussed how Islam provided emotional support for these women as they continuously faced the trauma of resettlement. McMichael (2002) also tackled the stereotyping of Islam by highlighting the diversity of Islamic ideologies and practices as outlined by these women's discussions of their religion.

Additional studies have explored how the socially constructed category of gender informs the experiences of men and women in the asylum and resettlement process. Daley's (1991) study among Burundian refugees in Tanzania offered an alternative reading of the refugee experience that until then had generalized the plight, number, and condition of women in refugee communities, focusing on the often dire stories of sexual exploitation and abuse. The study sought to explicate how processes of displacement and settlement affected gender roles and the reconstruction of the household in this new environment. Daley (1991) found that displacement had not changed culturally-defined gender roles. This was aided by factors such as presence of extended kin networks that worked to continue social relations, the deteriorating material conditions of displaced women, the complacency of the donor organizations that perpetuated this gender ideology, restricted mobility and employment opportunities, language problems, and the entrenchment and intensification of patriarchy in the settlement community.

From a different angle, Kibreab's (1995) study also contributed to this research by showing that counter to the perception of refugee women as victims of displacement, they are quite resilient in the face of adversity and find ways to cope in their new environments. His study assessed the impact of the refugee experience on Eritrean refugee women in Khartoum, northern Sudan. Focusing on rural women who were mostly resettled in refugee reception centers and settlements and urban women who self-resettled in these areas, Kibreab (1995) found that these Eritrean women's traditional roles and responsibilities changed, and they experienced a loss of supportive networks. Regardless of their cultural background and the institutional barriers they faced, they exhibited willingness to embrace change and take on unfamiliar roles, balancing all this in an environment where being a woman connoted being subsumed under male patriarchal authority. However, this was experienced differently by formerly rural and urban dwelling women. The former, who had been involved in life-sustaining production (agriculture) back in Eritrea, found themselves in a position of intensified patriarchal structures reinforced by aid agencies' practice of distribution of food and other materials to heads-of-family, usually men. In contrast, the latter, who had largely been housewives dependent on their husbands, had to adjust to a new social system where the males had fewer opportunities, prompting them to take up any type of work to sustain their families.

McSpadden and Moussa (1993) also elucidated the socio-cultural construction of gender and how it is implicated in shaping the interpretation and response to the socioeconomic transformations common to the refugee experience. Looking at Ethiopian and Eritrean men and women in both Canada and the United States, their study found a common experience of status and shame surrounding the refugee experience informed by both their socialization in Ethiopia/Eritrea and their new lives in Canada and the United

States. The differences were rooted in the gendered experiences of women and men. Regarding status, women were more likely to adjust to the lower status experienced because of their "refugeeness" since they had occasion to form ambivalent feelings towards the traditional Ethiopian/Eritrean expectations of women as wives and mothers. Thus, resettlement in North America, and its attendant greater freedom for women, enabled them to easily negotiate their change in status.

This was not the case for the men, who, because of their privileged status and higher educational and professional prospects in Ethiopia/Eritrea, often floundered as a result of the limited access they had to the same type of life and profession they had enjoyed at home. This change in circumstances was perceived as a threat to their respect and dignity and had negative consequences such as suicide, wife battering, and refusal to do "menial" work and therefore loss of status of breadwinner and/or equal provider, which further exacerbated the problem.

The studies discussed in this section offer a window into the experiences of African refugees in the asylum and resettlement process. This dissertation sought to contribute to this body of literature and to go beyond by bringing back the voices of the refugees absent in research that looks at their lived experiences. A second contribution of this study was the grounding in communication theories and concepts, enabling an understanding of the African women refugees' identity negotiation. Finally, the focus on non-gateway immigrant cities in the United States, which are increasingly used as resettlement destinations, provided an enhanced discussion of host receptivity in areas not previously explored.

It may be argued that all research that aims to elicit the refugee experience is significant in that it "can provide a 'therapeutic' function, as in the process of telling, the refugee has an opportunity to try to make sense out of senseless experiences of uprooting,

large scale violence, individual torture, and traumatized pasts" (Harrell-Bond & Voutira, 2007, p. 29). I argue that this is especially true of women and girls who often are second-class citizens in their own countries, a fact that is true of most Sub-Saharan countries where the system of male patriarchy is entrenched in society. Thus, what the women encounter post-resettlement in the United States are barriers to cross-cultural adaptation that are frequently higher for them than they are for men, due to their childbearing and family care responsibilities (Semlak, Pearson, Amundson, & Kudak, 2008). Within the context of immigration and refugee law, women may face bigger challenges negotiating their place and their new cultural identities than men do.

Chapter 4: Methods

The purpose of this study was to focus on the experiences of resettlement of former African women refugees to explore their narrative construction of identity, negotiation of belonging, and conceptualization of home in their everyday life in mid-size cities in the Southwestern and Midwestern United States. I chose to use the term *former African women refugees* because even though the participants did come to the United States as refugees, at the time of the study they had already become U.S. citizens or at the very least permanent residents with green cards. However, as some participants pointed out, the label *refugee* continued to be ascribed to them by others, making such identity position salient in some situations the participants found themselves even though they did not think of themselves to be refugees at this point of their lives. To underscore this situation, the term *former* African women *refugees* is employed here.

The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: What do the identity frames and gaps enacted in the narratives of former African women refugees reveal about processes of identity negotiation in the context of resettlement in the United States?

RQ2: What salient identity frames and gaps emerge in the former African women refugees' narratives about home and belonging in the context of transnational displacement and resettlement?

In this chapter I present the research design and methodology applied in this study. I explain the various methodological procedures and considerations regarding the collection and analysis of data. The discussion is divided it into five sections, each of which concerns a different component of the methodological process. These sections include (a) justification

of methods, (b) my position/role as a researcher in the study; (c) data collection methods and tools; (d) participants and sampling; and (e) data analysis.

Justification of Methods

As this study was concerned with answering questions relating to participants' identity formation and sense of belonging, a qualitative methodological approach was the most appropriate choice. Different from research carried out utilizing quantitative methods, "qualitative studies focus on the social practices and meanings of people in a specific historical or cultural context" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 122). This statement points to the fact that studies like my dissertation do not have as their purpose a generalization of their findings to the entire population. What they seek to study is the unique qualities of social phenomena in specific contexts. Thus the research strategies utilized in choosing the participants and/or sites to study are often *purposeful*, chosen because "there may be good reason to believe that what 'goes on there' is critical to understanding some process or concept, or to testing or elaborating some established theory" (Schwandt, 1997, as cited in Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 122).

My dissertation's purpose was to examine the lived experiences of African women refugees resettled in the United States. The interpretive paradigm is well suited for this type of research as it concentrates on exploring subjective realities (Mason, 2002). That is, interpretive researchers focus on "understanding the world as it is, and describing the subjective, creative communication of individuals" (Martin & Nakayama, 1999, p. 5). Researchers adhering to the interpretive paradigm typically use qualitative approaches and methods because they often result in data marked by depth, nuance, and complexity regarding the process under investigation. The interpretive perspective allows for, especially

important for this study, an understanding of how individuals construct their identities in various contexts.

As this study is rooted in the interpretivist, subjectivist paradigm and I seek to understand the complex deeper meanings that African women refugees in the Southwestern and Midwestern United States give to their sense of self, home, and belonging, I used both qualitative and focus group interviews. Different types of interviewing are usually employed in nearly all qualitative research because of the interview's "ability to travel deeply and broadly into subjective realities" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 170). Qualitative interviewing allows the researcher to enter into the subjective lives of others, as those others describe their experiences and feelings, in order "to understand the social actor's experience and perspective" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 173). In addition to my own subjective experiences as a woman from Kenya living in the United States, interviewing African women refugees helped me understand their individual, unique sense of identity, belonging, and home.

According to Lindlof and Taylor (2002), interview talk is the rhetoric of socially situated speakers and is always open to the unexpected and emergent. What emerged in the interviews was inextricably linked with my own lived experiences as a Kenyan immigrant woman. That is, the qualitative interviews were a unique, dynamic creation that included the subjectivities of both researcher and participants (Potter, 1996). I employed a collaborative style of interviewing "in which the interests and power of the parties are considered to be of equal value… [and they] invest jointly in the project and "co-author" its purposes and results" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 172).

The use of individual in-depth interviews enabled me to delve into the participants' holistic subjective realities, looking at the social interactions and discourses, past and present, which have shaped their perceptions. To this end, I designed a semi-structured interview

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guide that allowed for a more interactive atmosphere and a reflexive process, and allowed

the participants' reactions, recollections, and responses to guide the overall process. See

Appendix A, Individual Interview Guide.

More specifically, I used the respondent interview approach, in which the

interviewees predominantly "speak only for, and about themselves" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011,

p. 179) as opposed to reporting on others' actions. Contemporary qualitative studies that

utilize interview subjects as "respondents" employ at least one of five general goals for the

respondent interviews as put forth by Paul Lazarsfeld (1944). My study on African women

refugees' identity, belonging, and home best suits the goal that seeks to determine the

influences that shape people's opinions and lead them to act in particular ways (Lindlof &

Taylor, 2002).

Of importance to note is the changing conceptualization of the respondent from one

where he/she offers a subjective reading of his/her interaction with the context to one

where he/she is acknowledged as a site "of multiple, changing, and often contradictory

cultural discourses" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 179). Thus, given its attributes, the

respondent interview best served my integrated approach to interrogating African women's

construction of identity, negotiation of belonging, and conceptualization of home. As

Lindlof and Taylor (2011) postulated, "Respondent interviews are conducted to find out

how people express their views, how they construe their actions, and how they conceptualize

their life world, and so forth… we want them to disclose their subjective standpoints" (p.

179). In addition to respondent interviews, I also conducted focus group interviews; in the

section that follows, I set out my reasons for using focus group interviews for part of my

data collection. The complete protocols for both the individual and focus group interviews

are included in Appendix A.

Focus group interviews. Focus groups are useful because they "exploit the group effect" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 182), which is where the interactions produce information and insights that may not have arisen in other contexts outside of the group interaction (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). The information and insights produced come about because the group dynamic enables stimulation of each member's contribution through the ideas and experiences heard from the others present. Focus groups are useful as they serve as a "social laboratory" where "the production of interpretations, perceptions, and personal experiences can be observed" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 182). The focus groups in my study enabled me to ascertain how African women refugees perceive and talk about their own point of view regarding identity and notions of home and belonging, in relation to other group members' perceptions of the same. My participants also indicated they felt more comfortable talking about issues because they saw that other women in the group were feeling and experiencing similar things, an occurrence similar to what Carey (1994) called the "group effect" where the interaction of the group gives rise to data and insights which would not have been possible otherwise. Hearing other group members speak led to "a kind of 'chaining' or 'cascading' effect—talk links to, or tumbles out of, the topics and expressions preceding it" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 182); this generated rich data for my study. The complete protocols for both the individual and focus group interviews are included in Appendix A.

Role of the Researcher

In carrying out qualitative research, it is important for the researcher to be self-reflexive of the choices made, why they are made in the first place, and the consequences that could arise from these choices. In this section, I address my role as a researcher as well as my identity and how these factors affected the process of carrying out this study. My

subjectivity as a researcher is important to articulate, as the final result of any interpretive study is always a co-construction between researchers and participants. Importantly, my identity influenced the topic I picked, questions I sought to answer in this study, and research strategies I utilized.

In this study of former African women refugees' identity negotiation post-resettlement, I started with the following beliefs and assumptions about the women under investigation: (a) I argue that forced displacement and the refugee resettlement process are an integral part of the re-imagining of identity and belonging brought about by changing global interactions, placing the former African women refugees in a liminal space; (b) the liminality experienced by the former African women refugees is in large part attributable to structural inequalities which profoundly influence how these women enact their identity; and (c) the former African women refugees' enactment of identity is cognizant of various social, cultural, political, and economic contexts; as they employ discursive strategies that alternately display or conceal various aspects of their identity and lived experiences.

In addition to looking at the structural and discursive practices that are implicated in the lives of former African women refugees, I was committed to the "production of knowledge" that would provide these women with "new resources for thinking and acting" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 48) in the social, cultural, and political context of refugee resettlement. Basically, I looked at how former African women refugees in the Southwest and the Midwest communicatively "produce and deliberate knowledge claims and realize their potential for self-understanding and determination" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 48). In exploring the lived experiences of these women, I sought to be an above-board researcher in line with Tracy (2010) who views sincerity as one criteria for quality qualitative research. I wanted my research to be "marked by honesty and transparency about [my] biases, goals,

and foibles as well as about how these played a role in the methods, joys, and mistakes of the research" (Tracy, 2010, p. 841). To this end I articulate my own cultural identity and positionality and how that played a part in my research.

As a woman from Kenya who has been living in the United States for the last twelve years, my interest in researching the lives of former African women refugees is influenced by a number of factors. First, Kenya has for more than three decades been host to a large number of refugees from neighboring countries. Even though most of the refugees are to be found in two refugee camps, Dadaab and Kakuma, in remote and far away parts of the country from where I grew up, a sizeable number of refugees do live in urban areas. That is why I remember having neighbors or being in the same primary and secondary schools as children from Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, and Uganda. I did not dwell much on the historical and socio-political influences that necessitated their presence in my country, but I was at least aware that they were running away from civil strife and/or famine and that they were termed as "different" from the Kenyan children.

Second, my own emigration experience is an important influence on my research interests and my choice to focus on former African women refugees' lives in this study. I had never thought of leaving my home and family and had therefore never paid much attention to what life was really like for those people who, for a myriad of reasons, migrated. But once I was in the United States, I slowly came to the realization that the life of an immigrant is rife with numerous challenges. Still, I never thought much of the refugee resettlement experience because refugees were not very visible in the community in which I first settled once I arrived in the U.S. Moving to New Mexico for my doctoral studies and coming across a sizeable resettled refugee population was the catalyst to my decision to focus on this topic. Of special note is the fact that I volunteered for a local not-for-profit

organization that works with resettled refugees from various countries in the world, and my experiences there with African women refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi, and Rwanda were illuminating. That understanding of the women's lives also informed my academic choice to interrogate the lived experiences of these African women refugees in the United States and to, in turn, act as the conduit to make their voices available to the academic world, policy makers, and their local communities.

Third, life as an international master's and PhD student/candidate, teacher and scholar is eye opening in regard to accessing academic literature about African experiences anywhere in the world, and especially those in the United States. Coming into graduate school, I knew I wanted to write about the experiences of African woman, a task made challenging by the limited number of studies already undertaken. Moreover, most of the studies are written by academics from the global north, which in and of itself is not a negative thing, but brings up questions of accessibility, voice, and representation. Thus begun a quest to try and fill in that gap and work to bring more visibility to African voices and experiences of migration and transnationalism in the communication discipline within the United States and worldwide.

Finally, my self-reflexive journey must include acknowledgment of who I am; the facets of my identity resulting from my nationality, class, ability, and educational level. These attributes shape who I am and in turn have an impact on my research. It is important to recognize that I am a Kenyan woman in her 30s, pursuing her PhD and working as an academic in the United States, who was brought up largely in urban Nairobi by middle-class professional parents. Having come from a fairly stable and conflict-free country and having access to a "normal" life is something that I have to be aware of in relation to my study participants. On average, refugee populations often include individuals who have undergone

unfathomable experiences of horror and some of who have not had the opportunity to pursue adequate educational qualifications. My identity therefore has an effect on how I approached my study and how my participants interacted with me. Being aware of all these factors and continually being self-reflexive ensured that I stayed true to the voices and experiences of my participants, but did not gloss over my own beliefs, assumptions, and biases.

In this section, I explored the basic assumptions that inform this study, my role as a researcher, and how my identity impacted or did not impact the choices I made regarding various aspects of the study as well as my interactions with the participants. Next, I discuss the concepts that informed the analysis and discussion of the data generated.

Data Collection Methods and Tools

Research Sites. The research sites for the two immigrant groups interviewed in the Southwestern and Midwestern United States were selected primarily because I had access to these groups and interpersonal connections with some of the group members. In addition to researcher access, these two sites provided a rich selection of former African women refugees for the following reasons: (a) both cities are small to mid-size with populations of 542,852 and 96,740 respectively; (b) the cities' refugee/immigrant populations are a small percentage of the overall population; and, both cities are non-traditional immigrant gateways in that they do not possess the same established immigrant associations and networks found in the traditional immigrant gateway cities like New York or Los Angeles. Additionally, the two cities represent very different geographical U.S. locations, demographic make-ups, and histories of immigrant settlement/refugee resettlement.

Of special note is the fact that the city in the Southwest is in the only state in the U.S. with a minority group as a demographic majority; persons of Hispanic or Latino descent

made up 46.3 percent of the population while white persons who are not Hispanic made up 40.5 percent (Census Bureau, 2011). This is in direct contrast to the city in the Midwest, where 93.06 percent of the population identifies as non-Hispanic white. The reason why I chose these two cities was to provide a more nuanced exploration of transnational identity. Most studies of immigrants and refugees focuses on one community in one location and I wanted to take a different approach, looking at the lived experiences of former African women refugees on opposite sides of the country.

Participants

In recruiting my participants, I aimed at having a diversity of individuals from various backgrounds. However, given the specific predicament of the population I was working with, I anticipated some uniformity in particular aspects of the participants' lives in the recent past. I used snowball/network sampling to select six participants in the Southwest and 14 in the Midwest United States between 2011 and 2013 for a total of 20 participants. Of those, 10 were from Somalia, four were from Sudan, two each from Rwanda and Burundi/Tanzania (these two participants asked to be identified as coming from these two countries because their parents were Burundian but they were born in a refugee camp in Tanzania), and one each from South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Seven participants were in their 30s, six were in their 40s, three were in their 20s, there was an 18- and 52-year-old respectively, and two did not report their age. Finally, 11 of the participants had been resettled in the United States for more than 10 years, eight had been in the United States between five to 10 years, and one had been in the United States for less than five years. Additionally, a majority of the participants identified as Muslim, with most of those in the Southwest being Christians and those in the Midwest being Muslim except one. This can be explained by the countries they are originally from being either

majority Muslim or majority Christian. The following is a full list of all the participants.

Table 1. Description of Participants

Participant Pseudonym	Age	Country of Origin	Years in the United States	Level of Education	Religious Affiliation
Amaal	26	Somalia	7 years	Grade 8	Muslim
Mina	42	Somalia	14 years	Grade 8	Muslim
Dahabo	30	Somalia	13 years	Not reported	Muslim
Saumu	33	Sudan	12 years	Adult education	Muslim
Robi	30	Sudan	2 years	4 year college	Muslim
Leylo	29	Somalia	12 years	2 years of high school	Muslim
Miski	Not reported	Somalia	11 years	High school diploma	Muslim
Asrar	35	Sudan	9 years	College diploma	Muslim
Aesha	42	Sudan	13 years	Adult education	Muslim
Semira	33	Somalia	13 years	Some master's	Muslim
Waris	42	Somalia	18 years	Some college	Muslim
Kiin	40	Somalia	10 years	High school diploma	Muslim
Ummi	34	Somalia	10+ years	Grade 9	Muslim
Shariifo	45	Somalia	9 years	Adult education	Muslim
Angela	34	South Sudan	10+ years	College diploma	Christian
Vestine	Not reported	Rwanda	5 years	Some high school	Christian
Sylvie	52	Dem Rep Congo	6 years	Adult Education	Christian
Ana	18	Burundi/ Tanzania	5 years	High school student	Christian
Melissa	20	Burundi/ Tanzania	5 years	College diploma	Christian
Honorine	48	Rwanda	6 years	Adult education	Christian

I conducted a total of 15 individual interviews with former African women refugees, 10 in the Midwest and five in the Southwest, and three focus groups comprised of three to six individuals in each city. Due to the limited number of participants to which I had access, some of the interviewees also participated in the focus groups. I asked all my interviewees if they wanted to participate in the focus groups and only included those who agreed to do so. Of the 20 participants, only five did not participate in both the interviews and focus groups.

