

THESIS

SOMALI REFUGEE WOMEN: AN UBUNTU PERSPECTIVE ON HEALTH AND  
WELLBEING IN FORT MORGAN, COLORADO

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## ABSTRACT

### SOMALI REFUGEE WOMEN: AN UBUNTU PERSPECTIVE ON HEALTH AND WELLBEING IN FORT MORGAN, COLORADO

This qualitative study explores the perspectives and stories of the Somali refugee women who live in Fort Morgan, Colorado. This study suggests that the current condition of Somali women's access to resources is underserved. To date there has not been a full assessment that is focused on Somali women's perspective. Therefore, this thesis works to give voice to the most marginalized segment of the population/ community, Muslim women from refugee backgrounds.

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## DEDICATION

*For my mother Miriam Likimani, my son Malaika*

*Ssimbwa and all the Somali refugees in Fort Morgan who let me into their lives.*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
DEDICATION.....	iv
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	9
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY.....	36
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION.....	43
CHAPTER FIVE: RECOMMENDATIONS.....	60
REFERENCES.....	71
APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW INSTRUMENT.....	76

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

*African women in general need to know that it's OK for them to be the way they are - to see the way they are as a strength, and to be liberated from fear and from silence.*

*Wangari Maathai- Nobel laureate, Women's Right Activist and Environmentalist.*

I sit in a living room with some participants and some members of their family. Only women are present as is the norm, gender segregation. We have just concluded the interviews so we talk about lighter stuff. The women are so happy to have me. I have a plate of delicious food in front of me and a baby on my lap. One lady turns the television to a *telenovela* which is a type of limited-run serial drama. They ask me if I have been watching it, I say I have not to their utmost surprise: "You must watch it. Oh, my God you should see what Pedro has been doing, going out with two women at the same time". Another chime in "Poor Maria is always crying because her husband is treating her so badly and she is staying because of her daughter." They then scramble to fill me in on Pedro's shenanigans, Maria's woes, and other characters. It is quite interesting and I like their analysis and advice for the characters: "Maria needs to leave her husband. Who lives so miserably?"

I see a side of them I had never been exposed to before that is enjoyable coupled with deep critical analytical skills. I never had the opportunity to get to know a lot of Somali's on a one to one basis so my ideas of them were mainly based on stereotypes as opposed to fact. I am quite at home and they have taken me in like one of their own. This is a testament to their generosity and the trust they have placed in me. These are women who have faced unimaginable horrors and yet here they are laughing and extending their hearts and hospitality to a complete and utter stranger.

I begin this thesis by locating myself within the research context and I am reflexive of how I came to take on this journey. In keeping with African sensibilities, I make sense of concepts

though stories whilst consciously considering the importance of self-reflexivity. According to Chilisia (2012), “To be a reflective activist, a postcolonial Indigenous feminist researcher must listen with compassion and love to women and make visible the healing methods that women employ when they communicate their life experiences” (Chilisia, 2012, p.279). I am aware that my research participants are Africans in a foreign context and therefore it is imperative that the methods I use are from an indigenous perspective otherwise the participants and findings from the research will appear skewed.

I need to use a decolonizing method and that includes language. Africans come from an oral history background so, engaging in dialogue is the method that is most familiar to them. There is an impatience in the West with listening especially to those who are foreign to American culture. There urgently needs to be a creation for others to speak with the accommodation for different styles, cultures and sensibilities. There is a rush with everything that causes impatience with longer and slower processes which are especially needed when dealing with persons who have experienced trauma. According to Chilisia (2012), “an activist researcher aims at engaging in participatory action research that brings about change: both personal and social transformation” (Chilisia, 2012, p. 279). Allowing for others to share their experiences and give suggestions is critical but, more than that, their contributions need to be welcomed and added to the protocol for services provided and policy changes.

I therefore choose to use the *Ubuntu* philosophy which is rooted in Africa and is relationally based. It emphasizes recognizing others humanity and rights and working collectively for the greater good. In most African societies, this is how they operate.



According to Tutu (1999):

“Ubuntu is very difficult to render into a Western language. It speaks to the very essence of being human. When you want to give high praise to someone we say, “Yu, u Nobunto”; he or she has Ubuntu. This means that they are generous, hospitable, friendly, caring and compassionate. They share what they have. It also means that my humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in theirs. We belong in a bundle of life. We say, “a person is a person through other people” (in Xhosa Ubuntu ungamntu ngabanye abantu and in Zulu Umuntu ngumuntu ngabanye). I am human because I belong, I participate, and I share. A person with Ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good; for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes with knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed or treated as if they were less than who they are. (p.34-35)

African scholarly perspectives view relational epistemology as knowledge that has a connection with the knowers thus valuing contributions from the community. The critical importance of “meeting people where they are” and recognizing an outsider stance is vital so as not to offend or misrepresent a people. Western sensibilities oftentimes make researchers assume an expert position, thus approaching communities with at least the perception of lack of humility and respect. This manner of research has caused immense harm and it is imperative that the damage that has already been done be stopped. This is done by being cognizant of other people’s intelligence and agency and allowing them that.

From a traditional African viewpoint, the group collectively knows versus the individual western knowing. Experience is passed down generationally from the elders and experiential knowledge forms the foundation of the African epistemology. The knowledge acquired does not encompass all Africans but rather it is confined with other groups having their unique knowledge. According to Naseem (2002), “African epistemology maintains that no knowledge of reality exists if the individual is detached from it. One must, therefore, guard against stating the African view as if it is a Western one” (Nasseem, 2002, p.261). Consequently, this articulates the necessity to

explore this view without placing it in relation to Western paradigms. The African epistemology is founded on a cultural world which contrasts from a Western one in relation to its philosophy of integration and principles of understanding.

I come from a neighboring county to the participants of this study and have quite a bit of background regarding cultural rules and regulations governing their society. I always remember that I am an outsider and therefore err on the side of letting the community members guide me. Since my research occurs in a Western setting, I have encountered multiple clashes with the expectations of the Western academy and research in an indigenous community. Simply put, the community's expectations and norms do not align with those of the academy. I am therefore left trying to mitigate the pressure of the academy's expectations and remain true to the participant's cultural norms.

Western epistemologies have the tendency to ignore the part played by colonization, imperialism, and globalization in the construction of knowledge. When indigenous voices are silenced this is a continuation of the legacies of these oppressive regimes and systems. Unless and until the indigenous voices are recognized, all research and education shall be imperial as it dismisses alternative theories, perspectives, or methodologies. Since slavery and colonization this has been the case and therefore there needs to be a conscious effort made to quell this. It is important to have indigenous researchers advocate for indigenous knowledge to be included in academia and other spheres.

**Namuyaba's Epistemology:** I have approached this study with the intentional goal of humanizing the Somali women; to contextualize them within their complex and disparate experiences, so that they are not constantly and repeatedly framed as misfits in this or other host societies. Self-

reflexivity is important here because I have made mistakes that I intend to never repeat. What follows is a narrative that helps illustrate my thoughts before my consciousness awakening.

### **The Danger of the *Umati* Mentality**

*Umati means herd in Kiswahili. I clearly remember as a young girl of maybe 10 or 12 years walking with my mother down a street in Nairobi and seeing several Somali families also walking and my obvious irritation with them because of their difference in dress, mannerisms, and language. This was contrary to what my mother had taught me, which is to treat all people with dignity no matter what their background or social standing. My mother worked as a nurse with Somali refugees at a refugee camp in Liboi which is in northern Kenya and later in Somalia itself. She would teach me lessons from experience not something she had read in a book or been told by someone. Unfortunately, she was outnumbered; it was her against most of the citizens of Kenya. My mother's humanitarian voice was muted and the bigoted voices were louder*

*The National rhetoric was negative towards Somalis and I wanted to fit in with the rest of the crowd, disliking people for being different and nothing more due to unfounded fears of imagining refugees as taking resources away from "us" the rightful owners. There was a strong belief that those that were not citizens did not deserve to benefit from resources that they did not help cultivate. No consideration was given to the unfortunate circumstances that placed them in our midst. There was no insight into the benefits such as labor that they could provide. The differences are what was being highlighted and seen as a bad thing. Very few people bothered to get to know them because they were operating off stereotypes and therefore they were sure that the refugees had nothing good to offer. The main stereotypes were that they are lazy, primitive, violent, dirty and untrustworthy. Ethnocentrism was at play. We were moving to a common drum of hate in our umati mentality. The fact that Kenya is a former British Colony, we see that some of*

*the initial tactics that were used against the Kenyans by their colonizers are now pervasive and they too have internalized the divisions and now perpetrate them. The British used “divide and conquer” strategies to rule by making different groups wary of each other and making them believe that by one group succeeding they were making the other group fail. This caused tribal divisions and caused rifts that still exist to this day. The Kenyans are now doing the same thing with the Somalis trying to brand all of them as terrorists and blaming all their problems especially financial on them.*