The question of sample size is considered as a factor that cannot be determined until much later in the research process (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). The researcher should continue sampling until the data stops telling him/her something new. As Lindlof and Taylor (2002) suggest, once this happens, the researcher has reached a critical threshold of interpretive competence. This was my intention all along, and I first began interviewing the initial participants, increasing the number slowly by reference until I could not get any more participants. To my surprise, it was easier for me to recruit in the Midwest than it was in the Southwest, even though I lived there at the time of this study. I address the reasons for this in the next section

Selection of participants and sampling strategies. One critical issue that faces researchers undertaking qualitative studies is the question of how to use their time and resources because, as Lindlof and Taylor (2002) argued, "No qualitative project can capture every event as it unfolds" (p. 120). This calls for deliberate decision making on the researcher's part regarding what to focus on and who to interview. In this section, I outline my deliberate choices concerning how I selected participants for the study.

To gain access to women who might be interested in participating in my study, I employed a snowball/network sampling strategy, coupled with criterion and maximum variation sampling. Snowball/network sampling involves identifying participants through

referrals from others in the population of interest (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Snowball

sampling is useful when a researcher is engaging individuals in a sensitive subject, as my

discussion of life as a former African female refugee turned out to be, as well as when the

population is widely dispersed. The criterion sampling yielded a diverse group of

participants of varying ages, marital status, education levels, and length of stay in the U.S.

post resettlement. Additionally, I took advantage of the former African women refugees'

social networks to ensure as varied a sample as possible. The purpose of maximum variation

in sampling is to ensure as many different characteristics of the sample population as

possible are explored (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011), and I sought to "find exemplars of a wide

range of characteristics" while seeking to address the following question: "what themes

emerge when different participants discuss the issues?" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 123). In

this case, the issue at stake was identity, home and belonging as former African women

refugees in the United States.

Because of the sensitive nature of living in the United States as a refugee, I chose to

use snowball sampling as my sampling strategy. In the Southwest, I initially spoke to a

couple of the women I knew well from the community program for which I volunteered. I

had been helping both women with job searches and going to visit with them in their homes

over the course of a year and a half and so I believed they had a good sense of my

personality and intentions. Thus, the snowball technique would work best because if one

participant met with me and had a positive experience and then told a friend about that

positive experience (a snowball process) the second woman would be likely to feel more

comfortable about talking to the researcher. So I set out to recruit more participants

through my two gatekeepers. My initial two participants agreed to an interview, and after

that, I asked that they ask a few more potential participants to talk to me. This proved easier

said than done. I initially was introduced to about 20 women, some from the community

program that I knew and others who were not part of the program whom I had never met

before. I got in touch with each of the women, explained what my study was about, and

asked if they would be interested in participating. All of them said they would, and I set up

dates and times to go to each of their homes, or a central home, where a few offered to

come to make it easier for me (their words, not mine).

I went to each and every one of the arranged meetings over the course of several

months. I ended up with only six interviews and one focus group in the Southwest because

the rest of the interviewees either got in touch afterwards to ask that I not use their

information, or asked me to stop during the actual interview. It was an outcome I had not

anticipated since I counted many of these women as friends. After much reflection, I came

to realize that perhaps my cultural proximity, prolonged interaction, and lack of incentive

played a part in my ending up with fewer participants than I had planned. I should note that

after informal conversations where it was gently suggested that an incentive would be much

appreciated and spur more enthusiasm in participating, I did offer a gift card. I had initially

not planned to offer any incentives as I did not have the financial means to offer one. After

reflecting on how the process of data collection had gone with this group of women, I made

the decision not to analyze my field notes from my participant observations at this site as

part of my data set.

The case was much different in the Midwest, which came as a surprise. My contact

person in the city was a friend and former colleague who was also part of a community non-

profit in the community. She introduced me to two of the women who were leaders in the

community. These initial participants were the ones who recruited the rest of the

participants at this site for me. They set up meetings and even drove me to the meeting

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places, all except two, at the homes of the participants. Within a week, I was able to conduct 10 individual interviews and two focus groups. I have the two gatekeepers to thank for organizing and following through on all the meetings set up.

Protection: Through the snowball sampling described above, former African women refugees who were interested in participating contacted me in the Southwest, or were put in touch with me by the two gatekeepers in the Midwest. I made sure they all knew who I was, what the study was about, what they would be asked to do, and how the information collected would be used. At the time of the interview or focus groups, I had the women who told me they could read English go through the consent form while I explained the content in Kiswahili for those who told me they did not know how to read English. The consent form explained the privacy, confidentiality, and security of data they could expect in this study. In the focus groups I asked that all keep the information confidential but reminded everyone that I could not guarantee it as I had no control over what other focus group members could do. The last thing I let them know was that they could withdraw at any point of the interviews or focus groups, or even after their conclusions if they did not feel comfortable. A few of the women in the Southwest exercised this right during and after our interviews.

Data Analysis

Once I had collected the data from individual in-depth and focus group interviews, I sent the recordings off to a professional transcribing service. I had managed to secure a grant to cover the cost of this from the graduate professional organization at my university. Once the transcriptions were ready, I then started the process of analyzing them using a narrative and thematic analysis. The thematic analysis method I chose for this study was McCracken's (1988) guidelines that helped me to discern emerging themes from narratives

within the interview and focus group transcripts. McCracken's (1988) steps of analysis are as follows: (a) an initial, surface reading of the data independent of other aspects of the text, resulting in early observations that help to sort out the important from the unimportant material; (b) a further development of the observations by themselves, by looking at the evidence in the interview transcript, and by looking at the prepared review of past literature; (c) additional analysis of the interconnections of the observations developed in the second step helped by examination of past literature, with reference to the interview transcripts only to check ideas as they emerge; (d) taking all previously identified observations and jointly scrutinizing them in their collective form, organizing them hierarchically to determine patterns of consistency and contradictions within the developing themes; and (e) the earlier identified patterns and themes from each of the interview transcripts of the project are then put through a final process of analysis for determination of how these can be synthesized into theses. It is at the fifth stage that "a process of transformation takes place in which the cultural categories that have been unearthed in the interview become analytic categories" (McCracken, 1988, p. 46).

I utilized McCracken's (1988) analytic method because it presumes that the researcher has used a theoretical framework to guide the crafting of his or her research questions. For this study, I applied the communication theory of identity's (CTI) identity frames and gaps as a theoretical framework. This is unlike grounded theory research that seeks to construct new theory from the data (Piercy, 2015). I started by reading through the entire corpus of transcribed data to formulate initial thoughts and ideas, a vital part of the process (Riessman, 1993). I read and reviewed them several times in order to make observations and write memos about responses to the interview and focus group questions. In the next step, I examined a number of the relevant phrases and comments and began

identifying and placing this information in initial categories. I was guided on what to look for from previous literature. In this step, I began coding by examining the phrases and comments I had selected to see if there was development of some commonalities.

The third step in McCracken's (1988) process involved further examination of my initial codes to look for connections and/or any other developing patterns from the data as well as similarities or differences in the answers given by participants in the transcripts. I began creating clusters of codes and developing initial themes at this point. With the initial themes from the previous step already developed, I went back to the data and previous literature to ascertain which themes and code clusters I could keep or discard, and what eventually emerged was a hierarchy of themes based on the narratives of the participants and the memos and notes I wrote for myself. The final step involved a thorough scrutiny and review of all the themes across all the data gathered, which was made easier as I could easily create visual depictions of the predominant themes and their subthemes.

The themes that emerged from the transcribed interviews were units derived from patterns such as "conversation topics, vocabulary, recurring activities, meanings, feelings, or folk sayings and proverbs" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1989, p. 131). I put all these together to form a broad representation of the participants' collective experience. I further identified these themes by "bringing together components or fragments of ideas or experiences, which often are meaningless when viewed alone" (Leininger, 1985, p. 60).

Within the thematic clusters, I looked for narratives that best described the lived experiences of the former African women refugees. Narratives as a methodological model can be oral or written and arise during fieldwork or interviews. Given what I wanted to accomplish in this study, the definition that suits my needs is narrative as an extended story about a significant aspect of someone's life, and especially the personal narratives of the

former African women refugees (Chase, 2005; Reissman, 2002). The use of personal

narratives in my analysis helps position the participants as "social actors in their own right

whose subjective interpretations of events and conditions in the own lives" is important to

advancing research surrounding the lived experiences of women (Chase, 2005). I used the

identified themes and narratives to develop my discussion of the answers to my two research

questions.

Chapter 5: Tensions that Emerge in Narratives of Identity Negotiation in the

Context of Transnational Displacement and Resettlement

This dissertation focused on the narratives of former African women refugees in the Southwestern and Midwestern United States to explore the process of identity negotiation as they navigate their new lives. It also contributes to the understanding of transnational identity negotiation by examining gendered identities post-resettlement in non-gateway U.S. cities and towns. In Chapters 5 and 6, I provide answers to the research questions posed by presenting a discussion of the thematic patterns and personal narratives that emerged in the analysis of data.

This chapter addresses the first research question explored: What do the identity frames and gaps enacted in the narratives of former African women refugees reveal about identity negotiation in the process of resettlement in the United States? The central proposition in this chapter is that women's narratives about self-identity enact a tension between wanting to retain certain cultural norms, values, and behaviors that made up their identity and socialization before resettlement in the United States, and needing to change in order to fit in the new cultural milieu they are part of now. The analysis presented here highlights how former African women refugees are continuously struggling to incorporate salient aspects of their multicultural and fragmented selves as they negotiate life in a new place.

This discussion is framed by the communication theory of identity (CTI), which conceives identity as communicative; that is, identity as constructed, maintained, and re-created through a communicative process (Hecht, Warren, Jung, & Krieger, 2005). A central proposition of CTI is that identity is articulated through four interconnected layers— personal, enacted, relational, and communal (Hecht, Jackson, & Ribeau, 2003). These four

layers overlap and interpenetrate to form a more comprehensive and fluid picture of identity (Franken, 2014). According to Jung and Hecht (2004), "The four frames of identity may be analyzed independently but are not really separate from each other, which is interpenetration (mutual interdependence), perspectives on a whole, integrated identity" (p. 267). A contribution of this dissertation is to advance the application of this theorizing to identity negotiation beyond the individual-centered perspective that has been privileged in research. Given the nature of relational and communal frames, where the individual's self-concept is influenced by relational partners, it is imperative to take into account how other interactants affect the women's identities as we ponder processes of identity negotiation. In effect, through the narratives generated and presented here, it becomes obvious that identity positions are enacted as articulations of the interactions among former African women refugees and other relational partners such as husbands, sisters, and community members. These dynamic interactions, I will argue, are an integral part of personal and enacted identity frames and make the four frames of identity more interrelated and essential to the process than the analytical separation of frames proposed in the theory.

CTI proposed that frames (layers) of identity are sometimes integrated and sometimes contradict each other forming identity gaps or "discrepancies between or among the four frames of identity" (Jung & Hecht, 2004, p. 268). In this sense, CTI's concepts of frames of identity and identity gaps lend themselves particularly well as an appropriate lens through which examine negotiation of refugee identity. These notions thus enable the exploration of the dynamic and fluid aspects of identity among immigrants (and most importantly for this study, refugees) who draw upon the cultural resources of their countries of origin while at the same time attempting to effectively function in a society guided by differing values, beliefs, norms, and interaction patterns (Mahalingam, 2006). This process

often involves continued connection with relatives in homelands and in other countries, which leads immigrants and refugees to learn to interact in at least two social worlds and to transform their identities to reflect a more multilocal and transnational sense of being (Urban & Orbe, 2010). This chapter explores women's negotiation of identities, mindful that asserting a sense of individual self involves the articulation of interrelated identity frames. Such articulation of frames also reveals gaps and tensions that speak to the fluidity and fragmentation of identities.

In the analysis of data generated by in-depth interviews, participant observation, and focus groups with former African women refugees in the Southwestern and Midwestern United States, the overarching themes and narratives of identity enacted dual dynamics and tensions between maintaining and re-defining identity under the particular circumstances of gendered experiences of resettlement. Three major thematic clusters emerged from analysis of the participants' narratives. The themes are: being Othered while working to join the American dream; maintaining traditional gender rules as well as gender rule fluidity postresettlement; and, resisting cultural practices while affirming African cultural practices.

Within these thematic fields, the personal narratives shared by participants provide insight into how they navigate tensions, contradictions, and opportunities for change in their lives. The following sections of this chapter highlight the interpenetration of identity frames and identity gaps that marked the women's sense of self after resettlement.

Being Othered while Working to Join the American Dream

Many of the participants talked about being labeled as the "other" in their everyday lives even though they did not think of themselves as outsiders because of their legal and social status in the United States. This was particularly egregious to them given that fitting in and adapting to the social mores of the destination country is an often voiced condition of

acceptance set by host nations and their populations, and a persistent challenge to individuals with transnational connections. Participants thus grappled with and constantly negotiated the tension between how they viewed themselves in light of how others viewed them.

The Narratives of Otherness

Narratives of otherness incorporate experiences where the participants' sense of who they are and whether they belong in their new community was challenged on the basis of race/ethnicity, nationality, religious beliefs, language, and other cultural differences. This negotiation occurred in instances where they faced discrimination while out and about in the community, discrimination in the school system, and outright racism perpetrated against them. The narratives illustrate how discrimination by members of the mainstream society contradicted the participants' sense of self as individuals who had legal status as refugees, citizens, and permanent residents in a host country; adhered to the value of equality; were willing to advocate for fair treatment; and believed in civility, hard work, and educational achievement.

Discrimination while out and about. These narratives are examples of stories about their personal sense of self where participants described how they were not welcomed by townspeople in spite of regarding themselves as part and parcel of the town fabric. Many of them reported that they liked where they lived, with life in these cities being positively described, but there was always a qualification. Kiin, for instance, described her city in the Midwest in this manner:

It's a welcoming place, it's a good place. People are welcoming except for a few places that don't even know diversity. But most of them feel welcoming and very good, and when I came everybody was welcoming me, and the only thing that I face

is that sometimes when I am out and about, there are times that I felt that White

people around me are well … ignorant.

The "ignorance" she spoke of relates to the observed xenophobic and discriminatory

attitudes and behavior of members of the dominant culture. She mentioned being the only

person followed in a store where she was trying to buy some clothes. Similar to this

experience, some of the participants also shared stories about how their appearance, race,

and names marked them as different, resulting in host behavior that contributed to feelings

of discrimination and exclusion. Waris, especially, had a lot to say when recounting the

treatment she felt resulted from her skin color and mode of dress as a Muslim woman who

wears a *hijab* (a scarf or veil that covers the head and chest) when she went fragrance

shopping with her husband:

At the door when we came in, I stepped in and they said, "Do you need help?" I said

no. We walked for a while and then someone came after us, and they said again, "Do

you need help?" I said no. And then the third time she said, "Are you looking for a

specific thing?" And I said no, I'm looking for any kind of fragrance but I don't need

your help. So she was standing there on my left side, and the manager was standing

on the other side, on my right, looking while I was trying the fragrance and smelling

it. So my husband got mad, and I was telling him to just ignore it and for us to go.

And he told me, "No, I need to talk to them." So he talked to the manager, and he

said, "Are you the manager?" "Yes." "Why are you following us?" She said, "No, I

didn't follow you." [My husband replied] "It's just there's a lot of people in the store

but I don't see anybody coming after them following them to the aisle. You followed

me from the door to the aisle and you are still standing there looking at me like I'm

stealing something." She said sorry and we left. Once we left the store, we called the

1-800 number. We complained and told them we don't want to be treated different from other people.

Even though the former African women refugees were not pleased with how strangers acted towards them, this did not cut as deep as when this behavior came from people they have had constant contact with for a number of years. Farhiya explained that in her experience, the people she had encountered in the town, "are not friendly. It is a nice town because it is quiet, and there are good schools for the children, but people are not friendly." She further shared that "Everyone keeps to themselves. Like my neighbor, we have lived next to each other for seven years but we do not talk to each other." This sentiment was echoed by Robi, who stated: "I have a neighbor next to me and I usually greet her, say hi but she looks at me like, 'who is this black woman talking to me?' She has never greeted me." To emphasize just how distasteful her neighbor seemed to find her presence, Robi mimicked the woman making a face and drawing her sweater around herself during such encounters. This level of disconnection by people living next door when the participants said they had heard stories of how small town neighborhoods are particularly close-knit only served to illustrate that they are being excluded from the fabric of their communities and marked as different because of who they are and where they are from.

Additionally, this prejudice and discrimination goes beyond being followed around when at a store to automatic assumptions that these women do not belong and therefore do not speak English. For example, Kiin explained what experiences she has had when she goes somewhere and encounters U.S. Americans who present as white:

> You are always treated different. So if I walk into a store or office now, the first
> thing they will do when I walk in is to make their voice loud, assuming that I don't
> speak English.

To counter these perceptions of themselves as outsiders, the former African women refugees talked about ways that they embraced U.S. American values that allowed them to benefit from the American dream ideology. According to Ana:

> Everyone who came as a refugee in this country has a different priority in their life. Some people, they don't care, they just want to work and make money. Some people, they would like to have better education and get better. So we have that many different options.

Those who choose to avail themselves of the opportunities presented speak about bettering their lives and gaining acceptance into their communities as they are doing things right. According to Semira:

> Well, I have a lot of difficulties education-wise. I'm not getting where I want. I would like to be better than what I am now. I work, and I go to school. I would like to see myself being a full-time student and not working, which I cannot afford because I help a lot back home. There's a lot of people who depend on me. Even though I am married, I'm the kind of a person, I like to depend on me and give when I have. So it's very challenging for me going to school and working at the same time, and I would like to just concentrate on one because sometimes I am not doing well at school.

Similarly, education plays a big part in how Angela embraces U.S. American values. She shared her personal story:

> I have always dreamt of going back to Africa and working with the United Nations and, of course, working with refugees because I experienced that and I know what these people go through. And with my experience being a refugee and a single mother coming to United States, working so hard raising my boys while going to

school, even working a certain period of time, I know what women go through because I experienced it from Africa and from America. With all this experience I'll be right person to educate refugee women coming to the U.S. I wouldn't do it just without going back to school, that's why I decided to change my major from nursing to social work because that I knew that would give me more opportunity. And I've always loved educating myself, even out of class when I see a very interesting book that has something to do with helping people, I read so I want to get as much education as I can so I can one day go back home and help.

Even as they constantly face discrimination while they are out and about, a few of the former African women refugees know on what side their bread is buttered and hope that these outright attempts to fit in would end the discrimination. But they are not the only ones who do experience discrimination directly.

Discrimination in the school district. Other participants spoke specifically about their 1.5 generation children being perceived as not being U.S. American, even though they were born here or were already naturalized, as were their parents. Waris noted that:

This town is a nice place, a welcoming place. The schools are good, education is good, and teachers are welcoming. I have never seen or experienced a teacher who treated my two boys differently in the recent past. However, when I first moved to this town I took my boys to school, signed them up, and even before they tested my older son, they put him in ELL automatically! Because of his name they thought he needs help.

ELL stands for English Language Learners, a program equivalent to English as Second Language (ESL) programs that cater to students who are not native English speakers. This was a recurring problem for a few of the participants, who said they were angry that their

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U.S. born or raised children had to bear the brunt of discrimination because of the perception that being from households where their parents were non-native English speakers automatically meant their English was subpar. This automatic labeling of non-white African parents and children as unable to communicate has problematic consequences.

According to the American Community Survey (2013) administered by the U.S. Census Bureau, 1 in 5 U.S. residents speaks a foreign language at home and 41 percent of them reported speaking English less than very well. A significant number of refugees who come to the United States are non-native English speakers and experience discrimination arising from language issues. Many are parents of first generation or U.S. born children who bear the same bias. Waris aptly captured this dynamic when she said of her son: "He was born here but still if you are born here and your parents speak a different language, it may be difficult for you too." For her, the difficulty arose from others' prejudice towards perceived non-native English speakers. She said that because she taught her children at home, they were greatly advanced with their language skills by the time they joined school. This, however, did not make a difference. She stated:

> Because of the name, because of where the parents came from, my son was
> discriminated. So when he came home and he told me, "Mommy, they put me in
> ELL I don't know why," I said, "I don't know. Baby, did they test you and you got a
> low grade?" And he said, "No, nobody gave me a test." And I said, "How did that
> happen?" And he didn't know. They had sent a letter with him for me to sign, and
> the next day I went back to the school with him. I went to his teacher before I talked
> to other people and asked, "How is he doing?" And she had him almost two weeks
> at that time, so she told him he was doing great, his spelling was better than even the

white students born here. And I said, "Do you think he will need ELL?" And she

told me, "No way!" She said she was glad I came because he did not need ELL.