### **My Racialization**

***I became a black person in America.** Before my arrival in the United States, I was a Kenyan woman from the Maasai tribe who came from a privileged family background. I was a British colonial subject and all my previous schooling was done in the British educational system. I arrived in America unaware that I was a person of color. You see, where I come from we do not identify by skin color or race. Once I landed at Los Angeles International airport my fate was sealed and I was black and that I have come to understand is not a good thing. This immediately meant that I too acquired a slave history, my integrity and intelligence would always be in question, and doors to opportunity would be closed to me on no other basis other than the color of my skin. I had been reduced from a complex human being to a skin color that held no promise. Several times a day I find out how this works to disadvantage me.*

***I became a black person in America.** My early days in America, I was stopped by a policeman in Los Angeles for a traffic violation (failing to turn right on a “must turn right” lane). I looked out for traffic before switching lanes not to mention that 3 cars ahead of me had done the exact same thing (does not make it right). I had no prior encounters with the police and I had not been “schooled” in what the rules of such encounters were. My first mistake was thinking that I could*

*come out of my vehicle and have a conversation to explain my actions. Well the unwritten laws demand that you sit in your car, put your hands on the wheel and wait until the officer gets to your car. I had unbuckled my seat belt and started opening the driver's car door. In what can only be described as yelling/hysteria, the officer demanded that I put my hands where he could see them while pointing his gun at me. After getting through the customary showing of my license and car registration I tried explaining that since I was new to the area I was afraid of going down a street I did not know and getting lost. His answer was unsympathetic and his response to me was one akin to someone who had murdered someone and been found at the crime scene. Now I will be forever terrified of police officers!*

***I became a black person in America.*** *I have suffered many injustices due to the acquisition of color. Having said that, I understand this is nothing compared to my sisters and brothers who were taken from the homeland and enslaved or those generations that have come later and been born into a racist environment. As Lorde (1984) says, "We had to metabolize such hatred that our cells have learned to live upon it because we had to, or die of it" (Lorde, 1984, p.156). At least I had a chance to be foundationally nurtured in love and that is what has kept me sane up to this point. I stand in solidarity with blacks that suffer as we work towards a just existence. This is the bond that binds us since the original one was severed.*

When I started this project, I needed to know if I had the right frame of mind for the work I had chosen to do and to be honest, I didn't. I knew only little snippets of the injustices the Somali refugee women had endured yet I arrogantly thought I was adequately knowledgeable. With every encounter, I noticed that the knowledge I was gaining was immense and it was changing me and exposing my prior ignorance shrouded in privilege.

My profound realization came while in my first graduate class and it was then that I started to take personal responsibility and actively make positive changes. For the class, we were reading a book titled “Latina/Latino politics” by Lisa Garcia Bedolla. I was reading about Prop 187 and all the hateful rhetoric and feeling so repulsed. According to Bedolla (2005), “proposition 187, which called for denying education, healthcare, and social services to undocumented immigrants and their children and was approved by more than 60% of California voters” (Bedolla, 2005, p.18).

Whilst reading the vitriol that was being spewed by the supporters of the bill, I realized all the negative things I had listened to growing up about Somali’s and the negative things that I had thought thus. This became the moment when I acknowledged that I was bigoted towards Somali people and I realized how society reacts negatively towards refugees based on rhetoric. I do not approve of it because we have the free will to make choices that are empathetic towards others but majority do not. During my reading, I heard myself saying some of the same things too. I too had said hateful things about Somalis without provocation as an outcome of the national rhetoric encouraging hatred for Somali refugees. So clearly I was not immune. This was my moment of reckoning and I had to decide at that moment whether I was going to go with the crowd or stand for what is right whether I find myself standing alone. It is so easy to go with the popular sentiments but refusing to follow the crowd is the path of most resistance. I have chosen fighting for marginalized people as a lifetime endeavor.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

*The day that a Somali girl is born, she's already instigating change because she's born into a society where she is virtually invisible, where she's not respected or acknowledged or cherished or valued. Just the act of coming into such an environment and making it out of that environment alive is a way of instigating social change*

*-Fadumo Dayib, 2015*

This chapter outlines the current literature in the areas relevant to the background and theoretical framing of this research project. Included is an exploration into the historical context, resettlement, and challenges of adaptation (i.e. racialization and Islamophobia) for Somali women currently living in Fort Morgan, Colorado, remittances, gender norm shifts etc. It also helps to reveal what effect these separate factors have had on their overall health and wellbeing and explore some of the outcomes. This is a focus on Somali refugee women living in an area of rural Colorado. The literature used was broad enough to give a glimpse into issues that have a common thread and therefore need to be taken into consideration in any place that has a considerable number of Somali women, yet cognizant of the nuances of this area. Issues include but are not limited to matters that pertain to being female, Muslim and Somali.

### **Historical Context**

Somalia is a country located on the eastern coast of Africa. According to Gardner (2004), "Somalia is located in Eastern Africa and has been ravaged by a clan-based civil war that began in 1978 and exploded in the late 1990's when rebels from the United Somali Congress ousted former dictator Siyaad Barre" (Gardner, 2004, p.4). This has been a major underlying reason for the continued destabilization of this region. The people of Somalia have not known peace and stability thus it has manifested into the turmoil observed among the people of Somalia.

According to Pavlish (2010),

Somalia's persistent internal and intra-clan conflicts have weakened efforts to reconstruct a formal government infrastructure. Consequently, many Somali refugees initially migrated to Kenya and Ethiopia where large refugee camps are located. Several countries including the United States have also provided refugee sponsorships to relocate and resettle families" (p.354).

Internal strife has not allowed the country to provide a safe place for its people and thus begins the making of Somali refugees. The migrations have been many all over the world from people fleeing violence. Somalia has not had a stable government for 24 years hence giving context to the instability the Somali people have faced. According to Huisman (2011):

The Somali government collapsed in 1991 and the country descended into "turmoil, faction fighting, and anarchy". In spite of a dozen attempts to create peace since then, Somalia has remained the "only independent country without a national government in modern times" and a failed state (p.7).

According to Gardner (2004), "By 1992, some 1.5 million Somalis had fled to neighboring countries and beyond" (Gardner, 2004, p.2). Somalis have had to negotiate new existences wherever they find themselves resettled due to the instability of their country. Fleeing has had enormous social costs some of which includes; the loss of one's homeland, separation of families, the loss of family members, the disruption of identity, loss of culture in terms of language, rituals and traditions that also includes being separated from sacred sites and burial grounds.

Many societies in Africa are divided along tribal lines. A tribe is referred to as a group of distinct people living communally that depend on a subsistence livelihood and are largely self-sufficient. Somali tribal social structure means that its socio-economic stratification is dependent, not on a central government, but on the cultural power of tribes in society and they therefore determine the rules for their group.



According to Alomari (2013):

The power of any tribe is determined by the size, geography and wealth of its members and powerful tribes affect both the culture and the political system of the country. It is important to note that despite the more than 15 years since tens of thousands of Somalis fled, tribal customs and traditions continue to be strictly practiced in their new localities (p.13).

If we look back in time, traditionally the basic unit in Somali culture is the extended family. It is nomadic and patriarchal. Men are the center of Somali society and hold the cultural authority which is typical of old cultures which practice a patriarchal system and this has been prevalent for thousands of years and mainly continues into the present day. Thus, women have been marginalized and their voices muted. Men have spoken on behalf of women. According to Putman et al. (1993):

Men are the decision makers for almost every aspect of society, including matters of life and death. In Somali society, clans serve as a source of both solidarity and conflict. Clans combine forces for protection, access to water and good land, and political power. The Somali clan organization, however, can also be an unstable system, characterized by changing alliances and temporary coalitions (p.13).

These dynamics persist even in the western world post resettlement though they are diluted by the different cultural dynamics of western society such as women representing themselves in society.

### **Refugee Resettlement in the U.S**

The definition of a refugee comes from the legal definition from *the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol* as someone who has crossed an international border:

...owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality [or habitual residence for those without nationality] and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself to the protection of that country' (United Nations 1951).

The refugee condition is a precarious one. Nguyen (2012) observes that, “The refugee loses structure, the ability to coordinate, predict and expect, and his basic feelings of competence” (Nguyen, 2012, p.55). Refugees are resettled without a say of where they go except in places that encourage family reunification. All the same, most refugees are coming from a setting that does not resemble the one they are resettled into. Without any points of reference, the feeling is one of astonishment and intimidation. They have a myriad of things to learn while taking in the new cultural and environmental landscape.

Refugee laws govern resettlement. Refugee laws seem archaic and they rarely get amended to accommodate the ever-evolving needs. According to Zucker (1983), “As far as resettlement is concerned, the core programmatic design for refugee resettlement in the United States has remained relatively stable since the passage of the, *1980 Refugee Act*” (Zucker, 1983, p.180). There is a long period between any changes made to immigration laws and is usually prompted by a major event concerning refugees. According to Kennedy (1981), “this was the first major reform of the refugee provisions of American immigration law in nearly three decades” (Kennedy, 1981, p.141). Soon after it was passed, it was tested by the influx of Cuban refugees coming into the United States. According to Kennedy (1981):

The Cuban boat exodus of April and May 1980 was the first test of the new Act. The chaos surrounding the flight of the refugees, the uncontrolled character of their movement and the public perception that no one was in charge generated a public backlash against the Cubans and refugees generally (p.152).