When she confronted the administration about this, they admitted they never tested him in

the first place, just automatically placed him in ELL. This reinforced Waris's point that the

placement without prior testing was discrimination based on the fact that his parents are

from Somalia and he has a foreign-sounding name.

This discrimination because of who they are and where they come from further

impacts refugee children, leading to educational outcomes that are problematic. Waris again

weighed in on this: "The thing is, if my child now scores low in English, they will put him in

ELL, but if a white child's score is low, they will put him in a program called Title I

Reading." The U.S. American white children are given the needed language intervention

when they score low, but the refugee children are automatically assumed to not be native

English speakers, even when they are. Waris thought the playing field should be level

because:

> Sometimes when you take a test, your score can go down one day. And perhaps you
>
> are better at another subject. Or on the day you take a test, the chapter is hard for
>
> you, but another chapter could be better; they don't even give them a chance. If they
>
> score low in one instance, boom, ELL!

This type of prejudice towards refugee children in schools has been examined in

research studies that interrogate race and ethnicity in the U.S. classroom and have found that

teachers hold race- and ethnicity-based expectations for their students (Sbarra & Pianta,

2001; Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007). This rang true for a lot of the participants who were

parents. Kiin shared this story about another refugee parent's experience with the school

system:

So there was a guy working with me who was from Sudan. He went to his daughter's

teacher-parent conference, and they told him she's doing great. But he said, "Don't

tell me she's doing well because she's not, and I don't expect you to say, "She's

where she needs to be, where she's supposed to be." She's not supposed to be here.

She's supposed to be on the top. And the teacher told him, "Wow, I didn't know

that."

These low expectations from the teachers run counter to what the participants reported as

the seriousness with which education was viewed back in their home countries. Many

African parents expect A's and A+'s from their children, and so when there are low

expectations of their children, it is a big surprise for them. To counter this problematic

dynamic, Waris took on the role of advocate, stating:

Expectation is low, that's what I was telling the teachers too. I had a meeting so

many times with ELL teachers in the whole school district, and I was always telling

them, "Don't expect them [the former refugee children] to be low. You need to

always put them on the same level as other children."

Echoing this indifference even at a higher educational level, Semira talked about her

experience at the university, claiming that "Sometimes I feel like teachers, they don't really

listen to you because you don't know what you are talking about or, let's put it this way,

there's no encouragement, you know, to make you welcome." These examples of

discrimination within the educational institutions point to continued perceptions that mark

them and their offspring as outsiders, no matter how they position themselves and feel they

are fulfilling and want to fulfill as parents of U.S. American children in the school districts.

Racist discrimination. In addition to facing discrimination while out and about

and within the school district, the former African women refugees shared that othering

occurs when they face outright racism. This can happen in various contexts and from all manner of people. As Leylo said, "I've seen a lot of discrimination. White people don't like us and Black Americans don't like us because we are different from them, so we are lost in-between." Similarly, Anna recounted, "I have tried to look for a job and I have interviewed at fast food restaurants 14 in total, but I never get hired." She wondered whether it was because of her foreign-sounding last name or her appearance. Sharing the same concerns, Melissa spoke about discrimination she had faced at school where she was told to her face that "Africans do not bathe." After the perpetrators were suspended from school, they came back and swore they would "beat up some Africans." Both Melissa and Ann said that they also experienced instances of racism from their African American peers, something they had not thought could happen since they had assumed their being black would be a point of connection.

Within the community, there were stories told of particular instances where being a refugee resulted in harmful behavior from others. Ummi told of a Twitter post published to showcase a white father's negative reaction upon finding out that his daughter was going to a school dance with a Sudanese boy. Another anecdote shared focused on an adoptive mother of a Chinese little girl who came to a school in the city to tell the teachers that she did not want her "child to play with the refugee kids." This onslaught of racist behavior towards the former African women refugees, their children, and other people in their community is widespread and affects all aspects of the participants' lives. Semira explained:

> When we were in Idaho, my Sudanese friend and I were freshmen and didn't have
> that much money. At that time we were looking for an apartment. A lady in town
> put up a two-bedroomed basement furnished apartment for rent for 300 dollars. We
> were like, "wow, that's good." And so we called and she told us that the apartment

was still available. The day we went to see it, she saw us and just closed the door on us and called the police. She said, "They are harassing me." We were standing outside her door and knocking, wondering what was wrong with her. All of a sudden we saw a police officer coming towards us and guess what he said? It's her house, and she has the right to rent to whomever she wants.

Identity Frames, Gaps, and Interpenetration

The previous section presented subjective narratives of the numerous ways the former African women refugees were perceived as other in various contexts by different people they came into contact with in their community. In this section, I discuss the ways in which these narratives enact identity negotiation within and across identity layers and the identity gaps experienced. As mentioned earlier, the communication theory of identity (CTI) introduced four loci or frames of identity as means of interpreting reality—personal, enactment, relational, and communal frames (Hecht, 1993; Hecht et al., 2003). One of the most important aspects of CTI is that these four frames "are viewed as interrelated and interpenetrated, with a complex interweaving of identities expressing the nebulous and constantly evolving nature of identity" (Maeda & Hecht, 2012, p. 47). This is important in my discussion as I do not argue linearity of perspective of the former African women refugees' identities but showcase how the communication of identity is a messy, multidimensional process.

The personal layer of identity encapsulates an individual's self-concept or self-image (Hecht et al., 2005). The enactment frame centers on identity as expressed in social interactions and focuses on messages that 'express identity' (Hecht et al., 2003). Individuals can use either direct or indirect messages to reveal their identity to others (Hecht & Faulkner, 2000). The relational frame focuses on identity as mutually constructed in

interaction while the communal frame focuses on the ways a group of people use their shared histories and characteristics in defining and shaping identity (Hecht et al., 2003) or the identity society as a whole ascribes to the individual (Crosby, 2012).

Crosby (2012) advanced the notion that the personal and enacted frame are internal, that is, the person decides these two frames for him or herself, allowing for who they think they are and how they want to communicate that identity to others. In the narratives presented in this section, the former African women refugees were clear in articulating who they were, most often in narratives that countered the 'other' designation ascribed to them, which also incorporates the relational layer as these identities are negotiated with others in the community. Clearly, Kiin's experience of being followed while shopping for clothes and Waris' experience of the same while she and her husband were shopping is tied to the stereotype ascribed to black people in the retail world, the phenomenon of "shopping while black" (SWB) (Gabbidon, 2003). In fact, according to a respondent in a study carried out by Fifield and O'Shaughnessy (2001), "retail racism is where women of color have their most regular experience with racial profiling" (p. 4). These participants acknowledged this ascription and railed against it as it is not one they avow.

This particular ascription of both women as shop-lifters points to a personal-communal identity gap as this identity ascribed to them differs from their self-conceptions. In this instance, both women are consumers, everyday members of the society who are going about the American consumerist culture. However, their ascribed communal identities on the basis of their race, gender, and religion place them in a situation where how they are viewed differs from how they view themselves. Similarly, the perception surrounding the stereotype that foreigners do not speak English is a communal layer identity often attributed to brown immigrants to the United States. This affects the behavior of the individuals that

the former African women refugees encountered, and highlights another personal-communal identity gap.

Moreover, the narratives shared articulated how participants grappled with and constantly negotiated how they viewed themselves and how others perceived them, pointing to the efforts they were undertaking to bridge the gap between the personal and relational identity layers. The relational layer of identity captures the negotiation of identity through social interaction. Many participants reported a personal-relational identity gap because they did not hold a self-concept informed by their outsider/other status but felt that neighbors and officials at their children's schools ascribed to them negative characteristics as outsiders/the other.

The enacted-relational identity gap thus manifested itself in instances where participants expressed—including through advocacy—how much they wanted to be perceived in a certain way yet their host country counterparts perceived them differently. In order to overcome these negative perceptions, participants expressed their need to adapt by enacting what I call a desired refugee identity of pursuing education, learning English, and working hard in order to avoid being ascribed negative characteristics as outsiders/the other as Ana, Semira, and Angela do. In their narratives, it is clear that they perceive themselves as civil, law-abiding members of the community and communicate this in different ways with others they come in contact with. They did not see themselves as foreign, or as individuals whose English was not good, or as potential shoplifters. They also thought of themselves as black, which was made more salient when even the African Americans they thought would embrace them did not. They hoped their adherence to U.S. cultural values and norms would help them blend in, but the interactions with members of the dominant culture made it evident that they remained outsiders.

Maintaining Traditional Gender Rules as well as Gender Rule Fluidity

Postresettlement

My analysis and discussion in this section focuses on the theme of the struggle to maintain certain gendered roles within the extended family structure—roles that had anchored their sense of self in the home countries—while understanding that in the United States different gender rules and norms, far removed from strong patriarchal homeland cultures, are ushering the development of new personal lives.

The Narratives

These narratives highlight lived experiences of the tension between maintaining certain gender rules within the family—rules that give the participants a sense of self—versus understanding that U.S. gender rules and norms are resulting in development of new personal selves both in the United States and in their home countries. This negotiation was evident in the participants' effort to maintain and understand gender roles within the family before and after migration, the role of the single mother after resettlement, and the roles of women in the labor force outside the home in the United States.

Roles within the family. Family structure is the cornerstone and building block of any society. Family units are very important in the African context, and the ties one has to one's family cannot be overestimated. According to Hakannson (1994), patrilineal gender and kinship systems exist in East Africa "where women, irrespective of marital status, maintain socially sanctioned identities and jural, ritual, and economic rights and obligations in their natal family and lineage throughout life" (p. 517). In recounting their experiences as resettled refugees in the United States, participants provided a variety of responses that focused on familial relationships as key dimensions of their personal identities and how these

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relations are undergoing consistent reflection as they seek to maintain them in the midst of often contradictory cultural norms and values.

There are various ways in which being part of a family unit played out within the narratives of the participants. Much of who they are in their enactments of identity, especially their memory of their lives before war broke out in their countries of origin and talk about subsequent important life events, revolved around being an integral part of a family unit and playing particular gendered roles as women. It is important to note that roles within the family are taken very seriously in the African society, with many of these roles—whether through blood or marriage—forming lasting bonds. Several of the women I spoke to described how life as resettled refugees, often away from extended family, did not curtail their link to relatives but often this link looked different with distance and new life experiences factored in. To them, this removal from a physical place of community did not diminish or create disconnect with their traditions but actually served as a catalyst to do much more than they could have if they had been back home. They spoke about the maintenance, reinforcement, and reconstitution of family ties from the perspective of their roles as daughters, daughters-in-law, mothers, wives, and sisters.

The role of daughter or daughter-in-law. Children have a duty to take care of their parents in African society. This is a norm many African cultures instill in children growing up, and is modeled by seeing other family members fulfill this with older members of the family. For the participants, this familial role often led to ambivalent and contradictory enactments of their personal identity. This was evident in the ways participants spoke about: embracing cultural expectations regarding their duties; giving help from miles away; feeling helpless when confronted with situations where their status as

daughters and daughters-in-law could have led to much needed help and support; grappling with regret for decisions made, and; sacrificing part of their lives for their families.

In the African context, being a daughter or daughter-in-law has an attendant expectation of taking on the mother of your husband and treating her as you would your own biological mother. According to Waris:

> It is tradition back home in Africa that the oldest of the children has to take care of mom and dad. That's what my mom did, she was with my oldest brother and his wife, and they were taking care of her.

Many U.S. American cultures' socialization has been premised predominantly on patterns of individual practices associated with individualism, which does not preclude the coexistence of communal attitudes. Similarly, many African cultures' socialization has been premised predominantly on patterns of communal practices associated with collectivism, which does not preclude the coexistence of individualist attitudes. As noted in scholarship, individualism emphasizes a "preference for a loosely-knit social framework in which individuals are expected to take care of only themselves and their immediate families," and collectivism emphasizes "a preference for a tightly-knit framework in society in which individuals can expect relatives…to look after them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty" (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). When referring to roles and cultural expectations, participants in this research noted that there are no expectations to take care of the elderly members of one's family in the United States as they were back in their home countries. This made it more important for Waris because:

> We have that one culture that I want to keep. It's taking care of the elderly; like my mother-in-law who doesn't have a daughter. She has three boys and so when she gets old, I'm planning to take care of her.

It was important to her to maintain that tradition and reinforce it by choosing to eschew new cultural norms in her adoptive country.

Other participants spoke about how their identity as daughters had changed and evolved in regards to the kind of help that they give to the family. Back home, according to Sylvie, "most women had to do the work in the house while the men worked outside the home." That meant women helped in domestic ways as opposed to financial ones. With flight from home and resettlement, that is changing for many immigrant and refugee groups. When it comes to ascertaining whether remittances by immigrants to their home countries is gender neutral, studies show that there is parity between men and women. There is a difference, however, when it comes to women because despite earning less than men, they remit a higher proportion of their income more regularly and for longer periods of time (IOM & UN-INSTRAW, 2007). A study of remittances to Somalia from the Somali diaspora in London demonstrated that regular remittances go out to mothers, brothers, fathers, and sisters from both men and women in the diaspora (Lindley, 2009). Among participants, Dahabo illustrated this new dynamic in her narrative about what she did for her mother and other relatives:

> At that time, yeah, I built a nice home for her, and we used to communicate by sending letters and phone calls. I used to send every month some money to live on. But then she has a lot of, you know, how in Africa…a lot of relatives, uncle, aunt, everyone was living under her, using anything that I send.

While for some participants the new cultural space far from home played a positive part in enabling their new selves to maintain or transform their status and role among family in their homeland, others hated the fact that forced ejection from the safety and familiarity of their culture impeded the maintenance of cherished roles fostered in a collectivistic

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culture. In their view, distance from family in the homeland works against them for it

creates situations where they feel overwhelmed because of lack of support to face current

challenges—support they used to get back in their home countries as daughters or

daughters-in-law. This was illustrated in reference to what usually happened after a woman

had given birth. As Saumu explained:

> In Africa, in Somalia especially, when you have a child, in the first six weeks you
>
> have help. Someone from either your family or your husband's family will come and
>
> cook and clean for you. The only thing you do is just breastfeed the baby; that's it.

This, she claimed, was good for them as they were able to cope with new motherhood and

have the support and help expected of them from others in the family. Situations where

they themselves became mothers were especially poignant, as Waris noted:

> When I had my first child I was alone in Atlanta with my husband. He had to go to
>
> work, and I didn't know what to do. I was the youngest in the family and had seen
>
> diaper changing but everything was hard for me. I cried for two days, not knowing
>
> what to do. I called my mom who was in Saudi Arabia at that time, crying, "Mommy,
>
> I don't know what to do. I don't know why I even had the baby!"

The participants expressed how these gender rules were upended in a culture where

everyone takes care of herself or himself and even if you have family within the United

States, the reality of life is such that they cannot come to you and help. They, therefore, had

to adapt to a life without familial support.

Adaptation to life without familial support also evoked regret for situations where

participants said they felt helpless to determine the outcome of a family member's path.

This was particularly difficult after resettlement, when they were unable to solve a problem

due to legal or natural laws. For instance, Semira's family moved from Sudan when signs of conflict emerged, and she described a situation involving her mother:

> When we left, she stayed behind. We came to Somalia. My dad was with us, and he went back. My mom, she was there [in Sudan]. After that, she came and visited us, but she she always went back. But I always wanted-, when I look back, I always used to say I wish I would have never left and stayed with my mom. Cause I haven't seen her in many years. She came a couple of times to Egypt and went back to Sudan, and that was it.

Another way their roles as daughters or daughters-in-law have evolved is through the new sacrifices they make in their lives because of their family members. For instance, Waris made a huge sacrifice when her mother fell ill. She narrated how she had gone to school to study Sociology and already had clocked in two years but could not complete her studies. She stated: "I didn't finish. I stopped because my mom was sick, yeah, and I had to go to Australia to visit her." She explained that her mother ended up in Australia after being sponsored to emigrate by her brother, and she had not seen her mother since she was 14 years old. Waris emphasized,

> That's why I stopped going to school because she had cancer and she had a limited life, so I was planning to come and go back all the time. But it was not easy and also the ticket is very expensive.

These narratives enact their sense of duty to being good daughters and daughters-in-law as part of maintaining something that had anchored them when they were back in their home countries. The stories show the social expectations and the ways they were judged back home, all integral part of their self-identity as daughters and daughters-in-law.

The role of mother. Many African communities highly value children, and there is no value in marriage unless the fruit of that marriage could be seen in the offspring (Bahemuka, 2005). Among participants, nearly all of them have been married and have children, with some becoming mothers in their early teenage years, at 13 or 14 years old. Participants described their lives as mothers in the United States as revolving around coping with the pressures of traditional expectations within the family and fulfilling duties within the home. Scholars have documented that many immigrant families to the United States have to become two-income families where both the man and woman of the family work outside the home. However, in such situations much of the domestic work is still expected to be carried out by the women.

How this expectation was manifested in the home after resettlement was surprising to many participants in various ways. For example, a participant noted that it was not only the male members of the family who were raised in Africa that held the views that the woman takes care of the home, but also American-born and raised sons who had more ingrained African gender role norms than their mothers expected, especially after hearing stories about how immigrant children had become Americanized and no longer enacted any African cultural values. Waris shared:

> My youngest son wants me to cook every day. He doesn't want leftovers from
> yesterday because when he was young, that's what I used to do. I was home during
> the day and used to work part-time in the evening, so I used to cook every day.
> That's where they got used to it. He often says, "Mommy why do you have to go to
> work? Just stay and cook for us.

This was in spite of knowing how busy his mother was, working and going to school. The boy's position did not seem to involve an expectation of the father taking on similar

nurturing domestic roles. Amazed as she was, Waris said that she made a point of asking her sons what they would do in the future with these disparate gender views, given the fact that they will grow up in the United States and likely marry U.S. American-raised women who did not subscribe to these gender norms. To her, that was a way to distinguish between what could have been expected back home without question, and what was the reality here in the United States; a reality she wanted her Somali-American sons to face.

Motherhood as a self-concept for many of the participants looked very different from what they were exposed to by observing their own and other mothers in the community as well as themselves as they became young mothers back in their home countries. As I discussed previously, in many of their home countries, women stayed home while the men worked. It was rare that a woman worked or had the education to be able to have a role outside of the home. Thus, their lives post-resettlement in the United States proved to be a mixture of new experiences and challenges.

One of the challenges centered on the reality of life in a new place where both parents in the household had to work to make ends meet. As Dahabo succinctly put it, "You come here and you work and you are busy. And you do not have time for your children." Similarly for Aesha, the lifestyle in the United States was something that changed what she would have wanted to maintain of motherhood, saying, "I go to work from 8 to 5, come home, feed the kids, and sometimes one of my sons has a game and so I go to the game and come back home at 8 or 9 o'clock."

However, this new lifestyle made for what the participants shared as new experiences of engaging with their children on a different level doing different things from what they were used to back in their home countries. Waris labeled herself as a very U.S. American "soccer mom," sharing that while she lived in Atlanta, she observed that many of the

children had multiple activities they went to and felt the need to sign up her two sons, three and five at the time, for soccer. This has evolved into an integral part of her mothering duties and much like the average U.S. American soccer mom, she has a busy life that revolves around her children's activities. She described some of her life thus:

> I come home late, don't have time to do much than go to bed. I spend too much time going to basketball, soccer, and tennis games. My older son plays soccer on Saturdays and Sundays during the summer so we travel going to different places in and outside the state. For basketball it is the same thing, especially now that both of them are in high school.

Her older son is so good a soccer player that, "his team is going to Sweden in July and I have to go with him."

Some of the participants also stated that the new levels of engagement allowed them to be friends with the children, something they had never thought about while back home. According to Semira,

> I'm enjoying being with them, and I don't have little kids that are giving me hard time so we are all friends. Because they are teenagers, they are my friends. We joke, we play, we tease and go to movies together sometimes.