We must acknowledge that the refugee initially has no control on the decisions being made on their life. There is also the permanent label of being a refugee that holds a negative connotation. It is not considered to be a temporary situation and once resettled the label does not get removed. Refugees often find themselves in a precarious position in their host country. The natives tend to

feel threatened by their presence and react negatively towards them. Even though they are fleeing violence and threats to their life, they find themselves being viewed as violent and unruly.

According to Nguyen (2012):

As a political noncitizen, the refugee is outside the law, devoid of rights, the effect of terrible exception through which his or her life is forsaken. The refugee at the same time is an object of imperative concern for the arbiters of law and sovereignty” (p.58).

Most Somali newcomers currently living in the United States have previously lived in refugee camps in Kenya for more than 10 years and have been subjected, either directly or indirectly, to many kinds of physical and mental abuses. These abuses have severely impacted lives. It then shows the cruel irony of them then being threatening. According to Ali et al. (2012):

In the camps, there are no formal schools, programs or stable individual family homes. Subsequently the experience of life in refugee camps has contributed to a sense of fear, lack of confidence, and trust in authority (p.6).

The vetting process for the refugees to resettlement is long and there is excruciatingly arduous much as the public for the most part believe it is a simple process. The whole process takes up to two years to complete. According to McElmurry et al. (2016):

All prospective legal permanent immigrants to the United States are subject to extensive criminal and medical background checks. Since 2002, USCIS has significantly increased the number and scope of screenings to address a growing range of possible risk factors. Today’s criminal background screenings include four separate checks—two fingerprint-based and two biographic, name-based checks—against five different information technology systems housed within the FBI, DOJ, and USCIS. The checks are designed to flag applicants with criminal records, known and suspected terrorists, sex offenders, and those involved in illegal gang activity. If the background check yields an item of national security interest, USCIS will work with law enforcement agencies to determine appropriate action. Under law, USCIS may not approve any case when there are outstanding background checks that are unresolved. (p.9)

Somalis, once relocated, tend to settle in communities with other Somalis. Most relocate to large metropolitan areas with established Somali communities, but some others move to small or rural areas whose populations are racially homogeneous and where the Somali refugees are often highly visible. Somalis like most refugees seldom remain where they are initially resettled. Decisions to move are simultaneously shaped by orientations toward the past (war, unsafe neighborhoods in the US), the present (the desire to preserve culture and religion, and their immediate needs for safety, affordable housing and good schools), and the future (their interest in obtaining a quality education to improve future opportunities, good paying employment). According to Huisman (2011):

When Somali's move in search of jobs, education, or safety, the way they learn about new places and opportunities is through their expansive social networks. Furthermore, in most cases, the social networks facilitate and buffer the transition from one place to another. There are always people on the other end to provide food, shelter, and assistance once they arrive in a new place (p.29).

Refugee resettlement is not a solution based on sedentary integration. All the major refugee populations are significantly shifting their locations, affecting both individual refugee integration and communities at large. The primary relocation sites may be better prepared to handle the influx of refugees and their providers may have experience dealing with diverse populations whereas some of the relocation sites have no previous experience e.g. Fort Morgan. When the Somali's arrived, this was the community's first contact with people direct from the continent of Africa and their agencies were ill equipped to handle this new group.

According to Ott (2011), "the exercise of agency through migration contrasts with the perceived 'forced' nature of previous displacements and the lack of agency in decisions of initial placement" (Ott, 2011, p.5). Secondary migration challenges the basic framework of resettlement as a permanent solution. Refugees are legally free to move within the U.S., and they are moving

to join relatives, look for better work opportunities, and seek safe neighborhoods together with a myriad of other factors. This counters a conceptualization of refugees as passive, helpless actors who would be content in any community. When refugees migrate from the initial settlement to another location, the receiving communities are unaware and unprepared for them since there is no prior communication or arrangements.

### **Islamaphobia**

Islamaphobia is a widely-used concept in public and scholarly circles to describe the fear and dislike shown towards Muslims. According to Blicch's (2011) study:

Islamaphobia is the indiscriminate negative attitudes or emotions directed at Islam or Muslim. The term was originally developed in the late 1990s and early 2000s by political activists, nongovernmental organization (NGOs), public commentators, and international organizations to draw attention to harmful rhetoric and actions directed at Islam and Muslims in Western liberal democracies. For actors like these, the term not only identifies anti-Islamic and anti-Muslim sentiments, it also provides a language for denouncing them (p.1581).

Muslims currently living in the western world are constantly exposed to negative rhetoric and in extreme cases hate crimes based solely on their identification as followers of Islam. Contemporary U.S. and European discourse in the media and society at large is the latest iteration of Islamophobia. According to Waters (2013) study:

This ideology establishes membership to the Judeo-Christian tradition of North America as the norm, and Islam as the "other". Since September 11, 2001, law enforcement agencies, media conglomerates, and religious organizations have targeted Muslims and set them up as the enemies often referring to them as terrorists. Anti-Islamic ideas are expressed freely in public and private institutions. The vitriolic rhetoric escalated alarmingly in the decade after 9/11 (p.59).

Islamophobia in America is growing, since even political leaders that should know better are proclaiming the same Islamophobic tendencies as the American public. According to Cabili (2011), "this type of reaction by the political leaders not only gives substance to Islamophobia but

drives forward the idea of Islam as something against the American idea” (Cabili, 2011, p.2). The media helps transport the negative messages about Islam by giving a platform to those speaking against Islam whilst denying Muslims a voice to defend themselves from all the allegations.

According to Water’s (2013) study:

The new wave of Islamophobia claims that Islam is essentially embodied by Al-Qaeda and its 2001 attack on the World Trade Center. State legislative efforts outlawing Sharia Law, well financed activist bloggers like Pam Geller, and various Tea Party activities represent contemporary macro-level racial projects that attempt to advance this agenda. It is an ideology that is often spread on the Internet and has links with international anti-Islamists in Europe, like Geert Wilders’ Freedom Party in the Netherlands, who reject multiculturalism. Since Somalis are overwhelmingly Muslim, anti-Somali rhetoric could tap into the racial projects of the larger wave of anti-Islamic ideologies in addition to anti-African and anti-immigrant sentiments (p.59).

### **Racialization of Africans in the United States of America**

Coming to America for Africans means a whole shift in social ideologies and institutional structures from what they understood back on the continent. When Africans come to the United States, they “become black”. Back on the continent of Africa (except perhaps in South Africa) no African is racialized, but they do have to deal with other social complexities such as tribal or clan divisions. Nobody teaches them the history of America upon arrival and they are therefore unprepared for the negative attitudes and obstacles placed in their way simply because of their race. According to Pierre (2004):

The responses of Black immigrant groups as they engage the racial hierarchy may come in the form of a rejection of the stereotypical African American cultural identity they are presented with and a foregrounding of their own complex histories and experiences (p.158).

Africans try to separate themselves from their African American relatives as soon as they realize that racism comes with the territory of being black. Race is unstable and has complex social meanings continually being altered by political efforts. According to Omi and Winant (1994):

Racial classification systems reflect prevailing views of race, thereby establishing groups that are presumed to be “natural”. These constructed racial categories then serve as the basis for allocating resources; furthermore, once defined, the categories frame political issues and conflicts (p.55).

The driving forces of race relations are economic, legal, cultural and political. These determine what resources are made available to which groups and how people can be marginalized and segregated. According to Manley et al. (2008):

Race is paramount in the United States. So much of what we do in our daily lives is unconsciously centered on race. Racism, the ideological justification of superiority and inferiority, is a crime and disease. It is a crime because it violates the implementation of equal rights and opportunities under the Constitution of the United States. It is a disease because it cannot be separated from its psychic costs (p.431).

The negative effects are continually felt by those marginalized by the U.S system. According to Anderson and Hill Collins (1995):

Racism is a system of power and privilege; it can be manifested in people’s attitudes but is rooted into society’s structure. Racism is reflected in the different group advantages and disadvantages, based on their location in the societal system.” (Anderson and Hill Collins, 1995, p.56).

It is important to recognize the racial dimensions present to some degree in every identity, institution and social practice in the United States and then examine racial formation. Throughout the history of the making of American society, racial status and identity have been the most socially visible elements. Ideological racism, the normative cultural system asserting that certain racial groups are inferior, is an enduring legacy of American race relations. According to Arthur (2000), “it defines the cognitive and affective contents of racial minority and majority group relationships.

It structures the system of stratification, while also influencing access to wealth, power, and economic opportunities” (Arthur, 2000, p.73). There is a hierarchy on the discrimination ladder and at the very bottom is the black person. According to Bonilla-Silva (2003):

All racial categories in America are not as bad as being black which is, “at the bottom of the well” coupled with the minimization of race amongst whites who believe racism has ended even as blacks still experience it (p.131).