Similarly, Waris shared that,

> My husband and I, we always tell them like, "no you didn't do well if they did not; this is what you need to improve on," and we tease them if they do something badly. For example, if we come from a game and they did not play that well, from the car to the house, we tease them, "Oh you suck at it."

This was also the case for Angela, who shared the following narrative about her relationship with her children in the United States:

We share things. I don't want them to just be my kids and for me to just be on top of them all the time. We like sharing ideas. Sometimes I give them something, I say, Okay, this is what you need to do, what do you think?" I take some of what they say but of course as a mom, I am their mother and therefore the final decision maker.

For these mothers, establishing a rapport with their children is a new aspect of their identity as mothers that they reported not doing in the same exact way before. For them, it served as a novel way of maintaining the nurturing role of mother that was enabled in their home countries by the constant presence and care of mothers.

The role of sister. The narratives surrounding the role of sister unearthed unstated but expected obligations to family, as participants found themselves linked economically to their siblings as they experienced wrenching family separation and disconnection. In many African cultures, extended kin continue to place financial and emotional demands on those they perceive as more economically stable (White, 1984). With forced migration, remitting money back home for refugee populations "can be a source of familial and cultural affirmation" (Lindley, 2009, p. 1327). The participants' role of sister endured aspects of maintenance of the expected cultural norms as well as an understanding of how life post-resettlement changed their relationships with siblings near and far. One of the participants, Shariifo, explained in her own words:

Sometimes you have bills to pay, you have plans, want to save money or to do things for your kids' education, the mortgage and so on. But sending money to those left back home every month is something that they get used to it in Africa. I have a sister in Africa, and I used to send her 300 dollars a month for a while.

Sometimes, that financial help is what stands between certain peril and a safer alternative, as Semira articulated when she discussed the way her sister's "…daughter was like 13 and

couple of times they [men in the village before they fled] wanted to rape her." Having been married at 13 and with seven children at the time, Semira's sister did not have the resources to leave their war-torn home. Semira said: "…I told her, I said, I will help you, just get out. I sent her money to get out and then I said to go wherever the refugee camp was." Semira shared that her sister and the children made it and were accepted into a refugee camp in Uganda, where they live now, with continued financial help from her and other relatives abroad.

Refugee resettlement is predicated on having a suitable sponsoring entity willing to cover the costs of flight and processing of necessary documentation for each member of a family. This means that, often, many families are separated. This was the case as reported by many of the participants. Waris narrated how her brother, who had chosen to stay in Somalia when the war broke out because of his job with an international humanitarian organization, fled the country after being kidnapped for ransom. Waris and the rest of the family abroad paid the money and after that he found himself in a refugee camp with other family members. However, after going through the refugee resettlement process:

> He ended up going to Australia, because when you are in the refugee camp, you will
> go wherever you get a sponsor. In this one family, we are in three different countries:
> Australia, Britain, and America.

Even when siblings are resettled in the same country, they are still "scattered" as Mina said. Semira agreed, sharing that she and her "oldest sister, the one with whom I have the same mother, and who's a refugee in California…we haven't seen each other for a while."

It could be argued that with technological advancement, keeping up with relatives living on the other side of the planet has been made manageable, but as Leylo argued, "It is

still not the same as seeing each other." She further elaborated on how distance between family members distressed her:

> The more you're away from them, the more the disconnection is. Sometimes when I'm talking to my brother or to my sister, it feels like we are not getting along. It's like, everyone has a different life. Before, back home, if one of your siblings didn't come home at night or if you didn't know where they were, an alarm was raised, "so-and-so is missing." That care and attention doesn't exist anymore, no matter how far or near they are.

These changing dynamics of relationships with one's siblings and family lead to feelings of loss and to adaptation to a new sense of family relations. Asrar referred to how this works when she said:

> Now everyone has their own life. If I don't talk to them or if they don't' talk to me it feels like we are not as connected as we used to be. It's as painful as it sounds, but at the same time, the reality is that our closeness becomes much more distant the farther we drift away from each other. And you learn to adapt to a new world, a new language, a new environment.

She said that although she fears that she and her siblings are not as close as they should be, she acknowledges that living in different places—Belgium, Switzerland, and the United States—forces adaptation to a new way of being: "It looks like everyone does the same thing because the longer you live the same place, the more you get adapted to it." These narratives point to the realization many of the former African women refugees have to come to terms with regarding the fact that the relationships they had with their siblings look different now and are different now because of being scattered all over the world after fleeing their home

countries and being resettled in a third country. It further alludes to a sense of multilocal identity experienced by refugees as they negotiate life in new countries of residence.

Angela explained one of the reasons for the pain and loss expressed by participants. She said that back home, before the conflict that lead to forced migration, "we lived very close to each other and we saw each other all the time and the way we interacted meant we had a lot of time to spend together." After resettlement, even with relatives who live in the United States, they were scattered in different states. She gave the example of her blood sister[1] in Texas, whom she had not seen for a long time. She said that even when they talked on the telephone, "that closeness that kind of sisterly thing that we used to share back home that was so tight and close, I felt the difference." Additionally, when her other blood sister from Australia came to visit, she opted to stay in Texas, further increasing the distance felt. "Even when we are talking on the phone I see a lot of difference. We are not the same people anymore; the way we think, the way we interact with each other is completely different."

Participants also spoke about how the structure of everyday life in the United States, where everybody is busy with work, school, and other social obligations, often makes it hard to keep in touch and ends up changing their feelings of family connection. As Amaal elaborated:

> I have my real aunt in Atlanta now, and we don't communicate often. We usually don't talk for many months at a time. Unless I get a chance and call her and her daughters, they never call me because everybody is busy with their lives. We wake up in the morning and either go to work or to school. Later in the day, you pick up your

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[1] Many African communities practice polygamy, resulting in siblings who share a father but not a mother. Some participants chose to distinguish between those they shared a mother with and those they did not by using the term "blood" versus "half" or "other."

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kids from daycare. Those who are married come home and before you know it, it's ten at night or midnight, you go to bed and you say, "Oh, I'm going to call her tomorrow." And just like that, you don't.

The process of resettlement which separates families, the physical distance and reality of living on different continents, and the psychological distance of adapting to new cultures and ways of being engender new personal selves that change the dynamics of the participants and the relationships they have with their siblings.

The role of wife: The fourth role addressed by my participants in this section is that of a wife. Most of the participants in this study currently were, or had previously been, married. Thus the role of a wife, distinct from that of a mother, was a recurrent narrative surrounding an important aspect of their identity. Specific stories shared about marriage highlighted two main themes: appropriate gender delineation of duties within the family and kin betrayal resulting from age-old traditions brought about by separation during the resettlement process.

The gender delineation of duties within the family followed quite predictable patterns. As mentioned previously in this study, African cultures are patriarchal and many participants reported distinct gender role separation generally observed in their homes and communities growing up. However, the reality of life in the United States, where more often than not both spouses have to find work outside the home to make ends meet muddies up these rigidly set gender roles norms. Kiin expressed frustration with the reality of life post-resettlement. After stating that both she and her husband work outside of the home, she said: "I don't expect him to help me in the house because of the way I was raised but the thing is, it is sometimes hard when people expect you to cook and clean every day."

In the experiences of the former African women refugees interviewed, it seems that the majority of their husbands did not want to let go of the African way of life where the woman was responsible for all the housework because most stayed home while the men went out to work. Even with the U.S. American necessity of a two-income home, many men do not want to help in the home. Waris did point out that, "There's few who are educated who try to help their wife." Counting her husband in that group, she however said that because he does not want to carry out any housework:

> He insists always that he doesn't know and he doesn't want to learn. He will help me with everything else, except cooking and cleaning. So I thought about that and then told him, "Okay, you either choose to keep the African culture or adapt to the American one. If you keep the African culture, you take care of all the bills and everything I earn is mine because you are being African and the man is supposed to be the breadwinner. Otherwise if you choose the American culture, we can share the bills and housework half and half."

Other women also shared stories of their marriages where husbands were now forced to share domestic responsibilities. As Shariifo reported:

> When I had a baby, knowing that I needed help, he used to go to the restaurant to buy me food every day. The thing is he would tell me you will never be hungry, I will feed you, whether I buy or not, but I'm not going to cook. So sometimes I used to tell him, I'll tell you what to do, just go to the kitchen and do it but he always said no, I'm not going to, tell me what you want to eat and I'll buy it.

It was not clear whether the issue was that the husband did not want to cook, or that the thought of stepping into the kitchen is so taboo that he would rather spend precious money every day buying prepared food in a restaurant. The acceptance of the idea that the man

does not get into the kitchen was also shared by some of the participants themselves. Waris, after trying to negotiate with her husband, as previously noted, seemed to finally settle on a compromise when she stated:

> And I mean, sometimes I complain, and sometimes I look back and say okay, that's how we were brought up. And if he's good at doing everything else why do I have to complain about cooking and cleaning. I just decided to take my time and do the needed housework another time and when I'm tired I tell him I can't cook that day and we go out to eat.

In addition to reporting that the status quo in the gendered division of housework is maintained after resettlement, a few other women mentioned how wives also act as support systems for their husbands' ambitions, leading to an uprooting of the family so as to provide opportunities for them. However, this was not framed in a negative way, as Asrar stated, "we have to move. My husband, he studies ultrasound and the college here has no class he can take. So we have to move." Moving for the sake of bettering the family's status is seen as acceptable because if the husband is able to attend school the family will benefit in the long run.

A second thematic cluster in stories about their identities as wives regarded how the resettlement process leads to separation of the husband and wife, which then begets age-old traditions expected of an African man. These traditional expectations run the gamut from being a breadwinner to practicing polygamy if the man so desires. Angela's story to an extent illustrates this. Her husband was unable to accompany her and the children when they were first resettled in the United States. She nevertheless continued to try to get him to rejoin the family. The process takes time, and Angela narrated that she was dismayed to learn that her husband had taken another woman in the meantime. She said:

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When I learned about that, yeah, he had a child already with that woman. Of course

he made that decision, which meant he really didn't want to be with us anymore

because he knew you can't have two wives in the United States. If I was to bring him

here, this poor woman would be left there with that child, all alone. I don't know he

decided to do that, so I decided just to cancel his process and now they are together,

and I think they have four kids by now.

The realization that her husband was not as committed to the family as she thought he

should be must have come as a blow to Angela, but her recognition that his decision affects

even the other woman roped in showcased age-old traditional concepts. She acknowledged

that even if she does not know why her husband did it, she is not surprised, and perhaps

would have put up with it back home. But in the United States, bigamy is a crime, and so

she chooses to live her life without her husband.

Role of the single mother after resettlement. According to the U.S. Census

Bureau (2011) 67 percent of Non-Hispanic black children lived in single-parent families.

This goes hand-in-hand with the many stereotypes about black women that are prevalent in

U.S. American culture, such as women's reliance on welfare, sexual promiscuity, and

"emasculating" tendencies (Kennelly, 1999). Bumpass and Sweet (1989) studied how single

motherhood evolved from death of spouse in the first half the 20th century to divorce of

parents from the 1950s onwards. While these statistics and narratives are implicated in the

larger discourse surrounding family values and the decline of the American family, they help

explain some of what I discuss in this section as the role of the former African refugee single

mother after resettlement (Kennelly, 1999).

Due to circumstances surrounding the refugee resettlement process, Angela came to

the United States with her children, leaving her husband back in South Sudan. As the years

progressed, her husband remarried and had other children. She therefore identifies as a

single mother even though she did not indicate to me whether they had gone through the

separation and/or divorce process. Describing how difficult it is to be a single mother and

the stigma attached to it in the United States, she enacts the narrative advanced about

women who raise children on their own in the United States:

> It's not easy to be a single mother in the United States. It is very difficult being a
>
> single mother raising my kids by myself. And always here in the United States I see
>
> that the example of being on welfare, of being poor is always single mothers.
>
> Children who are always in trouble, children who are not educated, children who
>
> have problems, are always described as children of single mothers.

Echoing Angela's sentiments, Ummi said that the narrative surrounding single mothers in

the United States portrayed them as being "the poorest and whatever" even though she

disagreed with that assertion because there are, "some of them who are educated and have a

high income."

Single motherhood was shared by a notable number of the participants, due to the

death of spouses during the conflicts in their home countries, separation during the

resettlement process, and newly troubling for much of the refugee community, the

breakdown of marriages due to issues surrounding resettlement in a new country. Many of

the participants attributed this last cause of single motherhood to the former African women

refugees awakening realization that their rights as women in the United States were

acknowledged much more than they were back in their home countries. This enabled many

of them to leave abusive and unhappy marriages. However, many of the participants felt

that it was not as clear cut as everyone seems to think as it affects more than the woman

who leaves. Dahabo shared that many women were opting out of these marriages

Because it is so easy to leave. When you ask your husband to go look for a job and

he is lazy, sleeping in the house you get angry. You leave because you can get

assistance. But it is not good because then you have sons who grow up and as

teenagers go out and get involved with bad groups. So you have children and you are

on government assistance. Your child sees some good clothes or shoes or something

else they want but you cannot afford to buy it for them. What happens? The steal or

do other bad things to get what they want. Can you blame the children when you are

the one who left?

Dahabo pointed out the struggle and concern the community is facing both economically

and culturally, raising children in the United States in single parent families. Some of the

participants further outlined the economic difficulty of trying to raise children as a single

mother who also happens to be a newly resettled refugee. These economic difficulties often

snowball from the fact that transportation costs to get to the United States are a loan given

to resettlement agencies by the Department of State, loans which the resettled refugees are

required to pay back once they find their footing in the United States (U.S. Department of

State, 2016).

Typically, the Department of State's Reception and Placement Program's monetary

assistance is limited to the first three months of resettlement. After that, resettled refuges

may receive a few months' help from the Department of Health and Human Services' Office

of Refugee Resettlement through their state or non-governmental organizations (U.S.

Department of State, 2016). However, there is a high expectation that they will find a job

and fend for themselves in addition to repaying the loan given as transportation costs to the

United States. Often, the assistance provided falls short of household needs. As Angela put

it, "before I started working they were giving me $600 for family size four." These

sentiments resonated for a lot of the participants, even those who were not single mothers, who stressed that the monetary assistance was never enough to do anything substantial with, whether it was buying clothes for themselves or their children, or even getting enough and good quality groceries for the family.

Role in the labor force outside the family. While participants often peppered their narratives with acknowledgment of how grateful they were to be in the United States, they also did not shy away from speaking of the difficulties they encountered post-resettlement. One of the big ones was definitely financial. Since financial assistance from the time they became refugees to initial resettlement in the United States was minimal and short-term, many participants desired or were forced to look for employment wherever they could, largely as a means to support their families. Among the participants, older women had a hard time finding a job owing to a lack of formal education and limited knowledge of English.

For those who do find work, it is a constant source of pride for them. In many cases, it shows the resilience of the women who often were quicker at adapting to the new life in the United States than any men present in their lives. As I have previously discussed, the former African women refugees reported that back home women were generally expected to, and did, stay home while the men worked outside the home. The realities of life in the United States meant that many were forced to renegotiate this expected identity as women who stayed home and whose work was within the domestic sphere. This renegotiation of their identities outside of the domestic sphere is one of the ways in which resettlement in this case lead to the transformation of identity positions based on traditional gender roles. As mentioned above, providing income for the family through wage labor is a source of pride and assertion of the resilience and adaptability of these women in difficult

situations, whether in their home countries, in the refugee camps, or once in the United States.

One way things changed for many of the participants is that they now became breadwinners for their families. Waris truly exemplified this adaptability to changed circumstances and renegotiation of traditional gender roles. When she and her family (she was resettled with her stepmother, brother, and half-brother and sister) decided to move to a southern city to be near other family members already there, the very next Monday after arriving found her looking for a job. Even though it could have been frowned upon in their community that a young girl of 18 would be out and about on her own, she explained that:

> Some people are open minded, some people are close minded. I was more open
>
> minded, than the rest of my family who just stayed in the house. I decided to go out
>
> and look for a job because I had met a Somali friend and I asked, "hi, where do you
>
> work?" And he told me he works in a supermarket and I asked whether they were
>
> hiring and he said yes. I told him to take me there, and on Monday I was there and I
>
> filled out an application. The manager interviewed me right away, gave me the
>
> uniform, told me to start the next day. I was a bit shocked but I went home and told
>
> my family that I was hired. Nobody believed me so I showed them the uniform.
>
> They were surprised and kept on asking me how I did it because there were a lot of
>
> people who had come two or three months before me but didn't find a job yet.

This experience that points to adaptability is echoed by a few other participants. Mina shared her experience stating that she, "started from the supermarket where I was making hamburgers and I burned myself frying the French fries because I had no experience. I just used to say I can do everything they asked me to do, just to find and keep a job." Semira, on the other hand, said she "found a job as a babysitter," while Angela, a

single mother, had challenges navigating the bureaucracy of assistance. She reported that she, "started working but I wasn't making much. Just five dollars an hour." No matter what they did or how much they earned, providing an income for the family was a necessity that trumped everything else.

This adaptability and resilience can be attributed to their experiences weathering difficult life circumstances in their home countries as well as during their time in a refugee camp. Angela shared that she had her first child very young, at 13 or 14, but was fortunate in that she was able to go back to school. And after high school, she was a volunteer in St. Joseph primary school in her hometown. This opportunity resulted in the Catholic school offering her a scholarship to further her education, and she ended up at Christ the King Teachers' Training College in Gulu, Uganda. The teaching certificate she earned there has enabled her to volunteer or find employment. This is how she put it:

> Being a refugee where you are, that's not your home where you have your own house and you do everything that you want. When you are a refugee you have to live in the camp and the resources are very limited. Though I was working, teaching and getting some money, that money wasn't enough for everything. That money was only helping me to buy some milk and at least some nutritional food for my kids because the food that they were distributing in the camp was maize and beans, which is not even a lot. We were a family of four so I was getting four cups of beans and eight pounds of either wheat flour or maize, and then a cup of oil; that's what we get for two weeks.

Angela felt that she had to provide more than what was offered at the camp, and was always looking to better the life of her family. After arriving in the United States, the teaching

certificate she earned helped her secure a teaching job at the local community center that provided services for refugees resettled in that particular city.

With time, there is significant growth in the kinds of work that the women found themselves doing. Much like many educated immigrants who find that they have to take entry-level jobs at first because of qualification conversion or language problems, the refugee women eventually hit their stride and move on and up in the job market. Tracing her own work history, Waris shared her story. She said that after she had her first child,

> I think four or five months after that, I started working in supermarket again. I was a cashier there and then I left to go to a gas station to be a cashier too. From there I started working at the bank as a teller, so I moved up.

It is worth noting that these women often are forced to go out into the workforce with no childcare available for those who are mothers, but somehow they manage to make it all work. Especially coming from a culture where they had a lot of help from family members or had the option of staying at home with the children, it is remarkable they are able to adjust, take whatever low-paying job they can, and work against the perceived stereotype of immigrants as pests who feast at the teat of public assistance.

Juxtaposed with this willingness to step out and put metal to the grind is the frank acknowledgement that doing these minimum wage jobs is not easy and some women choose to take another path, maintaining those identities that anchored them back at home. Marriage and staying at home becomes the other side of the coin. Waris explained how she one time she decided to leave a hotel housekeeping job, with much mirth:

> It was a hard job! After five months I decided to get married. I couldn't wait. This guy that I met, who is now my husband told me I used to complain every day. I used to tell him I can't do it, 18 rooms, some of them still in bed. Oh my God I get back

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pain, I don't know what to do. I said, listen to me, do you want to marry me? Are you ready to marry? If you are I don't want to work anymore. He said he was fine with that. So I got married right away and stayed home for a while until I adapted to everything.

Overall, the narratives illustrated how the former African women refugees continued to enact their familial roles, which for them were their true selves and a constant anchor no matter where they were or what their circumstances were. They valued keeping connections with family members within and outside of the United States, a fact that helped them retain that part of their identity which made their new lives in the United States a little bit more bearable and understandable.

Identity Frames, Gaps, and Interpenetration

The previous section presented subjective narratives of the numerous ways the former African women refugees struggled to maintain certain gendered roles that anchored their identity when they were back home, while understanding that gender rules and norms that they were now experiencing in the United States led to the development of new personal selves. In this section, I discuss the ways in which these narratives enact each layer of identity, the identity gaps experienced, and the interpenetration inherent in the negotiation of identity. One important takeaway from analysis of this section is that many of the participants saw themselves implicated in maintenance of what they perceived as their authentic cultural selves in their relationships with other family members near and far.

The personal frame is represented by the self-conceptualization and identification as daughters and daughters-in-law, mothers, sisters, and wives. The participants who deemed these personal identities salient did so in narratives that communicated their perceptions of themselves as occupying that role in the lives of their family members—the relational frame.

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In the narratives, the participants talked about various ways their categorization as daughters and daughters-in-law involved certain expectations and motivations in their society—taking care of the elderly, helping the family in various ways even when they lived far away, getting help from family when needed and so on. These self-definitions of familial roles are constructed partially from the messages received from relational others, are communicatively performed through certain behaviors, and emerge in reference to others as they are mutually constructed and negotiated through interactions (Hecht, Jackson, & Ribeau, 2003).

The participants' frames of identity were apparent when Waris spoke about taking care of her mother-in-law (relational identity) or going to college to study Sociology (personal identity). The societal obligations of taking care of the elderly, providing financial help that takes care of immediate and distant family members, and familial support after childbirth (communal identity) were also still a major part of their lives. Sending money back home or calling up one's mother when overwhelmed with a new identity as a mother (enacted identity) was also apparent. All these examples show the interpenetration of these multidimensional frames in the participants' expressions of identity. Therefore, it is imperative to note that in my analysis I came to the realization that it would be difficult to present the former African women refugees' identity neatly in alignment with the four separate layers. This is because of interpenetration of layers, or the ways in which each layer is present in one or multiple frames simultaneously (Golden, Niles, & Hecht, 2002).

Thus any example of the personal layer by default is tied to the relational layer because being a wife, mother, sister, daughter, daughter-in-law, single mother, and breadwinner are contingent on being part of a family or community which allows them to claim saliency of these identities in various contexts. This was articulated in various ways in the narratives of the participants. Dahabo talked about building a home for her mother or

Waris when she talked about her son wanting her to stay home and cook for him because she was his mother. Additionally, the communal layer was evident in Waris' narrative explaining the Somali culture's expectation that daughters-in-law will take on the care of their husband's mother when necessary. She planned to do so as she saw her sister-in-law do the same for her own mother. Likewise, Saumu and Waris' examples of expectations surrounding how a woman was taken care of by nuclear and extended female relations shows the connection between the relational and communal layers of identity. A further example of how the communal layer contributed to these personal identities is Sylvie's narrative that matter-of-factly talked about the different roles African women were expected to enact within the home. It was a given that women stayed home while men went outside of the home to work. Consequently the woman was expected to be the homemaker who carried out domestic duties at all times.

Resisting U.S. Cultural Practices while Affirming African Cultural Practices

My analysis and discussion in this section focuses on the theme of resistance to what the former African women refugees perceived as problematic aspects of U.S. culture that to them seemed detrimental to upholding African cultural values, most poignantly when it came to the bond with their children and inter-generational relations.

The Narratives

These narratives of opposition to perceived problematic aspects of American culture incorporate experiences where the participants negotiated parenthood and community connections even while U.S. American cultural values and reality worked counter to what they had grown up knowing and valuing as African culture. Thus, many of the refugee women described growing up in a more traditional African family setting where it was unheard of to contemplate contradicting your parents. They were, therefore, frustrated by

their U.S.-raised children who seemed to hold very different views from theirs. Angela highlighted this, talking about what she has heard being discussed at community gatherings:

> Women often share their frustration. They feel their kids are not respectful as they themselves were growing up. Their kids think these women do not know anything, and that they know better than them. It's just because of the culture; American culture is different from African culture. These kids have grown up here, and the way they see things is different. They don't really follow the exact African cultural values of their parents such as you don't talk back to your parents. Respect is number one but here a child can say this answer back and contradict their mother. In Africa you cannot do that. So these little things make them more frustrated and they are not happy with the changes.

Having said that, "…life in this country is completely different," she proposed that the women should be counseled about how to engage with their children in conflict situations because even though they grew up with corporal punishment for children, and it was unheard of for one to answer back to their parents or elders, "here you might try to do the same thing like when your child talks back to you, you will start being angry and all that, and you know, cause more problems." The problems she alludes to are incidences where African refugee parents have been taken into custody and their children taken away by authorities after reports of corporal punishment in the home. This is a serious dilemma for many in the community and in a couple of the focus group many of the participants stated that they were at their wits' end and knew other parents in the same situation regarding how to discipline wayward children. According to a participant in one of the focus groups:

> Here, children don't want to be spanked while back home it was easy to discipline them by beating them if they stepped out of line while telling them what they were

doing was wrong. In America, kids know they can't be beaten and take advantage of that by saying that they will call the police.

Having to adopt American parental strategies like talking to their children, negotiating with them or having to listen to their point of view is alien to many of the participants. They reported always reminding their children that this is not what happens back home and said they had no recourse but to prayer to mitigate this challenge.

The challenge of indiscipline is reinforced by the dynamic of some of the families in the community. As discussed elsewhere in this study, many of the refugees who are eventually resettled in the United States have negotiable education and language skills from years of living in refugee camps and for some, not being able to go to school because of their socio-economic status even before the wars broke out in their countries. What happens in these families as discussed in the focus groups is that these children end up being given responsibilities for bills and control over communication with their schools. This makes some of the children think they know better than parents, leading to a lot of problems with respect in the home. Consequently, some of them, the boys especially end up in trouble—they get into trouble with the police, have a record, and spend time in jail—making it nearly impossible for them to find jobs and so on. This leads to a cycle of indiscipline and trouble within some families in the community because when these young men are unable to find jobs, they get frustrated and resort to ill-advised juvenile behavior.

Identity Frames, Gaps, and Interpenetration

The previous section presented subjective narratives of participants' perceptions of some U.S. cultural values as problematic when operating in the context of raising children in an African home. In this section I discuss how the narratives elucidate identity negotiation in the identity layers, any identity gaps that were present, and the interpenetration of the

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frames if present. The former African women refugees certainly embraced their communal identity here as individuals from a particular cultural group that has different values and norms when it comes to engagement with their children. Of course this was within the personal identity of parent enacted through their talk regarding how frustrating it is to discipline their children in the United States as compared to back in their home countries.

There is a personal-relational identity gap as illuminated by how the parents perceive themselves as authority figures who should be able to decide how they choose to discipline their children. However, this is not the case as the children seem not to see them as these authority figures and push back against them by showing disrespect and threatening to report them to the American authorities. This gap is precipitated by the realities of life in the United States for some families where the children, by dint of speaking English, get to take on responsibilities like bills and correspondence with schools that are the purview of the parents. Thus, the children perceive themselves as authority figures and not children, the opposite of how their parents think of themselves and of their children.

A personal-enacted identity gap was also apparent because of the former African women refugees' "constant negotiations of how they are and who they need to become to experience a degree of comfort and acceptance" (Urban & Orbe, 2010, p. 308). In the United States, these African parents were being forced to abide by the norms that guide interactions between parents and children, norms that they often did not agree with. They were resistant to enacting their self in a manner they perceived to be counter to their personal selves as African parents. Some, however, saw the necessity of adapting the U.S. cultural values and norms while continuously preserving what they saw as their core self. To these African parents, corporal punishment would work best to curtail wayward behavior in their children, but they acknowledged that enactment of this particular part of their identity

would lead to negative consequences for them in the United States. Thus they are locked in a spiral of having to accept certain norms that to them have led to negative behaviors in their children, norms that run counter to what they know, but unable to do anything about them.

Summary

The central proposition in this chapter was that women's narratives about their identities enact a tension between wanting to retain the cultural norms, values, and behaviors that made up their identity and socialization before resettlement in the United States, and needing to change to "fit-in" in the new cultural milieu they are now a part of. My analysis of data collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and focus groups yielded three thematic clusters explicated above. The narratives highlighted in this chapter make it clear that the participants acknowledged that living in the United States had changed them, even though it was sometimes difficult for them to embrace some of the U.S. American cultural values they deemed incompatible to the enactment of their avowed selves. There was a perception that they had to change in order to be accepted, but they also felt that their efforts to fit in were not acknowledged by those around them. Largely, they felt the need to maintain identities that anchored them when they were back in their home countries as they helped continue relational ties they deemed important. However, they also reported coming to an understanding of how the new cultural environment was giving rise to new personal selves, consciously or unconsciously. As discussed in this chapter, their narratives enact maintenance of cultural practices associated with their lives before resettlement, transformation, and resistance to change as the women make sense of the tensions and contradictions of their fragmented, gendered selves. They also illustrate the fluidity and adaptability of their identity positions as they adjust to a new environment while keeping and redefining their transnational relations. In the next chapter, I shift the focus to

the negotiation of meanings of home and belonging in the context of transnationalism to explore the meaning and impact of such context for identity construction.

Chapter 6: Tensions that Emerge in Narratives of Home and Belonging in the Context of Transnational Displacement and Resettlement

In Chapter 5, I analyzed the narratives of former African women refugees to explore how lived experiences of migration and resettlement in the United States influenced their identity negotiation with a central focus on how their identities were both maintained and transformed. In this chapter, I shift the focus to an exploration of identity and transnationalism, exploring how the lived experiences of migration and resettlement influence the former African women refugees' sense of home and belonging. The participants who were part of this study originally come from the following countries: Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The analysis presented here aims to contribute to the understanding of transnational identity negotiation by focusing on gendered identities post-resettlement in non-gateway U.S. cities and towns.

As argued in Chapter 5, one of the underlying themes in participants' narratives was the tension enacted between maintaining and re-defining their sense of identity under the particular circumstances of gendered experiences of resettlement. This chapter shifts the focus to explore tensions between notions of home and belonging in the process of transnationalism within the context of resettlement. Specifically, this chapter answers the second research question: What salient identity frames and gaps emerge in the former African women refugees' narratives about home and belonging in the context of transnational displacement and resettlement? The central proposition in this chapter is that women's narratives about home and belonging enact a sense of both connectedness to and disjuncture from the places they were born and had to leave involuntarily, as well as to the places they were forced to resettle for the long run. I argue that these narratives are

particularly rich for the investigation of transnational identity construction and negotiation given the unique positionality of refugee women because of the circumstances surrounding their coming to the United States, their legal standing, and the material and psychological preparedness they bring, which are very different from that of voluntary immigrants. Refugees also experience the exigencies of adapting to a new country and maintaining connections with their homelands much differently than immigrants do.

The discussion that follows is informed by the communication theory of identity (CTI), as discussed in Chapter 5, and transnationalism. Transnationalism is approached here as a perspective that allows for the study of the meaning and impact of the "accelerating circulation of goods, people, money, information and ideas through and across national borders and cultural boundaries (Shami, 1996, p. 5). For the purposes of this study, I utilize Vertovec's (1999) definition of transnationalism as a (re)construction of place or locality among people who, voluntarily or involuntarily, experience displacement. As Den Boer (2015) argued, the increased movement of people across borders has led migrants to place a more pronounced importance on identifying with distinct cultural and ethnic places. This is supported in the narratives of displaced people who coalesce around remembered, or in Anderson's (1983) term, "imagined" homelands. Hand in hand with this concept of *home,* is that of *belonging,* which in a nutshell is the idea of feeling rooted or part of something larger than yourself that gives a sense of security and possibility for the future (Mason, 2007). These concepts capture the communal frame of identity which "points to a particular community bonded by a collective memory as the locus of identity" (Urban & Orbe, 2010, p. 306). Thus for this chapter, I explore the narratives of the former African women refugees to interrogate their perceptions of their communal identity in the context of transnational relations post-resettlement.

Some scholars whose research centers on transnationalism have focused on migrants who retain cross-border ties to their homelands (Foner, 2003; Glick-Schiller, 2004; Smith & Guarnizo, 1998), while also noting that there are those who choose not to or cannot maintain these ties and that therefore, many studies of transnationalism by default exclude these migrants. The nature of the refugee experience is such that individuals who have been forcibly displaced from their homeland, lost family members, material possessions, and documents that show a tie to the nation state experience retaining cross-border ties to their homelands in ways different than for those who voluntarily migrate. This dissertation seeks to contribute to the literature on voluntary and involuntary migration by unearthing these differing experiences of transnationalism through a discussion of the participants' negotiation of transnational positioning. The former African women refugees perceived themselves as torn between the United States and the country they fled from, whether physical or imagined, as they underwent the process of integrating into the larger U.S. society.

The analysis and discussion below outlines the dialectical tensions between the participants' sense of communal identity—expressed in narratives about home and belonging—and the negotiation of transnational positioning. The analysis presents three dominant themes articulated through a set of narratives in which women relate their perceptions of home and cultural belonging from their position as former refugees now living as members of displaced families but resettled in the United States. The themes are: remembering imagined homes while grappling with the future postresettlement; duty to family while attending to the harsh reality of life in the United States, and, social fluidity in home countries versus social conservatism postresettlement.

Within these thematic clusters, I present exemplars of the particular personal narratives shared by women to provide insight into how they navigate tensions, contradictions, and the negotiation of transnational positioning. I then follow up with a discussion that highlights the interpenetration of identity frames and identity gaps that mark a negotiation of the former African women's communal identity after resettlement.

Remembering Imagined Homes while Grappling with the Future Postresettlement

The conventional understanding of modern societies is based on the idea of a world populated by rooted, stable societies (Shami, 1996) or what Malkki (1992) described as the "rooting of peoples and the territorialization of national identity" (p. 24). Her argument is very fitting for those who study the lived experiences of displaced peoples as she theorizes that

> there has emerged a new awareness of the global social fact that, now more than
> ever, people invent homes and homelands in the absence of territorial national bases
> through memories of, and claims on, places they can and or will no longer corporally
> inhabit. (p. 24)

This argument, posited more than two decades ago, was true then and more so now especially because there are an estimated 65.3 million forcibly displaced people worldwide currently, with refugee numbers standing at 21.3 million (UNHCR, 2015). And these figures exclude those voluntary migrants who routinely move within and across borders all over the world. Research surrounding the experiences of refugees thus helps to "illuminate the complexity of the ways in which people construct, remember, and lay claim to particular places as "homelands" or "nations" (Malkki, 1992, p. 25).

The Narratives

The former African women refugees who participated in this study embody aspects of this construction and recollection through the theme of remembrance of home as a patchwork of gendered experiences that allow them to reconcile the past and embrace the future in the new contexts of resettlement. These narratives of remembrance incorporate experiences where the participants' sense of shared identity underwent a transformation that enabled them to better understand and welcome the new experiences in the United States. This negotiation occurred as they reconciled narratives of nostalgia for the good life back home with hope of making a good life in the United States, narratives of gender oppression and, counter-narratives of resistance to gender oppression.

Narratives of nostalgia. How displaced peoples remember home helps unpack how the construct of *home* is constructed and communicated. Jansen and Löfving (2007) explained that "'home' is too easily represented unwittingly as a timeless entity in an unchanging context of origin" (p. 9-10). This notion is interesting to explore in the case of refugees, given that this population acquires a sense of identity precisely because of historically specific political changes in their nations of origin that force exile and dislocation. This is further dramatized by the fact that a particular label (that of refugee) is imposed on them by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) to ascribe a new identity position. Yet, it is interesting to note that some of the participants did articulate that particular timeless, unchanging entity through the language of nostalgia and longing in their narratives of how life was like in their home countries during their formative years.

For example, when talking about home, Waris recalled what she missed most about her life in Somalia: a society that afforded her the space to have teenage friendships, fun, and freedom.

What I miss about being a teenager is having a good time. When our country was good, it was good. Those who are here and are 30 years and younger can't talk about Somalia as much as I can. I had the best time in my high school as we used to go to the theatre. There was a time my brother used to tell me don't go out and I used to jump out of the window. These are some of the good things from back then. I always enjoy looking back and talking about it because it was a good time.

Other women recalled previous times of innocence and carefree existence in narratives of a unified family, communal existence, and a life with safety, bereft of adult responsibilities. Mina talked about her early years in these terms:

When I was in Somalia I was so young. You are surrounded by all your relatives. You do not think any bad thing is going to happen. You have your family. You have kids you play with, your neighbors and as everyone knows, in Africa, anyone who is your neighbor is your aunt and your uncle.

Angela and Semira's recollections of their formative years in South Sudan and Somalia were comparable, especially regarding their longing for communal life, trust, and mutual support as lived in their home countries. Interestingly, their narratives locate a sense of dislocation and experienced loss not in their home countries but as the result of resettlement in the U.S. society:

It does not matter how big the family was, we lived by helping each other, sharing and that's what I miss. Now in the United States I can't even bring my brothers or sister's daughter to live with me. I only struggle with mine. She has to struggle with hers. I can't send my kids to my sister because of the lifestyle here. Back home many people grew up differently. Sometimes you leave your home and go stay with your aunt and uncle, there was no problem. Nobody cared. It's just like we took care of

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each other and we don't have that here. So when you think of that, it's painful because that's not the kind of life you have here. Whatever you're struggling with it's just you. The only support you get maybe somebody will talk to you but you are not even close to each other to give that kind of help.

Nostalgic remembrances of home were linked to communal family living and evoked togetherness, even when the family was not a nuclear one. Semira said she came from a polygamous family that stuck together through multiple upheavals. She talked about how in the United States, "you feel a sense of loneliness" which was not the same back home because

even though we had two different mothers, we were always brothers and sisters. And when we had to leave home and go to Egypt, and then to eventually come here, you kind of lose your identity. When we were in Somalia, the neighbors used to call us "family Mohamed." You know, we had my mom this side, my stepmother that side. We were family Mohamed to everyone. But it doesn't exist anymore.

These two narratives highlight the different experiences of communal life back home as compared to life post-resettlement, where that sense was lost due to two things: fragmented and split families as well as the U.S. cultural value of individualism that is on the opposite end of the spectrum of cultural dimensions as compared to the African cultural value of collectivism. While talking about their idealized home in the past, both Angela and Semira place importance on identifying with distinct cultural and ethnic places, especially in contrast to the new and unfamiliar space they now inhabit. They embody an ongoing negotiation of coming to terms with being resettled in a culturally different milieu by remembering an imagined place that was ideal, and voicing disappointment that their lives post-resettlement do not measure up to that imagined home.

While the collective memory of life in their homelands was an idealized one in contrast to their narratives of life in the United States, there was acknowledgement among the participants that they had to make the best of where they were now settled as they had no other choice. The reasons given for embracing a future, though far from idealized, in the United States included the fact that they had children born and raised in the United States who knew this as home, and that it had become home for them too. When asked whether she would want to go back to that idealized version of "home" if the circumstances allowed it, Angela stated:

> I can't say no, and I can't say yes because I don't know the future, and I've been here for so long. I have also raised my kids here, and they are not grown up and done with school yet. As a mom and dad for them, I have to be by them no matter what and these kids only know life in the United States. They feel like this is their home but they know where they came from. They know their roots but they don't remember anything. What they remember is the life they have here right now. This is something that's going to force me to be here for them. My kids and myself, we have been here for so long, and I am beginning to see America as my home but I still respect where I came from.

This embracing of life in the United States was articulated as a re-construction of where they felt home was and a desire to feel rooted or part of something larger than themselves that gave them a sense of security and possibility for the future. The former African women refugees did this in a number of ways personally and within the community. One way was by enacting the same communal sense of living they had experienced in their homelands in their communities here in the United States. A widely embraced enactment of

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this was extending help to other refugees in the community who might not have the same resources and knowledge. Waris said:

> Some of the recent arrivals were more disadvantaged than me because they didn't go to school like we did. They were of a lower class and only a few of them had an education. So for example, when I live in Georgia, we had the first Bantu family who arrived when I was working over there. The person who was in charge was an old lady who had never seen or used electricity or indoor plumbing. She had no idea what to do and when the case worker picked her up and brought her to her apartment, she did not want to let him go. He was from Africa but did not speak her language and she didn't speak English well so there was a problem. She was holding onto him and telling him not to leave her there but they couldn't communicate. He tried to show here how to lock the door and she was just crying. He didn't know what to do and he called me at two in the morning for help. She was so relieved when she realized I spoke Somali and asked that I go to over because she was afraid to be in the house. My pleas for her to just lock her door and sleep were not heeded and so I had no choice but to tell the case worker to bring her to my house at that late hour. The next day when I took her back to her apartment, I showed her everything: how to use the bathroom, how to work the lights, lock her door and so on. Little by little, she learned everything.