These ideologies permeate every segment of society and they are evident in thoughts and actions. According to Fanon (1967), “It is not that we deny that blacks have any good qualities, but you know it is so much better to be white” (Fanon, 1967, p. 48). He further observes, “The “native” is declared impervious to ethics, representing not only the absence of values but also the negation of values (Fanon, 1967, p.6). There is also the added struggle of being a black woman in the United States. Women to date have not been given their rightful dues but worse off is the woman of color and especially the black woman. LaRue (1995) observes:

“The struggle blacks face is not taking place between knives and forks, at the washboard, or in the diaper pail. It is taking place on the labor market, at the polls, in government, in the protection of black communities, in the protection of black communities, in local neighborhood power struggles, in housing, and in education” (p.171).

There is a notion that race is an essence thus fixed, concrete and objective. This is in fact not true because it is a social construct that has grave consequences for those negatively affected by this ideology. According to Waters (2013):

Somali communities in the United States are the target of anti-black, anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim, and specifically anti- Somali forces, a probably small but (at least anonymously) vocal group who blame Somalis for all manner of social ills. In the rhetoric of this source of racial projects, Somalis are collectively culpable for these offenses, even Somalis who had not yet been born at the time. It remains to be seen whether or not this current racial formation between the host society and the immigrant community will shift significantly as the second generation blends more seamlessly into the society around it (p.81).



## **Somali Women**

As Somali women navigate their lives in a new environment, they rely heavily upon kinships and social capital most of which are left behind in the homeland or scattered in other countries of resettlement. The transnational relationships that are maintained and nurtured through communication are crucial since they are directly linked to the mental wellbeing. According to Leonardo (1987):

kin-work is the collective labor expected of family-centered networks across households and within them. It defines the work that families need to accomplish to endure over time. The family life course is constructed and maintained through kin-work. Kin-work regenerates families, maintains lifetime continuities, sustains intergenerational responsibilities, and reinforces shared values (p.443).

One way to sustain these affectionate relationships in cases where physical presence cannot be maintained is through financial support. Families and other relations get fragmented due to the nature of resettlement and fleeing. Once resettled, then such relationships are rekindled. Immigrating does not sever established ties, if anything most ties become stronger due to the constraints of distance.

Due to gender relations in the West, Somali women have gained greater autonomy than they had previously. They can work which is unlike their previous life where most of them stayed at home and the males went to work. This made them highly reliant on male support particularly economically. According to Abdullahi (2001):

The core of Somali culture are pastoralist values that originate from a pastoral clan and a nomadic way of life moving their herds for ages. Women in pastoralist settlements run the internal affairs of households which includes responsibility for childcare and all reproductive work along with milking goats and ewes. Men on the other hand are responsible for the “outside world and camel (p.122).

Due to these dynamics, most women have often remained in the domestic sphere with limited ways to support themselves independently. This is in no suggesting that Somali women are not resourceful and can handle a life on their own if they find themselves in this situation. What I am suggesting is that because of the cultural system setup, it would be a hardship for a Somali woman to navigate her life in Africa without male support. Crosby's (2006) study found the following:

Women's reliance on men is a pre-colonial cultural element (related to a pastoral background). Since independence, the phenomenon has been legally imposed by the state colonial powers. Traditionally education in Somalia on all levels but particularly in higher education has been the purview and privilege of males. Cultural and state restrictions on women's lives inevitably left most women uneducated and illiterate (p.73).

Due to the civil war, many Somali refugee women find themselves abroad, single, and heading households alone due to divorce, widowhood or family separation because of fleeing or resettlement (it is common for family members not to leave together). Tiilikainen's (2003) found the following:

All Somali refugees have experienced some family separation and loss. It is difficult to comprehend the loss Somali women have endured- everyone has lost family members; homes are in ruin and the home country has been destroyed. The disintegration did not take place on a political level, but the whole society, even families (p.64).

The Somali women who enter the United States unmarried, single or widowed become the sole breadwinners for their households and thus no longer rely on males which is new for them.

According to Tiilikainen (2003):

Family separation and loss is tragic for Somali women whose position in a patrilineal clan system is ambiguous. The war has brought a sense of insecurity, helplessness and hopelessness. Women have often named men in general for their suffering; men-warlords, the previous dictator Said Barre, their own countrymen, their own sons-have deprived women of their human worth (p.64).

## **Gender Role Shifts**

Somali women experience a major shift from the traditional pastoral cultural landscape. Once resettled, they depend on their own labor or accessing of social services to provide for all their needs. Since the kinship network is no longer reliably operative in the United States the way it was in their homeland, then consequently there are no men at the forefront in these situations. Subsequently, these women become torch bearers for those who are still under the yoke of male dominance and want to find their autonomy. According to Crosby (2015):

Married Somali refugee women in the United States find that their husbands do not support them and justify this lack of support by pointing to the lack of extended family to help provide assistance to their wives. The absence of support from relatives does not alter male behavior and the lack of male assistance to wives leads to high rates of divorce amongst the Somali (p.79).

The women who work independent of male support are the clearest example of how they become beacons of strength for other women. They have also altered the gender roles as they have been traditionally understood. Their contributions to the economic development of their people, both locally and globally, are substantial though often ignored. Somali refugee women make up an integral part of the economy by their fiscal contributions yet they are rarely recognized as significant players in the economic domain. They have been formally disenfranchised and now they are making monetary contributions from the micro level to the macro level both locally and globally. Despite their lack of formal educational training in many cases, these women have risen to whatever heights they need to provide help for their families and progress economies globally.

## **Somali Women and Healthcare Access**

Somali women have barriers accessing healthcare in the United States due to a variation of challenges. They come to the United States with multiple challenges such as English language barriers, religious beliefs that differ from the mainstream, and many more. They also may have come from a situation where access to healthcare was very limited and the cost prohibitive. In the United States, they are often speaking to clinicians who do not have background information of their past situation neither the cultural competency to address their concerns. According to Carroll (2004):

Medical research studies cite an “understanding divide” (i.e., cultural differences) that results in limited provision of preventive health care services, possibly due to differences in health beliefs, health literacy, or barriers to health care access. Health care providers and systems often have trouble communicating with patients who present to them with vastly different experiences about health and health care, especially because translation may not fully represent cross-cultural differences in conceptualizations of health (p.361).

The United States medical field generally lacks training in diverse populations from the African continent. This is even worse in rural areas where resources are limited. This further aggravates the situation of challenges accessing healthcare for Somali women. According to Johnson et al. (2009):

Compared with other African immigrants, Somalis have low rates of literacy and English fluency and lower Social economic status (SES) due to their constant flight and hence lack of stability. They are less likely to be insured or have a regular source of care. In addition, they have been the least likely to receive a health evaluation or Pap smear in the past year. Somali women are also at increased risk of adverse pregnancy outcomes, for reasons that are only beginning to be understood (p.230).

The fact that they belong to a religious belief that is not aligned with the mainstream creates more barriers. The women’s understanding of their bodies and its relation to health differs with the

mainstream therefore creating a barrier with the providers serving them. According to Carroll et al. (2007):

Many Somali women identify spirituality and religious faith as integrally related to their health. Women give specific examples of Islamic teachings that influence overall well-being, health-promoting behaviors, and family function/roles. Health promotion and disease prevention programs for Somali women should recognize and incorporate spiritual and religious foundations of health beliefs (p.374).

This is important to know because it informs a lot of the way they will navigate the United States society. There needs to be a recognition about how they view themselves and what is important to them. The challenges they face need to be taken into consideration so that they are effectively able to navigate the healthcare system

Each population has its unique set of challenges. This is an important consideration for the healthcare system when attending to people not born in the United States who have cultural beliefs that are not the mainstream. These beliefs inform the way they access healthcare and the way they understand their illness. According to Pavlish, et al. (2010):

From the Somali perspective, women generally perceive health and illness as part of their larger, situated life experiences rather than individually experienced events; as a result, women expect their health care providers to view health holistically and contextually, when in reality American healthcare systems usually fragment health and prioritize physical over social and mental well-being. Additionally, many women are expected to present their explanatory models to healthcare providers; however, these providers often work in healthcare systems that expect efficiency and do not structure adequate time for healthcare professionals to listen (p.355).

Somali women get circumcised as a rite of passage which is not practiced in the United States and is a criminal act that has legal ramifications. Western feminists have created movements to curb this practice however they have been critiqued for assuming all women suffer a common oppression. According to Mohanty (1991), “It is when “women of Africa” becomes a homogeneous sociological grouping characterized by common dependencies or powerlessness (or

even strengths) that problems arise- we say too little and too much at the same time” (Mohanty, 1991, p.25). Another problem here is that Africans and women from other regions that practice female circumcision are not the ones at the forefront of the dialogue but rather the women in the West who do not practice it. There is an unhealthy fascination of Africans from the western gaze.

According to Akudinobi’s (2005):

This leaves us with the question about why Africa is the principal site of the discourse on female circumcision despite a global distribution. Could it be that African women evoke a special interest, concern, or privilege? Answers to this question will be found in how scandal, difference, and “photogenicity” govern the appropriation, commodification, and consumption of African Contemporary Western cultural orbits (p.136).

Knowing the Somali women’s background and understanding their belief system is critical. Clinicians may not be clear about exactly what a woman has been through but they need to understand that there are differences within and between cultures and not all Somalis hold the same beliefs. They also need to have some working knowledge on the issues that are being presented.

According to Pavlish, et al. (2010):

Clinicians therefore need to navigate between different metaphors and social understandings of distress, between their training and the clients’ understandings, and respectfully reach shared understandings. As culture is refined by dynamic processes, hybridization and transformation, clinicians should avoid stereotyping and using rigid cultural representations, and instead explore individual and changing understandings with clients’ over time (p.358).

### **Somali Women and Gender Role Shifts**

In a pastoral society, there are strict gender roles and they tend to affect women harshly by rendering them economic dependents of males. The divisions between genders are strictly followed and there is no room for flexibility. Akou (2011) observes:

There are clear definitions of what is expected of the different genders in a pastoral society. For boys this comprises of “sustaining and securing livelihood for their families while girls are responsible for the domestic sphere. Males have very limited expectations when it comes to dress yet with the women there are prescribed forms of dress such as the hijab which is both cultural and religious” (p.110).

With western influence and societal norms differing in the countries that Somalis have fled to, there has been a shift in the work roles. Women now go out and work thus uprooting the status quo of Somali custom of women being relegated to the domestic sphere. This increases women's responsibility since they now have the added burden of going out to work in addition to their domestic chores. According to Whittaker, et al. (2005):

With increased autonomy for women and a disruption of gender roles, conflicts between religion, culture, gender and family responsibilities are intensified. Women find men unhelpful in the home and family despite their increased workload in the job market. Men have justified their lack of support by interpreting the Qur'an from Arabic and they have implied that certain prescribed roles are given for men and women (p.185).

To recapture their authority in a foreign land with several opposing cultural norms, the Somali men have become adamant in their control over women. They feel a loss to their manhood since the women no longer solely rely on them economically. The men's lack of domestic support for the women is an indication that they have not shifted their cultural view. According to Gardner (2004):

Somali culture is male centered, at least in public, although women play important economic roles. Female labor is valued for productive tasks as well as for household chores, as long as the male is still seen as being in charge. In recent years, war, drought, and male migration have dramatically increased the number of female-headed households and in an attempt to keep Somali culture and Islam intact, the men have become more rigid and women have had to bear the brunt of these decisions (p.10).

### **Somali Refugee Remittances**

A big component of the refugee's lives is connected to remittances. They work hard and the money earned goes to various relatives and projects back at home or in the refuge country. According to Lindley (2007), "the term remittance is a way of referring to the money and goods that migrants send to contacts in their country of origin or displacement settings" (Lindley, 2007, p.2). There are various complications and interruptions that are associated with remitting

especially for Somalis. The lack of stability in their region makes remitting money a very complicated process. According to Paul (2015), “that Somalia is one of the greatest dependents on remittances as well as one whose inflows are regularly affected” (Paul, 2015, p.2). It is amazing how much money travels globally in terms of remittances and the magnitude of how this helps other countries and people. According to UNDP, “migrant remittances exceed the income from exports coupled with international humanitarian aid in Somalia and probably reach more people” (UNDP 2001). Remittances to Somali are both formally and informally sent so accurate numbers are hard to establish. Research tracks formal remittances and has no established way of accounting for informal remittances so therefore, the numbers published are much lower than what is remitted overall. According to Paul (2015):

Somalia does not have a commercial banking system: Central Bank of Somalia currently has very limited correspondent relationships with foreign banks, little to no commercial banking services, and inadequate supervisory capacity to oversee the sector. Foreign banks and money transfer operators are basically absent (Paul, p.2).

This lack of data is related to the absence of financial institutions which would help in tracking this data. Investors do not want to take such extraordinary risks especially when peace is not guaranteed.

Remittances are such an integral part of the refugee/immigrant experience that it is necessary to delve a little deeper. According to Horst et al. (2014), “remittances are understood in three ways; an input to development, a hindrance to immigrant integration and as a component in terrorism and crime” (Horst et al., 2014, p.514). The terrorism and crime part is closely linked to the informal sector of remittances because it is believed that these funds go towards funding illicit activities. Without formal data, this is difficult to prove but it affects those who do not have sinister motives and must use these means.



As far as development goes, remittances are mainly viewed positively because they provide the receiving communities/countries with additional cash flow and thus funding of local developmental programs is increased. According to Lindley (2010), “remittances contribute to the wider economy by increasing local consumption of goods and services. It also increases employment and increases redistribution of gains” (Lindley, 2010, p.18). The recipients of these monies reinvest them into the local economy and increase the demand for goods. The money also goes towards lifesaving endeavors such as paying for medical services thus improving the people’s health. According to Paul (2015):

Somalia receives approximately \$1.3 bn in remittances from money sent from the Somali diaspora to loved ones back home. Remittances account for between 25 to 45 percent of Somalia’s economy and exceed the amount it receives in humanitarian aid, development aid and foreign direct investment combined (Paul, 2015, p.2).

This indicates how reliant Somalia is on remittances and the extent to which the country would be further devastated without these funds. The interruptions to remittance sending mechanisms are a major setback to any development.

Remittances being considered an obstacle to integration is a fear of the countries that are taking in the refugees because they believe that if they maintain such crucial ties to those elsewhere they will not forge the relationships that are necessary for integration. Somehow, remittances have been tied to integration which is absurd. One model of assimilation according to Gordon (1964), “that one model of assimilation is Anglo-conformity, where the refugee must become like the native by entirely conforming to the dominant culture” (Gordon, 1964). The threat of difference makes the association with remittances and integration possible. People send money to each other all the time even in the West however something about the money going abroad means something threatening.

According to Kunz (1981):

Some societies, are likely to demand assimilation in exchange for the privilege of admitting the refugee. The extent to which they would demand conformity would be contingent upon their social sensitivity. Certain societies are less likely to be cordial to people who cling to their differing cultures (Kunz, 1981, p.48).

The United States may be considered less cordial when it comes to Muslim refugees whose only acceptable identity is an assimilated one. This suggests that they must switch from their communal culture to an individual culture as is practiced in the West to express their patriotism. There is also the unspoken expectation of them denouncing their faith. There are no allowances for acculturation since this leaves elements of the original culture. Somali's adhering to their traditions and communal way of living which is foreign to the West has deemed them a threat. They have been subject to stigmatizations due to differences in culture, names, practices, and dress. They are excluded due to language barriers and attacked for their religion all stemming from the national rhetoric of Muslims being associated with terrorism. If they were to sever ties to their homeland, it would be akin to losing a part of themselves which would be a difficult in a foreign country that is hostile towards them and where they have limited social ties.

Refugees are not willing immigrants but rather victims of their violent governments and so asking them to further sacrifice any ties they have with their homeland is cruel and unjust. The suggestion that remittances are an obstacle to integration, seem unfounded. Asking refugees to assimilate wholesale to western culture rather than adapt to cultural norms that align with theirs is a traumatic experience. It is unfair to stipulate that people show allegiance by neglecting their relatives who are an essential extension of who they are and in need of assistance.

There is the informal sector (*hawala* or *xawilaad*) in places where banking systems have failed, this service compensates for the vacuum created by not having a formal banking system. In

the informal sector, we have what is called *hawala or Xawwilaad*. According to Lindley (2010), “*Xawwilaad* is the Somali rendering of *hawala*” (Lindley, 2010, p.36).

Houssein (2005) adds:

*Hawala* is an efficient, practical, and cost effective system of transferring funds from one country or area to another. It has been used for millennia. Unfortunately, these days, the name *hawala* conjures images of dark forces and underground activities. *Hawala* serves more than half of the world, far more than conventional banking and serves it well (p.88).

The creation of these systems is a way to allow people to make remittances where it would have been otherwise impossible. When formal systems are lacking then there arises an opportunity for the creation of informal systems. According to Passas (2005):

The payments are fulfilled reliably and cheaply and communication happens via a fax, email or telephone call. Some details of the sender are kept and these include keeping record of recipient information and serial numbers of the currency. For the transaction, cash is delivered to a location such as a grocery store and the cash is thereafter delivered to the recipient at the destination by an agent no matter how remote the location (Passas, p.51).

Since Somalia has a limited formal infrastructure and many of the people are dependent on remittances and the regularity of receiving these funds, it is imperative to maintain an informal remittance sector. Funds being sent are critical for the survival of many.