Likewise, Semira shared a story about how she connected to her new community by volunteering her time to continue that sense of collective living for those refugees in her city who were newly arrived and unfamiliar with life in the United States:

> I often help other refugees like me. One time I was taking this girl... Her family came as refugees from Somalia. So we were taking the bus. I wanted to show her the bus,

how to ride it to…where she was taking English lessons so that she wouldn't have to depend on someone for transportation. She was afraid of everything, especially the drunks loitering around the bus stop. She was also self-conscious and believed that everyone was staring at her because she looked different in her long flowing dresses. Her anxiety was so bad that she never rode the bus after that day the whole time she lived in [the city].

Here, the narratives expose a desire to uphold the communal sense of connection that was evident in their narratives about life in their homeland growing up where everyone knew each other and looked out for each other.

Seeking a connection was also as simple as acknowledging other black people in the predominantly white communities they found themselves in. For example, Ummi shared that when she first came to the United States, she found herself in a town with two Somali families who were resettled earlier than her family and a Senegalese family who came later. She said that, "if you saw a black person across the street, you could just cross the street and hug them." For the African families in that town, this simple act of acknowledgement was an enactment of communal identity in a new place where they sorely needed that connection to someone who outwardly looked like them.

Angela experienced this help and community solidarity when she first came to the United States. She shared the following narrative:

I was first resettled in the Dallas/Ft. Worth area in Texas. I lived there for five months, and I don't know how people knew I had come to the United States, because they told each other and I started receiving phone calls from relatives and people I had known back home. I had a cousin who had come earlier, and she is the one who convinced me to move [here]. When I got here she took me to the shelter

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to get housing assistance and she had me apply for housing, for Medicaid and welfare because I did not have anything. Without all this assistance I don't know what I would have done.

The refugee communities continue to enact this sense of collectivism by sharing resources as Angela further articulated:

I think the reason why refugees get used to life in the United States to the extent that they are able to move from the city they were brought to is because a family member or friend asked them to move to their states. Someone might call you and say, "oh my friend, you should move here. I am in New York and it is a very good place." And boom, you move. If two people from my tribe move to New York, everybody would go. Like in this town right now, there's Anuak, Acholi, and Nuer. Nuer are the majority so if I move here and find people from my tribe and you are my friend, I will call you and tell you to move and you might call another person and so on. That's how people move around the United States.

What this points to is the connection and obligation refugees resettled earlier feel towards newer arrivals to ease their transition into the U.S. American cultural landscape and to also encourage movement so that, much like previous immigrants to the U.S. who established today's Chinatowns, Koreatowns and other ethnic enclaves, the former African refugees can also build their numbers and presence in particular areas of the United States.

Narratives of gender oppression. While narratives of nostalgia for togetherness and safety experienced within families and communities, and rosy memories of growing up in their home countries abounded, they did not preclude participants from sharing the remembrance of home as a non-idealized place where conservative gender ideologies kept women in conditions of inequality and oppression. Nostalgia could not erase criticism of

some of the commonly held cultural norms and gender roles in traditionally conservative African societies. A number of the participants talked about "home" in ways that did not shy away from looking at some of the oppressive cultural norms imposed on women.

For them, home as remembered was not always an ideal place, as their narratives explored the negative aspects of life for divorced, single, and married women in their countries of origin, even before the conflicts that forced them to flee. Semira acknowledged that

> life was challenging most of the time. We didn't have enough money because my
>
> mom divorced at that time and she was the breadwinner. My dad had his other
>
> wife and kids. Life was tough on us when I was a little kid. Most of the time, my
>
> mom wasn't home because she had to sell vegetables in the market to survive. It
>
> wasn't like my mom went to work and came home at night. It was daily running and
>
> selling, buying, selling, doing things like that to survive.

The economic instability created by her mother's divorce is at the center of Semira's narrative. Unlike in the United States where a divorced woman is entitled to alimony and/or child support, that was not a cultural norm in Somalia. Once divorced, a man, much like Semira's father, could remarry and dedicate all his financial and emotional resources to the new family.

Like Semira's account, many of the participants' narratives centered on restrictive practices that were not favorable to girls and women in the community. In her remembrance, Waris, for instance, echoed familiar, normative gender scripts that often determined:

> things like men are the leaders of the house, and so you have to obey and respect
>
> what your husband says; you can't say no. Women did not have a voice, they did not

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have rights. For example, when a woman got divorced, the husband took the kids. If

you went to court, they awarded custody to the man.

Other issues the participants recalled as negatively influencing women's lives included "the

circumcision thing," or what is widely known today as female genital mutilation (FGM), and

"arranged marriages" that were widely practiced in the homeland and seem to have found

their way into the refugee community in the United States.

FGM as a rite of passage for pre-pubescent girls has been around for generations

and is ingrained in the fabric of life in some of these communities. According to the United

Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), more than 200 million girls

and women alive today have been mutilated in 30 countries in Africa, the Middle East and

Asia where FGM is concentrated (UNICEF, 2016). The reasons why communities carry out

FGM include: it is often considered an important part of raising a girl to prepare her for

marriage and adulthood; it is used to police sexual behavior and to ensure premarital

virginity and marital fidelity in girls and women; and it is associated with cultural ideals of

femininity and modesty, with the belief that by removing body parts that are considered

unclean, unfeminine, and male, the girls remain beautiful and clean (Skaine, 2005). In these

communities, it is believed that it increases marriageability and therefore many feel the

pressure to uphold this social norm to be accepted socially within the community.

One participant from Somalia spoke about the extent to which this practice was

cultivated as common sense and internalized by girls themselves when she said: "When I was

young I used to cry, just to get circumcised because other girls had been circumcised. I did

not want to be left behind and so I cried until I was circumcised." She explained that this

was because it was taken for granted that a girl was not old enough or was not going to be

accepted as a woman if she was not "circumcised."

The participants also discussed that once a girl became a woman, then she would most likely face an arranged marriage. As Leylo put it, "in Somalia, when you become a woman, at 16, 17, you get married and stay home." There was no need to have the consent of the girls and most of them had no choice in the matter. As Leylo added, for many girls:

If you go to school, by the time you get married, you're done. So even though the time was changing, for the majority of the people what was important was that a woman had to get married, have kids, and stay home.

This sentiment was also echoed by Semira who recalled:

Women were not outspoken. You had to take what the men told you. Like I witnessed what happened to my older sister. We do not have the same father and so she was to marry this old man who had eight children from a previous marriage and whose wife had died. My sister had to marry him, and her job from then on was to just cook and clean. She could not stand up for herself and say, "No, this is not right." She had to agree with whatever he said especially because he was a rich man in Somalia.

Likewise, Kiin's sister had the same fate and when "she got married, she was 13 or 14 back home. And no education, no nothing. [Had] seven kids in a row." One of the participants, Angela, shared her own experience when she disclosed: "I had my first son at a very young age. I was just 13-14." What this meant obviously was that a lot of these young women could no longer go to school and became mothers at too young an age, ensuring that they had no choice but to stay under the thumb of the male authority figures and breadwinners in their lives, perpetuating the patriarchal hierarchy in the community.

Counter-narratives of gendered norms: While I expected these narratives of gender norms to adhere to a critique of patriarchal structures and behaviors that demarcated

women's and men's places in society, I was nevertheless surprised to hear some narratives that countered such views. Waris was one of the participants whose narrative was different from the expected. Describing the gender roles in her family when she was growing up, she shared:

> My dad used to feel comfortable in our home because my mom, unlike his other wife who used to fight with him when he wanted to cook, would tell him to teach her how to cook. So he used to show her what to do and what to cook, and he used to cook every day. We were not the same with his other family who had traditional Somali culture. My mom was open-minded and would say, "okay, cook if you want."

This is a counter-narrative to the participant narratives of gender oppression presented above as well as to U.S. mainstream narratives about gender in Somali culture— which is known as predominantly conservative Muslim—that are reproduced in much of the coverage of Somali refugees in areas of the United States where they have a high population. Much of what is discussed highlights views of Islam as forcing women to cover themselves outside the home. However, Shariifo recalled life in Somalia which runs counter to the prevailing U.S. American views regarding religious women's covering:

> Covering was a choice, yeah. Especially in the capital city Mogadishu. We never had that until the early 90s when the war started. When we used to go to school we had a uniform part of the rule was that we could not cover our head. If you covered your head you were kicked out from the school. We wore khaki pants and shirts to the high school and open hair. But now a lot of people and most of America sees those who are religious as more representative of us.

Even though there were traditions in place that forced young women to continue in gendered roles that precluded any self-expression, and it felt like most did not have agency

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to determine the direction of their lives, there were pockets of progressiveness within the community that did not adhere to this traditionalist mindset. Ummi explained:

> Yeah, education wasn't thought of as that important for some women. But some families were different. I don't want to generalize. Some families did not differentiate whether they have boys or girls. They always wanted all their kids to get an education. But in some families, the boys were always placed ahead of the girls in getting an education.

Across narratives, the "home" participants reconstructed in their shared remembrance is not only one that is from another place they left behind when they were forced to flee the conflict in their country of origin, but it has also "been left behind in another time and is often experienced as another 'home,' irrevocably lost both spatially and temporally" (Jansen & Löfving, 2007, p. 9). The recollections of this previous home are often then invoked as memories of times gone by which manifested both as nostalgia as well as critiques of conservative gender norms. This pattern illustrates the incomplete and bifurcated sense of belonging many of the former African women refugees reported. In this sense, enacting cultural activities suited to life post-resettlement brought back that sense of communal living they craved and made life that much more bearable in their new home.

Identity Frames, Gaps, and Interpenetration

The previous section presented narratives of the various ways the former African women refugees experience remembrance of home as a patchwork of gendered experiences that allow them to reconcile the past and embrace the future in the new contexts of resettlement. In this section, I discuss the ways in which these narratives explicate identity negotiation across Hecht's (1993) layers of identity, the identity gaps that emerge between these layers, and the interpenetration inherent in the negotiation of identity. The communal

frame focuses on the ways a group of people use their shared histories and characteristics in defining and shaping identity (Hecht et al., 2003) and "points to a particular community bonded by a collective memory as the locus of identity" (Urban & Orbe, 2010, p. 306).

The four layers of identity proposed by the communication theory of identity (CTI), according to Jung and Hecht (2004), "may be analyzed independently but are not really separate from each other, which is interpenetration (mutual interdependence), perspectives on a whole, integrated identity" (p. 267). This is true for my analysis because even though I focus on the communal layer here to explicate the larger social categories individuals share, the rest of the layers are implicit. For example, when Waris described herself as being eager to get circumcised growing up (personal layer), she attributes it to the fact that one was not perceived as a proper girl or woman (relational layer) without undergoing the cultural practice of FGM (communal layer). Another example could be Semira's discussion of the acceptance that post-divorce, a man could abandon his family, remarry, and focus on the new one without repercussions. This was an accepted practice within the community (communal layer) which shaped the dynamic of the relationship among family members who belong to families like hers (relational layer).

Moreover, many of the participants spoke about both positive and negative gender practices that delineated what men could do and in most cases what women could not do. This had an impact on their personal identities as they grew up to either embody or eschew these roles (enactment layer) that were dictated by society. Semira's example of her family (relational layer) being described as family Mohamed showed how society viewed people through the relationships they had more than focusing on their personal identities. Narratives describing calling everyone aunt or uncle (relational layer) and every adult being able to take care of and/or discipline even children who were not their own (enactment

layer) speaks to the African proverb that states "it takes a village to raise a child" (communal layer).

While the layers of identity can work together seamlessly, they sometimes create tensions and are always being negotiated. The identity gaps identified occur within narratives of particular individuals as they discuss their transnational identity across the layers. Angela's account answering the question of where she feels "home" is, where she fled from or America, is an example of a gap occurring within one identity frame. I should note here that even though much of the research focuses on gaps between the different layers or *inter-frame* gaps, there are recent studies that have introduced the concept of *intra-frame* or within-frame identity gaps (Crosby, 2012; Paxman, 2016). Thus, Angela describing her communal identity as encompassing her home country and her country of resettlement is an example of the negotiation of two different communal identities within the same identity frame. This is also apparent in the communal frame as illustrated by Waris and Semira's acknowledgement of both positive and negative aspects of their African cultural identities. As they shared nostalgic remembrances of life growing up, they also conceded the problematic gender expectations that governed the lives of women and girls in their communities.

While these examples of intra-frame identity gaps were a discrepant chord, there were also expected inter-frame gaps unearthed. For example, Waris's narrative regarding the gender roles in her family, Shariifo's account of the act of veiling, and Ummi's narratives of educational opportunities illustrate what I call a communal-personal-communal gap. The communal identity frame is the identity ascribed to people based on their group membership while personal identity frame refers to how individuals subjectively view themselves (Hecht, 1993). Waris, Shariifo and Ummi repudiate the ascribed identity imposed on them in

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American discourse of their homelands and avow a shared identity that is counter to these characterizations.

Duty to Family while Attending to the Harsh Reality of Life in the United States

One other way in which migrants and refugees maintain transnational ties with their homelands is through what has come to be known in migration literature as financial remittances. There are 244 million people worldwide living in a country other than their own (United Nations, 2015). The remittances they send are often the main source of income for their families left behind. In 2015, an estimated $582 billion was remitted all over the world, with the 19 percent of migrants in the U.S. sending back an estimated $133.5 billion (Connor, 2016).

One particular group of migrants and refugees, the Somali diaspora, uses financial remittances to maintain contact with the communities left behind. According to Hoehne, Feyissa, and Abdile (2011), these remittances, which are a big part of Somalia's national revenue, "contribute to household survival, and have the potential to help strengthen political stability, economic growth, and institution building" (pp. 90-91).

The Narratives

In this section I argue that among the participants, notions of "home" are also enacted by the economic practice of sending remittances to relatives displaced across national borders. For the former African women refugees, the act of remitting money was a material, economic practice that redefined their sense of identity. This was evident, for instance, in the shift of their traditional familial roles now that they are working outside the home and become providers of financial help because they are pegged as the "fortunate ones" and expected to help others. However, tensions occur as they negotiate between their sense of duty to cultural norms and resentment for the economic hardships they endure to

fulfill the cultural expectation. This negotiation was articulated in narratives of sense of duty to ensure survival of relatives and the struggles faced by the not so fortunate former African women refugees.

Many of the participants in this study had to send money to their relatives who were often still in refugee camps in the neighboring countries they had all fled to once the conflict started. These material economic transactions force a re-construction of identity positions among former African women refugees trying to re-construct their lives after resettlement. This is due to the fact that prior to resettlement, their identity positions carried with them different expectations that are upended now that they are resettled in a new country that allows them privileges their relatives back home do not have. Basically, as women in their home countries, they fulfilled their gendered roles in ways did not include financial help to family members. However, after resettlement in the United States where they have had to adjust to roles outside the home, they fulfill expected cultural norms of providing assistance to family members by providing financial help. African collectivistic cultures carry an expectation of those more fortunate helping out those who are not.

The case of refugee families is especially unique given that family members are often still in refugee camps or within economically unstable war-torn countries. Many of the narratives presented in this section are tied to the theme of roles within the family but highlight the different ways the former African women refugees construct transnational identities while maintaining contact with those left behind. This section illustrates that connection as maintained through financial remittances.

Sense of duty to enable survival for relatives. Dahabo explained that her mother was the immediate relative she left back home and she, "Built a nice home for her and we used to communicate by sending letters, phone calls and I used to send her money every

month for her to live on." The money she sent was used to contribute to household survival as discussed above, not only for her mother, but also for many relatives who were dependent on her, as is the custom in most Africa countries of the most fortunate relative having an obligation to help less fortunate others. Likewise, Melissa claimed she helped from afar when she said: "I send money from the U.S." She was quick to tell me that ideally, she would much prefer to go back home to Burundi to help, but she understands that being in the United States has opened up material economic advantages that are of more help to her family. As she acknowledged, "the reality of going back is not that easy."

The financial help given to relatives sometimes went beyond household survival to actual saving of lives as narrated by Waris. Her brother was

> Abducted and then we had to pay money for his release. He had to flee Somalia and finally made it to a refugee camp. This was a guy who had been a director of an international NGO and he ended up in a refugee camp struggling with life; his four kids, three nieces, and my sister and her three children looking to him for everything. They were a large family and so we used to support them from here.

Similarly, Semira's nieces were in danger of being raped and she had to send her sister money to enable her and her daughters' journey from Somalia to a refugee camp in Uganda where they still were at the time of the study.

Narratives of struggle for the not so "fortunate" refugee woman: The financial remittances often sent are pretty substantial and sometimes the participants shared that they had to rethink their altruism. Shariifo is an example of this, sharing that, "I have a sister in Africa. I used to send her 300 dollars a month every time. I had to stop, I couldn't do it." This is because

Sometimes you have bills to pay, you have plans, you want to save money, you want do things for your kids' education, mortgage, you know, but sending money every month is something that they get used to it in Africa.

Further, as Ummi griped about those left at home who felt entitled to her hard-earned income,

This money I work for hard and you are getting easily and you want somebody to work for you when you are not doing anything. What are they doing? It's hard to give the money. Now they always say when you go to America and drink the American water, people change. They become rude, they become money lovers, they don't remember back home. That's what they believe. But it's the situation that you are in, you know. When you are in America, every step you take is money; nothing's free.

From these excerpts and my interviews with the participants, there was a sense that they felt they had a moral obligation to help people back home by sending money. This was mainly because many of their countries were still unstable and most of their relatives were dependent on them for income because they lived in refugee camps in neighboring countries or did not have gainful employment in their country of origin. However, they also felt resentful because this help puts them under financial stress while making life easy for their kin. They were also critical of what they perceived as entitlement to their hard-earned cash evident when their relatives negatively labeled them for not remitting money for any number of reasons.

Identity Frames, Gaps, and Interpenetration

Three frames of identity emerged from the participants' narratives in the above section. The first one was the personal identity where each of the participants viewed

themselves as obligated to help family members in dire situations back home as well as provide a continued source of sustenance. Similarly the relational frame was apparent because these obligations sprung from their identifications as individuals in relation to other people within their families, that is, their roles as sisters and daughters. Here we can clearly see the interrelatedness of these two frames because the negotiation of identity is occurring within and between the personal and relational layer. Finally, remitting money, and communicating through letters and phone calls illustrated the enactment layer that focuses on performed or expressed identity (Jung & Hecht, 2004).

Three types of identity gaps also emerged from participants' narratives: relational-enacted gap; relational-personal gap, and relational-enacted-personal gap. The relational-enacted gap occurred when participant behavior (enacted gap) deviated from others' ascriptions that form identity (relational layer). This gap is illustrated by Shariifo when she stopped sending money to her sister because she felt she was sacrificing too much for someone who expected her to uphold a lifestyle that frankly eclipsed her own in the U.S. just because they perceived her as the "fortunate" relative in America. Another identity gap that emerged from the participants' narratives was the personal-relational gap. An example is Ummi's account where she disavowed an identity ascribed to her—as a rude, money loving individual who abandoned those left behind—as she perceived herself as a practical person who had to put her welfare and upkeep in the United States above frequent remittances to individual relatives who did not seem to appreciate just how hard life was for a resettled refugee in the United States.