Remittance interruptions are unfortunately regular due to insecurity and the association of money transfer to questionable activities. There have been many different incidences that have curtailed remittances due to the insinuation that the remittances go towards dubious activities. The attacks on the trade towers in the United States is one such incident that caused interruption. The attacks sent ripples through the World forcing other institutions to put embargos on their customers with regards to the remitting of money and ally themselves with the United States. In other cases, the financial institutions were the target of these embargoes.

According to Lindley (2010):

In 2001, Al-Barakaat was the largest money transmitter in Somalia. The United Nations added it to its list of suspected terrorist supporters and responses around the world were quick. All the significant countries in its network immobilized its bank accounts. Its owner was previously employed by Citibank in Saudi Arabia and he later oversaw the money transfer operations in Jeddah of a rich Mogadishu trader before establishing his own business. The specific crisis of Al-Barakaat developed in the broader context of increasing financial regulations of migrant's remittances. After the terror attacks on the World Trade Center, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), which organizes international efforts to block criminal use of financial systems, released special sanctions regarding terrorist financing, incorporating on 'alternative remittance' i.e., Non-bank money transfers services, which insisted that service providers 'know your customer' and 'control your business (p.41).

These new restrictions cause problems for the business owner and for the sender too. According to Hassan and Liberatore (2016), "increasing tension from the international financial regulators and policy makers (particularly the US and the UK) has amounted to tighter regulation in a bid to prevent money laundering and the financing of terrorist activities" (Hassan & Liberatore, 2016, p.35). The consequences are that this causes constant interruptions to the flow of remittances due to fears that the funds are going towards backing terrorist cells and in today's anti-Muslim, anti-terrorism climate this is with some regularity. These interruptions are a major hardship to the recipients who rely on these funds for their daily needs and may have no other reliable source of income. According to Paul (2015), "one out of three Somalis say that without remittances they would not be able to pay for food, school or basic healthcare" (Paul, 2015, p.4). It is not easy for refugees in African countries to get employment due to security concerns. There is not a reliable way to do background checks thus being able to determine who is safe to interact with the locals. The other obstacle is the funds to even set up such a system. According to Wasilkowska (2012), "cash transfers create peace and harmony both within the household and in the wider community

as hunger, malnutrition and the pressure of daily life lessen with the cash input” (Wasilkowska, 2012, p.45). Available humanitarian aid for registered refugees is miniscule and for those who are not registered as refugees with UNHCR, they do not qualify for assistance.

### **Childrearing in America for Somali Parents**

Somalis feel that living in the United States has changed the way families deal with conflicts due to government regulation. According to Kruizenga (2010), “the law has replaced elders in the role of ironing out family differences. In Somali culture, elders are regarded as experts in the family matters because they know how to counsel and appease all parties involved” (Kruizenga, 2010, p.9). This is further manifested in their navigation of the educational system for their children. The first obstacle is that the school’s system is one they have no background knowledge of so they cannot efficiently advocate for their children. Mahamed (2010) observes:

Somali parents do not have the ability to effectively negotiate with school personnel regarding their children. All Somali parents indicate that they have signed consent forms without fully understanding what they were signing and the school system failed to provide the proper accommodations to allow them to make informed decisions (p.71).

These parents do not have adequate guidance and this is also compounded by language and cultural barriers. According to Mahamed (2010):

When it comes to their children’s education, Somali parents lack familiarity with the school system itself and resources within it. This is compounded by the linguistic challenges they face in their dealings with school board officials, and, even when these can be managed, there still remain intercultural communication problems that are not immediately evident to them or the board officials (p.70).

### **The Rural Town of Fort Morgan**

Fort Morgan is a rural town in the Eastern Plains of Colorado with a population of 11,000. There demographics are; 46.7% Whites, 45.8% Hispanic, 45.8% Black, 5.8% two or more races, 1.3% American Indian and 0.8% Asian (Fort Morgan, City data). The local economy is based in agriculture and related industries, including a Cargill meat-packing plant that employs 2,000

people, Leprino Foods cheese factory, a large Dairy Farmers of America milk-processing facility and Erker Grain, which is one of the largest processors of sunflower seeds in the world (Fort Morgan, Colorado: “In Brief”).

As is evident from the data, meatpacking is the major employer in Fort Morgan. There has also been a significant shift in demographics and this is a result of changes to the workforce. In December 12, 2006, there were multiple raids by U.S. immigration officials. According to Preston (2006):

In simultaneous dawn raids, federal immigration agents swept into six Swift & Company meatpacking plants in six states yesterday, rounding up hundreds of immigrant workers in what the agents described as a vast criminal investigation of identity theft. More than 1,000 agents from Immigration and Customs Enforcement appeared at 6 a.m. at the Swift plants with warrants to search for illegal immigrants. Inside, agents separated American citizens from immigrants, interviewing all the foreign workers and taking hundreds away in buses to immigration detention centers (Preston, 2006)

This affected meatpacking factories because suddenly they were without a complete workforce and production was going to be affected. The solution became to hire refugees since they are legal aliens allowed to work and to increase pay to minimize worker turnover. This is the genesis of the changing racial landscape of Fort Morgan. According to Vasquez et al. (2008):

In the last 7 years a new population has appeared in this small community: East African refugees. Previously, Fort Morgan never had a large black population. This new migrant dispersal has been precipitated by “the restructuring of food processing industries, as well as changes in service construction and manufacturing sectors” (p.23).

Cargill which is a meat packing plant is the main employer in the city of Fort Morgan and the starting wage for employers on the floor cutting meat is \$14.25 an hour including benefits. The company also offers English as a second Language (ESL) courses which the company funds and offers an incentive of promotion after completion of the course. The company employs approximately 2000 workers and about 1840 are of African or Mexican descent. According to

Bjerklie (1995), “Cargill’s Excel division- has a capacity 83,750 head” (Bjerklie, 1995, p.43). As far as production for this factory goes, a visit to the plant provided more information on this statistic. According to Ginther, “currently Cargill produces 4 million pounds of beef daily” (Ginther, 2015). This number is affected when there are labor disputes and the production significantly reduces as it did in middle of December 2015. In this incident, 180 Somali workers were fired due to a conflict between management and the workers over prayer accommodations. There has been an adverse reaction from the natives about the presence of the newcomers. According to Atre (2013):

An influx of nearly 1,000 East Africans over a span of only 5 years was a dramatic change for this small community of only 11,000 inhabitants. Further, while previous immigrant populations did differ from the receiving community, the town generally remained Christian and white. With the arrival of East African migrants, there were three fundamental responses made by the Fort Morgan community: outwardly negative, proactively positive, and generally complacent (p.12).

The local community’s distress is primarily because Somali refugees are visually (black) and religiously (Muslim) different. With the social climate that does not have any positive thoughts towards Muslims, this presents a hostile environment for the refugees.

### **Meatpacking Factories**

Meatpacking factories are a major employer for the refugee and immigrant population for various factors. According to Shandy and Fennelly (2006):

Meat and poultry processing jobs have a unique set of attributes attractive to immigrant populations. The work does not necessarily require knowledge of English or previous job skills, and the wages are attractive when compared to other available options for a population without U.S. job histories or high levels of English proficiency (p.12).

Most Somali refugees come to the United States without an education and so these jobs turn out to be suitable as they do not require English language skills or prior experience. Despite the attraction to these types of jobs, there are downsides. According to Stull (2006):

The work is dangerous and back breaking and injuries are not hard to get. According to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), “meat-, poultry-, and fish-processing jobs are among the most hazardous in America” (p.3).

The injuries sustained are usually significant and some of the causes are the workplace practices that favor high production to maximize profits. According to Broadway (2007):

Packinghouse work remains labor intensive and dangerous, which makes line work unattractive to most North Americans. The work requires no preexisting job skills or knowledge of English and the industry continues to recruit immigrant and refugees to staff its production lines (Broadway, 2007, p.564).

Job distribution in the factory puts the refugees and immigrants in the greatest danger by putting them on the cutting floor whilst the white people get less hazardous jobs mainly supervisory. Unfortunately, in the meat packing factory African and Mexican workers are put in harm’s way for a profit and supervisory positions are given to the whites. According to Stull et al. (2006):

Despite advances in technology, one troubling aspect of meatpacking that stubbornly remains is danger on the line. Meatpacking had the highest injury and illness rate of any industry in America during the 1980’s and it remains so today-well ahead of poultry processing and more than three times greater than the overall manufacturing average (p.63).

The factories try to maximize production whilst compromising the safety of their workers. This creates an industry that has a high workforce turnover.

According to Broadway (2007):

The injury and illness rate peaked in 1992 at 44.4 per 100 (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics: various years). Reported rates have subsequently fallen due to the industry’s efforts to improve ergonomics and changes in injury reporting procedures (p.564).

Practices such as training the workers on only one cut instead of various cuts so they can rotate and reduce injuries from repetitive motions are yet to be implemented. According to Stull (1995):

To combat these issues, the solutions are simple and well known, provide better and longer periods of training, adequately staff work crews, vary job tasks to relieve muscle strain and



provide longer recovery periods for injured workers. The most crucial is to slow down the chain (p.81).

As simple and cost saving as these solutions may seem, the factories do not implement them. As a result the number of injuries is high and turnover is huge. The factories seem to be working under capacity because they cannot keep most of their staff and the cost of training new staff is exorbitant. Cost effective measures are not implemented and this is absurd.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This study centers on the experiences of the Somali refugee women of Fort Morgan, Colorado from an Indigenous African feminist framework coupled with an *Ubuntu* philosophy using ethnography. According to Merriam (2009):

Ethnography consists of interviews formal and informal, and the analysis of documents, records, and artifacts also constitute the data set along with a fieldworker's diary of each day's happenings, personal feelings, ideas, impressions, or insights with regard to those events (p.28).

The specific research questions which guide this study are: RQ1. How do Somali women perceive their present housing, educational and employment conditions in Fort Morgan? RQ2. How do Somali refugee women perceive the efficacy of services rendered to them in Fort Morgan? RQ3. How do the Somali refugee women perceive their social environment?

These questions were developed from an African feminist perspective coupled with the *Ubuntu* philosophy. African feminism emphasizes the interrelationships, interconnectedness, and interdependence between women, men, and children and between the living and nonliving (Chilisa, 2012, p.276). This is closely tied to the philosophy of *Ubuntu*. According to Khoza (2006), "an African value system that means humanness or being human, a worldview characterised by such values as caring, sharing, compassion, communalism, communocracy and related predispositions." (Khoza, 2006, p.269).

### Methods

Qualitative methods are used for this research study because of the thorough analysis that is achieved from interviews with participants.

According to Merriam (2009):

Qualitative research is an umbrella term covering an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world (p.13).

Using qualitative methods allows for a good understanding of the lives and experiences of participants. The data allows for a critical understanding of the challenges and needs of Somali refugee women in Fort Morgan.

Somali refugee women's voices are highlighted in the study since their voices rarely get the opportunity to be heard. Interviews were conducted with Somali refugee women in Fort Morgan as part of this research project. According to Merriam (2009), "interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them. It is also necessary to interview when we are interested in past events that are impossible to replicate" (Merriam, 2009, p.88).

### **Sample and Procedure**

This research was Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved. I conducted semi-structured interviews with four Somali refugee women in Fort Morgan. The participants were all females. The justification for having women only is because their perspectives are not sought from them directly and in most cases men speak on behalf of the entire community. There are gender specific situations that are critical yet go unheard.

I assigned pseudonyms to the participants in the interviews for their safety. The participants were chosen due to their gender and national background (Somali). The participants are from one national origin (Somali) and are all over the age of eighteen.

The participants were also chosen as participants due to meeting the criteria of having come to the United States as refugees and have lived in Fort Morgan for over a period of three years so

that they are well adjusted to their new environment. This criterion was used for participant selection because the objectives of the study are to understand the impacts on Somali refugee women resettlement in Fort Morgan. I used criterion-based selection purposive sampling since it is typical for qualitative studies. According to Merriam (2009), “purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam, 2009, p.88). I also selected a snowball sample since I was being given access to the participants as opposed to me going out and recruiting them.

### **Recruitment**

Recruitment of participants was conducted using a culturally acceptable method. The men (established leaders in the community) are the gatekeepers therefore it is appropriate to approach them with the request for access to the women and explain the research study to them. Once the information is relayed, the researcher must wait for permission which comes in the form of being introduced to women in the community. The length of this wait is unknown and they communicate when they deem that trust has been established and that no known harm shall come from the women participating in the study.

Even though the researcher shares a common language (Swahili) with some of the community members, there is neither national affiliation (Somalia) nor religious (Muslim) affiliation thus rendering the researcher an outsider. This is the only acceptable method of recruitment for a study that is to be done over an extended period if the information to be gathered is reliable.

With the initial contacts, the researcher got access to other women in the community this time referred by other women. The men stop policing the process once they are satisfied that this

is a safe process. What became evident is that only women with more than a high school diploma education were willing to talk to the researcher. The women that have ventured to improve their lives through education and refused to settle for a limited skill job by getting further education are the ones who can also establish and trust that the researcher is not taking advantage of them. All the participants requested that the interviews not be conducted in a public space. The interviews were conducted in their homes and this gave them a level of freedom to discuss matters not ordinarily discussed.

### **Data Collection Methods**

There were a total of four participants, all female. The interview protocol was made up of semi-structured questions all of which were open ended. Interviews were recorded on a laptop and Android phone recorder and the interviews lasted approximately forty-five minutes to an hour and a half. Each participant had one interview with up to two follow up short visits for clarification of the information/questions. The interview questions explored health, education and working conditions. The participants were prompted during the interviews on key issues that this research is focused on (i.e. social climate, mental health) so specific areas were explored related to the research questions.

(See attachment A).

### **Data Analysis**

Throughout the data enquiry process, the researcher upheld the anonymity of the participants. Transcribing the data was the initial step and subsequently it was coded line-by-line and sorted using a continual comparative approach. From this method, themes emerged that sometimes differed and other times supported the original research concept. According to De Munok (2009), coding is:

Rules for organizing symbols into larger and more meaningful strings of symbols. It is important, no imperative, to construct a coding system not because the coding system represents the 'true' structure of the process you are studying, but because it offers a framework for organizing and thinking about the data" (p. 193).

The line-by-line coding was done by hand, followed by coding of categories and refinement into themes and an overarching theme. During the coding process, care was taken to regularly return to the categories and confirm that they corresponded to the data collected.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The researcher was faced with a dilemma early in the process of vetting participants. The Somali cultural process requires going through the male leaders in the community to get permission to talk to the women. This is unlike the western methodology of meeting people and starting the interview process (with their permission). Since the researcher is keeping with an African indigenous methodology the cultural protocol had to be maintained.

The complication with this though, is the timeframe provided by the academy to get the project done is tight and there are timelines that need to be fulfilled. The researcher was not going to violate Somali cultural sensibilities even though this put them in a predicament. Consequently, the researcher had to request an extension from the IRB. Consequently, the researcher has gained the trust and respect from the community and has been given full access to any women without having to go through the gate keepers anymore.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

Respecting the participants' autonomy and comfort level meant that some questions originally composed were removed and the level to which the participants wanted to give detail on any subject was respected. When they got uncomfortable with a question or being asked for more detail the researcher withdrew. This is with regards to consciously avoiding rehashing past

trauma and staying away from the western method of constantly prodding until information is revealed and with keeping with the African indigenous method of *Ubuntu*.

The second key issue is that the participants have been constantly kept abreast with what is happening in the research process and the commitment of returning the findings to the community members. The participants will be given a chance to decide what they would like to come out of the results and the researcher will help as far as possible which is with keeping with *Ubuntu*.

### **Limitations**

The initial limitations the researcher had were that there was no previous knowledge of how to approach the Somalia community for discussing personal issues. The researcher had previously interacted with members of the Somali community on a very superficial level in different capacities. This did not give the researcher skills of how to navigate the cultural landscape and what the rules and regulations are. The researcher however comes from a neighboring country thus allowing for some basic knowledge of respectful ways to interact that proved useful.

The second limitation was the cultural norms that needed to be adhered to that were a hindrance to the western setting that the academy is in and its methodology. This forced extra work being taken on due to expectations of data collection not fitting the academy's timeline. This also raised concerns with some faculty who did not want to adjust to this anomaly.

The third limitation is the researcher trying to explain to faculty and staff why certain things matter if one is to stay true to the cause of being respectful. The cultural clashes have caused discomforts but also presented learning opportunities on both sides. There are some Somali norms

that present as wrong or absurd in a western setting yet they cannot be overlooked or dismissed as primitive.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this qualitative study analyzes the experiences of Somali refugee women in Fort Morgan, Colorado and their perceptions of the resettlement process through their lived experience. The participants were purposively selected through a cultural selection process that was orchestrated by the community leaders. The data was coded for themes and the findings from the data emerged from the experiences and standpoints of the women and their lived experience in their resettlement area related to the study.



## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

*Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable. Even a superficial look at history reveals that no social advance rolls in on the wheels inevitability. Every step towards the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals. Without persistent effort, time itself becomes an ally of the insurgent and primitive forces of irrational emotionalism and social destruction. This is no time for apathy or complacency. This is a time for vigorous and positive action."*

*Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in Stride Toward Freedom the Montgomery Story - Chapter XI Where Do We Go From Here*

### Introduction

The participants of this study were four women from the Somali refugee community in Fort Morgan. From the data analysis, four major themes emerged and these are: 1) Acquisition of formal education and its outcomes, 2) English language and its benefits and setbacks, 3) The working environment and what it means, and 4) Life goals are a family/community endeavor. The overarching theme that emerged is wellness shifts yet community responsibility is a constant.