Social Fluidity in Home Countries versus Social Conservatism Postresettlement

Apart from financial remittances, social remittances are another way that refugees and migrants maintain transnational ties. Levitt (2001) coined the term *social remittances* to

refer to the norms, practices, identities, and social capital circulating between Boca Canasta, a village in the Dominican Republic, and Jamaica Plain, a Boston neighborhood. According to Levitt and Lamba-Nieves (2011),

> Migrants from the developing world bring with them social remittances—defined as ideas, know-how, practices, and skills—that shape their encounters with and integration into their host societies. They also send back social remittances that promote and impede development in their countries of origin. (para 3)

Remittances of this type depend on how much the migrants and refugees engage with these countries. Hoehne, Feyissa, and Abdile (2011) carried out a study with the Somali diaspora and their findings point to three types of groups: those who maintain constant contact, those who do not care to maintain any type of contact, and a third group that falls somewhere in-between the other two. Those who maintained constant contact were the ones most likely to affect the political, economic, social and cultural climate back home.

Social remittances as conceptualized by Levitt (1998, 2001) are of "four types—norms, practices, identities, and social capital" (Levitt & Lamba-Nieves, 2011, p. 3). Moreover,

> Social remittance exchanges occur when migrants return to live in or visit their communities of origin, when non-immigrants visit those in the receiving country, or through the exchange of letters, videos, cassettes, e-mails, blog posts, and telephone calls. (p. 3)

The Narratives

Social remittances are ways in which refugee communities engage in the reconstruction of shared identity in the new environments of resettlement by incorporating elements of their cultural identity that they deemed positive and criticizing those they did

not. Participants in this study brought a critical reflection on their cultural norms and how some of these remittances were socially constructed in ways that continue to be problematic to women. These critical reflections were expressed through narratives of communal living in the new place as a cultural asset and narratives of social and religious conservatism as a threat to women's empowerment.

Narratives of communal living in the new place as a cultural asset. Portes, Guarnizo, and Landolt (1999) defined socio-cultural transnationalism as activities "oriented towards the reinforcement of a national identity abroad or the collective enjoyment of cultural events and goods" (p. 221). Kivisto (2001) posited that this is evidence of a desire on the part of immigrants to bring over to the United States selective elements of their culture. Gans' (1979) argument that the kind of cultural activities employed by immigrants help preserve a nostalgic "symbolic ethnicity," supports my own argument regarding the former African women refugees' cultural engagement as a way of maintaining communal identities and practices meaningful to their sense of collective memory.

I personally saw evidence of a refugee community engaging in activities geared towards strengthening the bonds of their national and ethnic group. What follows is a report of an event I witnessed through participant observation. I reconstruct it using field notes I made that particular night. As I mentioned in chapter 4, one of my sites of data collection was the city in the Midwestern United States where I was fortunate to be introduced to and taken under the wings of two women community leaders. Kiin and Waris are originally from Somalia and, together with their husbands, are part of the leadership of the refugee community. They invited me to come along and meet a family of newly arrived refugees.

This particular family had first been resettled in Atlanta and had been there for four months before they decided to relocate to Mankato. Kiin explained that they had just been informed a week ago that there was a new family of Somali refugees coming to their community. As they do for all new arrivals, they organized housing for them and on this day, they were paying them a home visit to welcome them to Mankato. I rode together with Waris to an apartment complex which she told me housed many former refugee and immigrant families. They had chosen the apartment for this particular reason, giving the new arrivals a ready-made community.

We were welcomed into a two-bedroom apartment which at that moment had scant furniture. The family had just arrived the night before, and this home visit was supposed to be a welcoming event as well as a way to ask the family directly what their needs were. I asked permission to sit down and observe the interactions and found a corner of the room and sat on the carpeted floor. What followed was a couple of hours where there was a steady stream of visitors coming in and out, spending a few minutes talking to the family and then taking their leave. Kiin, Waris, and their husbands stayed for the duration of our visit. There was plenty of laughter and animated conversations in Somali and Swahili, and I often found myself drawn into the conversation. The family, composed of a single mother and her three sons, expressed their gratitude and talked about hearing that this city had a strong Somali community, a fact they felt reflected in the warm welcome they were being accorded. During this visit, the community leaders explained that they were organizing school admissions for the boys, furniture for the house, and a job for the mother. They pledged to stop by often to help with groceries and other needs before the family got acclimatized to their new home.

We left to make our way to a Somali-owned grocery store to get basic rations for the family. This space sold food items from East Africa and was a focal meeting point for the African refugee and immigrant community in the city. My narrative highlights the various ways the former African women refugees and the larger refugee community in this town engaged in cultural activities that preserved their communal identities and was a cultural asset for everyone involved.

Narratives of social and religious conservatism as a threat to women's empowerment. Social remittances are not always positive nor do they move in one direction only (Levitt & Lamba-Nieves, 2011). Participants in this study spoke about a few issues they brought over to the United States with them which could be viewed as social or "cultural" (p.3) and these include arranged marriage, circumcision, and religion. As Levitt and Lamba-Nieves (2011) stated, "the ideas and practices migrants bring with them are transformed as they are used in the United States and then remitted back" to their home countries (p. 8).

The first social remittance participants bring with them is the cultural practice of arranged marriage. Many cultures around the world practice this way of bringing two individuals and families together. While they acknowledged it as an important cultural norm for some in their community, the participants were also quick to disagree with the continuation of the practice as they perceived it as taking away agency from the lives of the women who had to fulfill their family obligations. Mina spoke about the practice and said she still saw it maintained by some families in their city. She narrated the story of one young woman she knew:

Was introduced to a man who lived in another city. Her mother and father arranged it for her. She graduated high school and even went to college but her parents chose

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for her the man she is going to marry. She said okay, not no, because she was keeping the culture.

Mina made it clear that although she did not support this practice and she would never choose spouses for her own children, she nevertheless said she understood why the practice was widespread. Further, this was a cultural practice that is still ongoing back home in Somalia, at it has been for generations. Leylo made this clear when she talked about how she saw the same thing happen to her sister:

> She was older than me and my half-sister. She was to marry this old man who had eight kids from a previous marriage. His wife had died, and he was set to marry my sister. Her job was to just to cook and clean. She could not stand up for herself and say, "No, this is not right." She had to agree to whatever he said, especially because he was a rich man in Somalia at the time.

As a whole, most of the women I spoke to appeared to be against arranged marriages but also acknowledged it would be hard to root it out as it was a cultural practice carried over from the old country.

The second social remittance participants critiqued was female "circumcision," more critically known as female genital mutilation (FGM), and the impact it had on the community. Waris shared that,

> It's more about the parents. The boys who grew up here they don't even know, whether this is circumcision or they don't even want a woman who was circumcised, but the older generation are the ones who still insist on it. Sometimes I get a call from Somalia—my husband has a daughter from a previous marriage—and his grandmother calls us and she says, "oh you should circumcise her." She used to keep calling him to send his daughter to Africa to get circumcised and my husband used

to say no. Back home, to some families, it is shameful to have a girl who is not circumcised.

However, Waris said that she hoped the act of refusing to have her step-daughter undergo FGM would change the older generation's minds. Interestingly enough, it seemed that this was a cultural practice full of contradictions. The community, according to Amaal, "knows that it is illegal here, but still their mindset is still the same as we had back home." To complicate matters, as Waris opined, because of living in the United States, many families were:

"now learning a lot but I've seen some women want to take even their young kids back to Africa and do it [FGM], but they are afraid of the system. But it's not that they want to have their daughters undergo this, but they are forced to [by cultural expectations]."

Perhaps the saddest story was one shared in a focus group where the women gathered discussed the alarming nature of one young woman's journey:

One girl went back to Somalia to get circumcised because she had not been cut as she came to United States when she was young. Her family wanted her to be accepted as a woman who's supposed to be circumcised and she was 20 something when she went back to Somalia to get circumcised. She agreed to it because this is something she grew up with in her mind, and her family was determined to do. She couldn't do it when she was young because she had to see doctors and her parents would be in trouble if found out. So they waited until she was 21.

In the same vein as the narrative surrounding arranged marriages, most of the former African women refugees in this study espoused views that showed they thought of FGM as a harmful cultural practice that should not have been brought to the United States, nor be still

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practiced back in their home countries. However, it was one of the things both those resettled here as well as family and communities back home still followed through with, right or wrong.

The last social remittance I found critiques of in the narratives of the African women refugees who were part of this study was the role of religion in their lives and how some of their community members enacted this communal identity. Most of the women identified as Muslim, with many donning outward artifacts such as a *bui bui,* which is an item of clothing worn by some Muslim women, especially along the East African coast, consisting of a long black dress and a piece of black cloth that covers the head showing only the face or eyes (Oxford Learner's Dictionary, 2017). Given the political socio-cultural climate in the United States post September 11, one might imagine that many adherents of Islam would be cautious and try to keep as low a profile as possible. It was then fascinating for me to encounter evidence of the opposite happening. It was also a source of consternation for some of my participants.

For some of the women, maintaining deeper roots to a familiar practice in their new place of residence helped keep them grounded and focused, especially when it came to raising their children. One 42-year-old Somali woman from a focus group shared that she was taken aback when her friend, who had worn shorts and played basketball back home, decided that could not do for her daughter here in the United States. The reason her friend gave was that, "She's a girl and she will be bad, and I don't want other people to see her body." When confronted with the fact that this was the United States and that when she was her daughter's age in Somalia she did not mind showing parts of her body off, she replied, "I didn't know the religion at that time."

This was a recurring narrative within the focus group discussion, with many participants surprised at how much more religious people have become now that they are resettled in the United States. Some of the ways this renewed or adopted religiosity was expressed was in the policing of women's dressing. Saumu shared her view that people

Think that you come to America and change. I didn't change. I was the way I was at home. I wore my pants for all my life. It's not something that I started here but some people assume I changed when I came here. So you will see a lot of Somalis who are wearing pants because they came from the city. But there are parents who are not allowing their children, especially girls, to do activities like sports.

What is interesting about this is the linkages made between the contrast in practicing stricter guidelines of Islam back home and here in the United States. According to Waris, it seems "religion is getting stronger because coming to the United States and living here has made people afraid that everything they know—their culture—is changing and so they force the young girls to cover, something we never had back home." According to the discussions I had surrounding this issue, more adherence to stricter rules of Islam feels especially counterintuitive given the climate surrounding U.S. attitudes towards Muslims all over the world as well as those residing in the country. The fact that many families have chosen a more difficult path was explicated by another Somali participant in her forties in this manner:

It is a choice to be more conservative. This is because for those of us who remember back to how life was back home, especially in the capital city Mogadishu, we never had strict religious rules until the '90s when the war started. When we used to go to school we had a uniform. We could not cover our head and if you covered your head you were kicked out from the school. We wore khaki pants and white shirts to high

school with uncovered hair. But now for our people and the majority of Americans, the people who are religious stand out more.

Reflecting on this, one focus group member from Sudan in her 30s agreed that more people were afraid of losing their culture, their tie to their homeland, and were therefore "reacting to life in America. More people are spreading a lot of their religion and telling others what to do and they're brainwashed, that's what I can say about most of them." For her, this becomes a problem because "people are interpreting the religion the way they want to."

For the participants in this study, their narratives surrounding religion contrasted their remembered practice of the same and what they see evolving in their communities here in the United States. The final observation seemed to suggest that stricter religious guidelines were remitted by those here especially in promoting more restrictive behavior for their children than they themselves were expected to uphold when they were still back home in their countries like Somalia and Sudan.

Identity Frames, Gaps, and Interpenetration

The purpose of this chapter was to explore the ways that former African women refugees communicatively negotiate their transnational identity. The discussion follows Hecht's (1993) layers of identity and identifies identity gaps that exist between these layers of identity. As evidenced by previous examples in this chapter, the participants referenced a communal identity in their narratives of social remittances they brought with them from home; these social remittances being those cultural activities that are an integral part of community life in the United States. The practices of arranged marriage, FGM, and stricter religious adherence also emerged in individual narratives of the participants. Identity is constructed within and across all the layers of identity—personal, enacted, relational, and

communal—but participant narratives indicated that transnational identity was most prominent in the enacted, relational, and communal layers of identity.

To wit, participants detailed how they discussed and negotiated their identity with others in ways that enabled them to acknowledge their cultural traditions (communal layer), keep family and other community members happy (relational layer), while critiquing and distancing themselves from these practices (enacted layer). Examples of this can be seen in my participant observation narrative where Waris, Kiin, their husbands, and other community leaders displayed their communal identity by offering help and communicating that sense of belonging they wanted the new arrivals to feel. The relational layer was apparent in Waris' discussion of trying to understand her grandmother-in-law's insistence of FGM for her step-daughter. It was apparent that her extended family viewed her as somebody who would go along with this practice, and she had to negotiate her views of opposition in this context.

In addition, the narratives focused on a religious identity which then bled into enactment of personal and relational identity in various way. Most of the former African women refugees who participated in this study self-identified as Muslims in the communication and mode of dress, even though I did not have a question directly asking about their religious affiliation in my interview script. I took this to mean that this self-avowal pointed to the saliency of this communal identity, especially because of the discourse surrounding Islam in the United States post-9/11. The enactment of this shared identity occurred in various ways that marked a desire to preserve it even in the midst of heightened scrutiny of Muslims in the United States.

One identity gap emerged from participant accounts: communal-enacted-personal gap. The examples of the communal-enacted-personal gap emerged when cultural

expectations (communal layer) led to behaviors (enacted layer) that deviated from the participants self-perceptions (personal layer). This happened when participants generally disagreed with the cultural practices of arranged marriages, FGM, and stricter religious adherence but also had to acknowledge that these practices were part of their culture, were being practiced in both their countries of origin and the United States, and could continue to occur in their community. This dissonance they felt between being critical and feeling powerless to change anything illustrates this negotiation of transnational identity especially given that in the United States, all these enactments of shared identity are outright illegal or frowned upon.

Summary

The central proposition in this chapter was that women's narratives about communal identity—articulated through notions of home and belonging—manifest a sense of transnational connectedness or lack thereof to the place they were born and had to flee, as well as to the places they were forced to escape to and resettle in the long run. My analysis of data collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and focus groups yielded three thematic clusters: remembrance of home as a patchwork of gendered experiences that allow the former African women refugees to reconcile the past and embrace the future in the contexts of resettlement; home and cultural belonging as related to economic remittances sent to relatives displaced across national borders, and; cultural belonging practiced through social remittances as ways in which refugee communities engage in the reconstruction of shared identity in the new environments of resettlement.

Narratives highlighted in this chapter suggest that former African women refugees maintain a connection to a remembered home and seek to recreate the sense of communal identity they experienced by enacting particular cultural activities in their communities in the

United States. Ultimately, these narratives point out a negotiation of identity along the fractured geographical, affective, and cultural spaces they navigate. In this sense, it is important for me to note that discussion of identity gaps is helpful in bringing awareness of how former African women refugees manage the fragments of their identities in ways that help them negotiate a transnational identity post-resettlement.

Chapter 7: Discussion and Conclusion

This study explored the experiences of former African women refugees' post-resettlement in mid-size cities in the Southwestern and Midwestern United States. More specifically, I examined their negotiation of identity, home, and belonging in the context of transnational displacement. This dissertation addresses a gap in communication research by exploring how the gendered experiences of resettlement of former African women refugees in non-gateway cities in the United States influence their sense of identity. Additionally, it reveals new analytical insights into a cultural group—refugees in transnational displacement—that has been seldom studied within the discipline of intercultural communication. To understand this problem, I applied the communication theory of identity (CTI) that posits that four interpenetrated frames of identity (personal, enacted, relational, and communal) are articulated in the process of identity formation. Further, it posits that these frames can sometimes be contradictory, giving rise to identity gaps or discrepancies that demonstrate the fragmented and fluid character of identity (Hecht, 1993; Jung & Hecht, 2004). In this study I argue that, counter to CTI emphasis, which looks at identity negotiation predominantly from the individual perspective, the narratives generated in this research demonstrate that relational partners are central and integral parts of identity negotiation and must be taken into account in order to form a more holistic picture of the identity negotiation process taking place.

My research questions were: (1) what do the identity frames and gaps enacted in the narratives of former African women refugees reveal about identity negotiation in the process of resettlement in the United States?; and (2) what salient identity frames and gaps emerge in the former African women refugees' narratives about home and belonging in the context of transnational displacement and resettlement? These questions were answered using a

thematic and narrative analysis of qualitative data generated from in-depth interviews, focus groups, and participant observation. In this chapter, I summarize the major research findings and discuss the significance and implications of this study. In the final section I discuss limitations, suggestions for future research, and conclusions.

Review of Major Findings

  Research question 1: *What do the identity frames and gaps enacted in the narratives of former African women refugees reveal about identity negotiation in the process of resettlement in the United States?* The analysis of women's narratives generated three salient themes in their discourse about identity negotiation: being Othered while working to join the American dream; maintaining traditional gender roles as well as gender role fluidity postresettlement; and, resisting U.S. cultural practices while affirming African cultural practices. Within these thematic clusters, the narratives shared highlighted the tensions that the participants' sense of self underwent as they negotiated between wanting to retain or redefine gendered norms and behaviors that made up their identity and socialization before resettlement in the United States, and the understanding that their identities were in the process of transformation as they needed to "fit-in" in their new cultural milieu.

  Additionally, narratives shared made it clear that the participants acknowledged that living in the United States had changed them, even though it was sometimes difficult for them to embrace some of the U.S. American cultural values they deemed incompatible to the enactment of their avowed selves. There was a perception that they had to change in order to be accepted, but they also felt that their efforts to fit in were not acknowledged by those around them. Largely, they felt the need to maintain identities that anchored them when they were back in their home countries as they helped continue relational ties they deemed important. However, they also reported coming to an understanding of how the

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new cultural environment was giving rise to new personal selves, consciously or unconsciously. Overall, the participant narratives not only enact identity maintenance, transformation, and resistance to change as the women make sense of the tensions and contradictions of their fragmented, gendered selves, but also illustrate the fluidity and adaptability of their identity positions as they adjust to a new environment while keeping and redefining their transnational relations.

The results presented here add new insights to the field of intercultural communication and complement previous research on immigrant and refugee studies outside communication studies. Previous research had suggested that the prejudices and stereotypes of the host community toward refugees shape the cultural context in which refugees have to adapt (Shepard, 2008). Analysis of the participants' narratives about discrimination against them due to foreignness and use of religious artifacts like the *hijab* (head covering) and traditional clothing concluded that these outward identity markers lead to discrimination from U.S. Americans (Jatau, 2011; Wingfield & Karaman, 2001). This is because U.S. Americans, especially post 9/11 and more recently with the Muslim travel ban, equate their religion with terrorism (Wingfield & Karaman, 2001). In addition, the situations of conflict and trauma that the former African women refugees have already endured before resettlement contribute to making cultural integration in the United States difficult (Haffejee & East, 2015).

This study of communication of identity and identity negotiation extends the literature on African women in post-resettlement contexts as it shows how even as they faced discrimination, participants rose above it by speaking up for themselves and enacting behaviors they hoped would erase the negative perceptions they encountered in public discourse and media images that depict refugees as unwashed masses who are illiterate and

have lived in refugee camps all their lives. While these images do serve as rallying calls for humanitarian assistance, they can also be sites of oppression (Collins, 2002). This awareness of the otherness ascribed to them was evident in participants' discussions of teachers' lower expectations of their children and neighbors and others' discriminatory behavior toward them. How the women chose to deal with these challenges is especially important as a way to counter these negative portrayals. From the narratives shared in this study, it is clear that participants value education as a means of advancement for themselves and their communities.

The study also extends research that has found that economic self-sufficiency is a challenge for African women refugees, as they experience restricted access to resources, job skills, and formal education back in their home countries pre-displacement (Women's Refugee Commission, 2013). Of note in this study is that there was a demarcation along urban and rural dwellers as well as socio-economic differences. Those who grew up in urban areas and were of middle to upper socio-economic class were more likely to have had resources to go to school in their home countries, escape to countries like Egypt or urban areas in neighboring countries unlike their rural and lower-income counterparts. Researchers have argued that financial independence is tied to literacy, English proficiency, and education (Segal & Mayadas, 2005). Many of the participants in my study expressed how their lack of English proficiency or accented speech was a barrier to getting a job, making friends, or doing well in school. This complements studies that have found that the lack of English makes it difficult to integrate in the host community (Fong, Busch, Armour, Effron, & Chanmugam, 2008; Twagiramungu, 2013).

Another important way that this research complements and extends the literature surrounding the experiences of African women refugees regards gender roles and how

transnational displacement impacts them within the African family structure. Previous research that has interrogated the gendered experiences of African women refugees' lives after displacement, often looking at their lives in refugee camps and after resettlement in the global north, has examined how the socially constructed category of gender informs the experiences of men and women in the asylum and resettlement process (Daley, 1991; Kibreab, 1995; McSpadden & Moussa, 1993). For instance, McSpadden and Moussa (1993) found that it was easier for women to adjust their status in the U.S. since they had occasion to form ambivalent feelings towards the traditional expectations of women as wives and mothers. This study's findings show that ambivalence regarding the gendered roles of mother and wife, and extends to include the roles of sister, daughter, and daughter-in-law. Additionally, this study suggests that wives and mothers had to adjust their roles within the family because life post-resettlement forced them out of the house and into the labor force. This finding complements Kibreab's (1995) research indicating that refugee women, no matter the barriers they faced, exhibited willingness to embrace change and take on unfamiliar roles.

Further, this study's findings extends such research by highlighting the plight of single mothers who become main breadwinners or heads of households, and other women who by dint of life in the United States have to take on financial responsibilities for those family members left behind, leading to a negotiation of their gendered roles within the family. As McSpadden & Moussa (1993) posited, resettlement in North America, and its attendant greater freedom for women, enable them to negotiate their change in status as women for they are more likely to adjust to the lower status experienced as refugees. This was the experience of the participants in this study who reported being the first to take the

initiative to find a job, any job, in order to support their families, while the men in their lives were not as resilient or creative.

Additionally, gender roles shifted post-resettlement as many of the participants felt empowered to question received wisdom regarding their roles and the roles of the men in their lives if the latter were not carrying their weight. This complements studies that have found that in the event that immigrant women get a job, gender relations might begin to shift, as women no longer respect, tolerate, or even stay with husbands who spend money on vices and do not treat them with compassion (Wilson, 2009). For the participants in this study, many felt that this was both a positive and negative trend because they could rightly leave abusive relationships, but then becoming single-parents subsequently created issues with their children's discipline.

Finally, participant narratives of resistance to problematic aspects of American culture shed light on a sense of self that struggles to maintain values and behaviors rooted in African cultural practices. This study found that participants perceived African mothers in the United States as mothers who could not discipline their children the way they knew how. To them, this loss of African cultural values surrounding the relationship between parents and their children was something they resisted but had to carefully enact because punishing children in the United States could lead and had led to run-ins with U.S. child protective agencies. This finding extends the literature that explores African parents' views of U.S. American parenting strategies (Ogeihor-Enoma, 2010).

Overall, previous research has found that women encounter barriers to cross-cultural adaptation that are frequently higher for them than they are for men due to their childbearing and family care responsibilities (Semlak, Pearson, Amundson, & Kudak, 2008). My findings in this study do point to the fact that there are sometimes enormous challenges

faced, but what it does add to the literature is the sense of resilience, hope, and determination that they all showed. The former African women refugees in this study saw those challenges and in most cases spectacularly rose to the occasion to engage with them.

Research question 2: *What salient identity frames and gaps emerge in the former African women refugees' narratives about home and belonging in the context of transnational displacement and resettlement?* The analysis generated three themes: remembering imagined homes while grappling with the future postresettlement; duty to family while attending to the harsh reality of life in the United States; and, social fluidity in home countries versus social conservatism postresettlement. Narratives highlighted in this chapter suggest that former African women refugees maintained a connection to a remembered home and sought to recreate the sense of communal identity they experienced by enacting particular cultural activities in their communities in the United States. Ultimately, these narratives pointed out a negotiation of identity along the fractured geographical, affective, and cultural spaces they navigated. In this sense, it is important for me to note that discussion of identity gaps is helpful in bringing awareness of how former African women refugees manage the fragments of their identities in ways that help them negotiate a transnational identity post-resettlement.

These findings establish connections, as well as contradictions and extensions to previous research surrounding refugee experiences. For instance, researchers have noted that African cultures emphasize collectivist practices, valuing social support coupled with social responsibility over individualism (Akinsulure-Smith, Ghiglione, & Wollmershauser, 2009; Charlés, 2009; Guerin, Guerin, Diiriye, & Yates, 2006; Whittaker, Hardy, Lewis, & Buchan, 2005). The findings in this study show this tendency as community leaders in my research site took on the responsibility to welcome and ensure that new refugee families moving to their city had the social support they need. However, this study extends

understandings of refugee experience through its discussion of participant narratives that were highly critical of cultural activities they deemed as a threat to women's empowerment. Recognition of ways that culture was incongruent with not only the U.S. American social norms and laws they now had to follow, but also with what was best for the women in their communities opens up a space to interrogate the relativity of cultural practices.

Participants in this study indicated the in-betweenness of life as former refugees. They experienced a dialectical tension as their shared identity underwent a transformation that enabled them to better understand and welcome the new experiences in the United States. As Kumsa (2002) posited in a study of Oromo young women in Canada, an expression of new identities "points to new boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, new patterns of sorting and bonding in the new country" (p. 478). The participants' nostalgia was for an identity as carefree, youthful, safe, and responsibility-free young girls and women. Juxtaposed with the realities of life post-resettlement where they did not have the same support structure, had to take on responsibilities towards others in the family, and so on, this remembered home felt right to them. By the same token, they were also able to acknowledge that their nostalgia was an incomplete picture of shared identity pre-resettlement. This study adds on to the literature an interrogation of the complexity of memory, home, and belonging for those who have been violently displaced as they negotiate lives mired in memory and reality.

There are abundant studies that have looked at financial remittances among immigrants. For many, migration is a household strategy to generate income through remittances. This is however not the case for people who experience violent displacement, as their primary focus is safety and security (Lindley, 2010). Still, studies have shown that refugees frequently support nuclear and extended family members who have been left

behind (Ahmed, 2000; Carling, Erdal, & Horst, 2012; Horst, 2004, 2008; Lindley, 2009). The participants in this study did remit money to family members who had been left behind. The financial help was used to sustain households and even for survival, in the case of the family members who had to escape dangerous situations they were in. The women's narratives also revealed the participants' feelings of resentment towards those they felt were using them to live a good life while they had to struggle and sacrifice with the little they had in the United States. As I previously discussed, many of the participants in this study were in precarious positions financially to begin with, and they shared that they often had to give up things to send money back to their families. This extends the literature to include further discussions about what effect this ambivalence towards helping relatives could have on the participants' personal and communal identity.

Implications

Examining the narratives of former African women refugees in the United States to explore how lived experiences resulting from forced migration and eventual resettlement have influenced their sense of identity has various implications. The findings from this study have several theoretical, methodological, practical and policy implications.

Theoretical implications: Studies of identity using the communication theory of identity and specifically the concept of identity gaps open up more avenues for interrogating the negotiation of identity in various contexts. The communication theory of identity (CTI), a relatively new area of study within intercultural communication, is a promising area of identity research. Particularly interesting is the application of identity gaps to elucidate the complexity of identity negotiation in various contexts. Further, recent theoretical discussion about how identity frames possess internal and external orientations, and the concept of intra-frame identity gaps warrant more investigation (Crosby, 2012).

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A central contribution of this dissertation is an extension of the theory in which I argue that previously, the theory focused on identity negotiation from the individual perspective—seeking to give a rundown of one of the relational partner's reading of the situation. However, given the nature of the relational and communal frames, where the individual's self-concept is impacted by relational partners, it is imperative to also take into account the responses of the other interactants in the relational frame or the community member in the communal frame. Thus, through the narratives, it is obvious that both the former African women refugees and their husbands, sisters, and community members are engaged in negotiating identity at the same time.

Second, the narratives in this study afforded a view of a strategic feminist critique of the culture the former African women refugees had grown up in. This study sought to interrogate the lived experiences of the women; interrogating them through the African womanist and feminist standpoint theoretical perspectives enables the researcher to give special attention to how women of color experience gendered and racialized social structures. Contemporary feminists have focused on how women disrupt patriarchy in various ways, one of which is enactment. According to Foss (2017), when they utilize the strategy of enactment, "individuals act out or embody an interpretation of a situation that is counter to the normally accepted one—they embody the point they are making about the new reality they desire" (p. 25). As the former African women refugees negotiate their identities, they are disrupting certain patriarchal structures. Through sending money home to family members, choosing to leave their husbands and be single mothers, working outside of the home, and taking up leadership in the place of resettlement, the participants enacted a disruption of a standard perspective on a personal level (Foss, 2017).

These theories facilitate the understanding of oppression and resistance, the advocacy for the inclusion of historically oppressed and marginalized women, and the promotion of consciousness-raising for both oppressor and oppressed (Patton, 2006). This theoretical approach allowed me to look more closely at the former African women refugees' positionality in social and political power structures and to open space in my research to bring their voices to the discursive space surrounding immigration and refugee issues. By focusing on the narratives of former African women refugees, my study provides a fascinating space for the expression of personal experiences, understanding of the complex realities of forced migration, and assessment and evaluation of broader migrant discourses. Far from providing an essentialist perspective of former African women refugees, this study shows complexity and differences within the group. The participants are from different nationalities, ethnicities, and are resettled in two very different parts of the country. Ultimately, this study challenges essentializing notions that suggest all African women are conservative or that they will embrace U.S. gender norms uncritically.

Methodological implications: From a methodological perspective, I want to speak to my positionality as an African woman researcher. What I learned in the process of doing this study can be of benefit to other African women researchers or any other person who gains access to this specific population to give voice to their experiences. As an African woman doing research with other African women, I started my research with assumptions regarding access to and receptivity of the participants that ended up being more complex than I had imagined. Being resident in the Southwest and having already established relationships with the women there lulled me into thinking access would be a cinch. It was not. I had better responsiveness in the Midwest and I attribute this to the fact that I was a stranger and perhaps it was easier to tell me their stories without fear of repercussions unlike

my friends in the Southwest for whom my being a part of the community was a souring point.

Thus, one must acknowledge that similarity of background does not automatically translate into access and willingness to participate from your potential sample of participants. Reflection and conversations I had with my Southwestern participants brought out a couple of concerns. As I mentioned in Chapter 4, a number of the participants in the Southwest withdrew from the study after going through interviews and focus groups with me. In later conversations, I learned that the participants were afraid that their stories would be easily identifiable in my work and also that I might tell their stories to other people in the community. My discussions surrounding protection, confidentiality, and the use of pseudonyms was not enough to reassure them. Another challenge I encountered was in regard to a lack of incentives for participation. Many refugee populations from Africa have at one time or another been part of a research study. This was the case in the Southwest and my gatekeepers eventually told me that many of my potential participants thought I was taking advantage of our cultural similarity to get their life stories which would benefit me academically for free. I had not factored that in as I did not have a grant to undertake my study. A researcher undertaking a study with marginalized and disadvantaged populations must take into account the many ways their positionality might impinge on their potential participants before seeking access.

However, there were a number of ways that my cultural proximity was an advantage. The former African women refugees that were part of this study come from east and central Africa and generally speak Swahili, which many describe as the language of the region. My native speaking status is actually the reason that got me into volunteering for the non-profit in the Southwest that works with the refugee population in that city. The former African

women refugees I first encountered when I started my volunteer activities could not contain their excitement at meeting someone who seemed to be in a position of authority who spoke their language. This common cultural attribute was very beneficial for both me and the African families in this community organization. However, as I mentioned previously, this cultural proximity would eventually be too much and lead to reluctance to share their stories on the part of potential participants.

Practical and policy implications: The discourse surrounding diversity in the United States at this time in history is largely anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim, which complicates the lives of former African women refugees as they navigate life in this country. This study's findings can help communities, service providers, and policy makers gain a better understanding of the unique challenges this population faces in the context of transnational displacement and resettlement. The narratives that emerge paint a picture of ordinary women acclimatizing to extraordinary circumstances, living their lives seeking community and belonging. This message should resonate with all Americans and further highlight just how similar these women's lives are to the average American's as far as wanting the best for yourself, your family, and your community is concerned. Giving voice to experiences of refugees helps debunk all the harmful narratives starting at the very top of the political pile in America that paint them as terrorists and a danger to the country.

Policy makers can benefit from narratives that explicate the economic, legal, and social struggles the former African women refugees encounter postresettlement. Hearing from the individuals who are impacted by refugee laws and policies just how well these are working for them is beneficial to ensure that the right help is given to the right people at the right time. Additionally, reflection on the different contexts of the Southwest and Midwest

is important for both communities, service providers, and policy makers to take into account.

One of the contextual factors to take into account would be how the demographics of the different cities affect the process of resettlement. In the Midwest, the majority is white, and the number of black people is relatively low so issues of otherness and racism look different than in the Southwest where there is more cultural diversity and a larger immigrant population. However, even in the Southwest, questions surrounding otherness are unique given that the black population is also low in comparison to the other minority groups. Further, the Midwestern city has had more time as a center of resettlement for refugee populations especially than has the Southwestern city. Thus these two contexts will have a direct impact on the types of discriminatory treatment the former African women refugees face.

Limitations

This study has several limitations worth discussing in the interest of identifying ways to strengthen future research endeavors. First, this study was undertaken in two different sites in the Southwestern and Midwestern United States. These two sites each had unique challenges. I was a member of the community in the Southwest, which resulted in hesitation on the part of potential participants to be interviewed. I attribute this to a few factors. One is the cultural proximity I had with the former African women refugees who were all from countries in East and Central Africa. My identity as a Kenyan woman both hindered and helped me. It hindered me because I believe the participants viewed my cultural and physical proximity to be a threat to the confidentiality of what they shared with me. Second, cultural proximity may have also led to perceptions of my taking advantage of their stories to benefit myself without offering adequate compensation. I should note that I had initially not

planned on offering any incentives as I had no financial grants to undertake my study. However, after informal conversations with some community members I knew personally, I ended up offering gift cards as an incentive. The confluence of my identity and lack of resources may have worked against a more robust participant pool for this study. The opposite was true of the site in the Midwest. There was no hesitation to participate at all. The only limitation was time constraints that reduced my exposure to the site and participants in that site.

Suggestions for Future Research

This dissertation advances several areas that future research might explore. First, research that applies an identity frames and identity gaps theoretical framework could be very illuminating. This framework could be used in studies that look at the experiences of former African men refugees, families, and communities as a whole. Second, future research could take a more holistic approach to identity negotiation by integrating narratives of the refugees' lives both pre- and post-resettlement. This would illuminate in more detail the process of identity transformation as shaped by particular contexts and ideologies. Third, future research could explore the specific lived experiences of refugee children and men. This was something that emerged in the narratives of my participants, as they were very concerned that few understood the challenges for both children and men in refugee families and communities. Finally, a critical perspective looking at historical, political, socio-cultural and economic structures and how they impact refugees' lives post-resettlement in the United States would advance the literature on the immigration experience in the United States.

In sum, this dissertation focused on the narratives of former African women refugees to explore how lived experiences in a third country, in this case the United States, influenced their negotiation of identity, home, and belonging in the context of transnational

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displacement. Applying CTI's framework of identity frames and identity gaps, it also sought to understand transnational identity negotiation by examining gendered identities in the context of post-resettlement in non-gateway U.S. cities and towns. Given the current situation in the United States where refugees are not welcome, and there has been a travel ban issued against individuals from specific countries in Africa and the Middle East, I hope that my study helps scholars, policy makers, and ordinary Americans understand the plight and subjectivities of refugees as a vulnerable group in search of safety, security, home, and a community to belong.

APPENDIX A: PROTOCOLS

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

<u>Verbal Introduction Script</u>

First of all I would like to thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. Based on your interactions with other women I can see that you are a well-respected and active member in your community. The purpose of this research is to examine how the things that you talk about and the things that you do shows what it means to be an African woman refugee in the United States. I have asked you to do this interview with me because of your unique perspective.

Before we get started I have a consent form that I will need you to read over and sign if you choose to. This document is basically saying that your participation in the research will not be known to others. Your name will be changed; I will erase the audiotapes after I type out the conversation and you can notify me at any time and let me know that you don't want your name or interview to be used in the research. I'll give you time now to read it and if you have any questions just let me know (*Give time to read & sign*).

I have a list of questions to go through and because I want to make sure that you have the opportunity to answer every question that I ask other women in my study, I may stop you in the middle of responding to a question. It is not that I don't think what you are saying is important, but because there are many things I want to make sure that we address. Is that okay?

<u>Interview Guide</u>

1. We are both not originally from (*name of city here*); tell me what it's like living here…

Follow-up probe: What circumstances brought you to *name of city here*?

2. What's the biggest difference between life at home and life here?

   Follow-up probes: What is the next largest difference? How has this affected how you interact with others in your community, family, or friends?

3. What was the biggest challenge about being a woman when you were living at home? *Follow-up probe:* How about since you've been living here in the U.S., what has been the biggest challenge?

4. How do you react to people who ask you where you are from? What are some specific questions you have been asked? How did these questions make you feel?

    Follow-up probe: Where do you mostly get asked these questions, that is, in what context are you interacting with the individuals who ask you these questions?

5. Where is your home? Where do you feel you belong, and why?

6. What have your interactions with other people in your community (African Americans, Asian Americans, Caucasians, Latino/as, etc.) been like?

   Follow-up probe: How do these interactions make you feel, and why?

7. Given that you were forcibly removed from your home, what do you wish you would have brought with you to the United States?

8. What is the best/most difficult thing about your life now? What was the best/most difficult/most difficult thing about your life before?

9. Do you have anything else to add?

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

<u>Verbal Introduction Script</u>

First of all I would like to thank you for agreeing to participate in this focus group. Based on your interactions with other women I can see that you are all well-respected and active member of your community. The purpose of this research is to examine how the things that you talk about and the things that you do shows what it means to be African woman refugees in the United States. I have asked you all to do this interview with me because of your unique perspective.

Before we get started I have a consent form that I will need each of you to read over and sign if you choose to. This document is basically saying that your participation in the research will not be known to others. Your name will be changed; I will erase the audiotapes after I type out the conversation and you can notify me at any time and let me know that you don't want your name or interview to be used in the research. I'll give you time now to read it and if you have questions just let me know (*Give time to read & sign*).

I would like to now discuss with you some basic focus group rules. Because this type of research interview involves more than one participant, it is important to agree on how we will all conduct ourselves during this process. First, what you say during this focus group is protected by confidentiality – what you say within the confines of this group should not be shared with others outside of the focus group. It is especially important not to share information discussed by other members of the focus group with others outside of this focus group. Could I ask you all now to agree that you will keep confidential what you hear in the focus groups? Second, it is important to maintain respect towards each other, including respecting the opinions of the other focus group members, even if they

are different from your own opinions. Finally, please feel free to talk about your own experiences, and allow other focus group members to also talk about their experiences without judgment or ridicule. This is a safe space and all your contributions are highly valued. Do you have any questions regarding these rules of conduct? Are there perhaps other rules you think could benefit our discussion today?

I have a list of questions to go through and because I want to make sure that you have the opportunity to answer every question that I ask other focus groups, I may stop you in the middle of responding to a question. It is not that I don't think what you are saying is important, but because there are many things I want to make sure that we address. Is that okay?

Interview Guide

1. We are all not originally from Southwestern/Midwestern U.S. city; tell me what it's like here for you…

2. What's the biggest difference between life at home and life here?

    a. *Follow-up probe:* What was the biggest challenge about being a woman when you were living at home?

    b. *Follow-up probe:* How about since you've been living here in the U.S., what has been the biggest challenge being a woman here?

3. How do you react to people who ask you where you are from?

    a. *Follow-up probe:* What are some specific questions you have been asked? How did these questions make you feel?

    b. *Follow-up probe:* Where do you mostly get asked these questions, that is, in what context are you interacting with the individuals who ask you these questions?

4. Where is your home? Where do you feel you belong, and why?

5. What have your interactions with other people in your community (African Americans, Asian Americans, Caucasians, Latino/as, etc.) been like?

   Follow-up probe: How do these interactions make you feel, and why?

6. Do you have anything else to add?

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