### **Overarching Theme: Overall Wellness Shifts Yet Community Responsibility Is a Constant**

The overarching theme that emerged from the data is that the overall wellness (physical or mental) shifted depending on the circumstances on the ground. Health does not simply mean the absence of disease; it encompasses the whole individual including their environment. As a refugee, not feeling safe is a part of your reality from the experiences of fleeing danger in your country. It continues with the precarious conditions of your immediate point of refuge. There is little a refugee can control initially and this makes them fearful because they do not know what is expected. One of the things that are of utmost importance is that as well as they can, they look after each other. Even when they have barely anything, they are constantly trying to improve and share with other

family members and community members. It is important to note that they do not operate from a nucleus family ideology but rather a communal one so every family has extended family factored in. If they can assist another, this gives them a sense of wellbeing. This links to *Ubuntu* which is a tangible demonstration of the interconnectedness of human beings – it is the embodiment of African culture and lifestyle. This is demonstrated by one participant:

I was born and raised in Somalia and I came to the U.S when I was about nine and then we came to Columbus Ohio that is where I grew up. When I came to Columbus Ohio I was supposed to be in 9th grade but I started 4th grade. I came in 2000 February; I can't remember the date but it was kind of snowing. I came with my uncle and my aunt and their children. I left my mom and my dad back home. So, I grew up with my uncle and his kids which I kind of consider them my brothers and sisters.

Despite demonstrated challenges, they never waiver in their commitment to help family members while making tremendous sacrifices. For Somali communities, every Somali national is part of their group and they make unspoken pledges to uphold the group under any circumstances. This includes but is not limited to accommodation, time and money. They take jobs that are hazardous in a bid to support others. All these refugees are committed to the goodwill of another, mostly family members. One participant says:

So, we started out with my aunt who sponsored us coming to America. We came to Ohio Columbus.

Another says:

“We came with my sister and this boy we adopted. My mum was in the process of getting her papers. My sister adopted me too when I was in Nairobi, she took me from my mum.”

Yet another says:

I was 19 old years when I came as we qualified for sponsorship by our dad so that's how we got here.

As indicated, sometimes refugees compromise their wellbeing to support their relatives. The hazardous jobs they do are proof of this. Lack of an income is their worst fear as opposed to the harmful circumstances they are exposing themselves to. For them, it is unfathomable that one would go without a job when there are people depending on them. This pressure is felt even by young ones. One participant says:

By the time I was 14 I wanted to help my parents and so I would look for a job but Columbus, Ohio does not hire you when you are 14 back then. You couldn't get leases and stuff. So, my uncle tried .....It was a big city but he didn't find that opportunity to get a job so he decided to come to Colorado.

Another participant said:

And I didn't like working there honestly and I would never, never say never but I would try not to go back there. It's the last place I want to go back to if I must work.

Despite the circumstances the refugee is living in after relocation, the responsibility to family/community does not waiver. The workplace is both physically and emotionally challenging but that is the least of their considerations. For the most part the environment in which they find themselves can add to their challenges if it is unwelcoming in nature. Contending with all this affects their wellbeing negatively.

### **Major Theme: Acquisition of Formal Education and Its Outcomes**

The first theme is education as a blessing and obstacle. For Somalis living in Somalia and those that have sought refuge in Kenya and other neighboring countries, formal education is hard to come by. There are many factors that make this the case. Some of these are financial constraints, the lack of prior educational resources, nomadism, and culture.

Due to the unsettled and migratory nature of the Somali refugee experience, education is most often inaccessible and often unattainable for females due to cultural norms. For a student to

have a solid educational foundation, they require stability, safety and access to educational resources. In the refugee experience, schools and all infrastructure are the first to get destroyed. Due to the violent nature of war, these facilities often suffer and there also is no guarantee of safety. When they are at refugee camps, education is not high on the priority list but rather resettlement. This then explains the reason most Somali refugees have no formal education.

Women in Somalia are deprived of access to education and other social services under the facade of culture. They instead are groomed to attend to the needs of males in their society starting with their father and brothers. Later they tend to their husbands needs and they tend to be married off early. Getting an education does not feature in this trajectory and most seem to be relegated to the domestic sphere. According to Gardner (2004):

Living in the diaspora as refugees is usually a difficult and stressful experience but one which has enabled many thousands of girls and women to access educational and training opportunities which would not have otherwise been available to them (p.209)

Some participants alluded to this issue and most of them admit that prior coming to America education was not high on the priority list. There is something to be said for the refugee experience when they find peace that heightens the need for education. At this point it is a way out of poverty or a path to freedom. One participant said:

We started with my aunt who sponsored us to come to America and we came to Columbus Ohio. She told us this is the life in America, what you must do is go to school, be somebody, go to college when you finish school, but the first thing you need to learn is English. That is the first thing that is going to be your life. If you know English, you will get a lot of things.

Whilst they recognize the need for education, most lack English language skills upon arrival. Due to this deficit, it is hard to fit into the American school system that is based on an age

grade structure. Gaining language skills is a difficult endeavor and therefore many are discouraged and opt to drop out. One participant said:

.....I didn't know a lot of English. When I was in Kenya, I learned "hi" "how are you" "how are you doing?" "What's your name?" "Where can you go?" "Where are you going?" "What can I give you?"

Ideally, refugees would arrive with some literacy skills that they gained whilst at the refugee camp. The refugees that did not live in a camp and got to live in the city stood a better chance. In the City schools are available and if they have some financial resources they can get an education prior to their arrival in the United States.

Other obstacles to education are the fact that since not a large number are getting educated at the same time, the acquisition of new knowledge and language causes divisions from the other members of the group. According to Horst (2014), "there is mistrust and an identity of *buufis*. The translation is varied from "going abroad" or "resettlement" to "hopes for abroad" and "everyone who is interested to go abroad" (Horst, 2014, p.167). There is further unsettlement when one is "displaced" from their own group. The gains of acquiring both knowledge and the English language are great in terms of career advancement but a real disadvantage when it comes to one's place in the culture. This advancement is isolating because one is no longer accepted amongst their own group as before, yet do not fit into the dominant society. One participant makes this point:

.....one thing I noticed is that half of the Somali people who lived here back then didn't speak English and they did not have the same mindset I had. You know you meet people from where you're from and believe that you can communicate and they would know what you are talking about but they didn't. You are Somali and they are too and we should be able to talk to each other. But for me it was the total opposite. They would ask "Why don't you speak Somali?", "Why are you doing this?" "Why are you wearing this?" "Are you Americanized?"

She goes on to say:

So, we went to the high school and in class I was the only Somali person since I didn't take ESL (English as a second language) classes. The rest of the students would ask amongst themselves, "Does she speak English?"

This is a complicated dilemma because as much as every individual wants to advance they do not want to do it at the expense of their relationships in their community. The other frustration is as good as they get in the dominant societies language and culture they shall always be deemed deficient. The dominant society is set up to discriminate those that are perceived to be foreigners and they always point out the differences even though they may be fluent in language and culture. Children of refugees who are born in the United States will not have the language or cultural barriers that their parents had however they will always be viewed as foreigners by the dominant society and not Somali by their country mates. The societal structure of the United States advantages white supremacy at the cost of all others. According to Fannon (1967):

When someone else strives and strains to prove to me that black men are as intelligent as white men, I say that intelligence has never saved anyone; and that is true, for, if philosophy and intelligence are invoked to proclaim the equality of men, they have also been employed to justify the extermination of men (p.17).

### **Major Theme: Working Environment Hazards**

The second theme is the hazardous working environment at the Cargill meatpacking factory. The factory is a common thread for all refugees living in fort Morgan. The major reason refugees move after initial resettlement to a secondary resettlement area is to seek out better employment. There are no other known incentives offered by the town of Fort Morgan to warrant a secondary migration.

The Somali refugees come from a very harsh past and they develop a tenacity that is unusual. This is read in many ways by casual observers and those that work with them. The most common way it is read is that they are stubborn, uncooperative, rude and things of that nature. Rarely is it considered to be a byproduct of a harsh existence. There is a lot of misunderstanding and lack of empathy when people are dealing with Somalis. I would like to attribute this to Somalia not having a stable government for 24 years, the refugee camp experience, the witnessing of violence on a scale that is inexplicable and many other negative factors. Having said this, America presents them with a different kind of violence mainly in the name of religious intolerance when it comes to Islam, the negotiating of new rules and regulations that are foreign including their racialization, and working opportunities that are exploitative and demeaning in the treatment of workers. They have the added disadvantage of lack of formal training therefore their chances at a decent well-paying job are greatly diminished.

Much as the meatpacking factory has an economic pull, it does not necessarily have the environment to keep its workers happy. There are numerous complaints about the treatment of workers by the management and how those who understand English feel the added brunt of abusive statements targeted at them by supervisors. Whether it is the hours, lack of upward mobility, injuries etc., there is generally great disgruntlement. One participant says:

First two months when I started working there, I burned my hand with hot water and that was devastating. I didn't like working there because of the way they make you work; it is like they value the cow more than the human beings. If you make a mistake while cutting the meat, they will be like "Do you know how much this costs? What the hell? I am a human being. When you get hurt they don't see you, they see the cow that has value more than you do.

The factory management has not tried to make meaningful connections with its workers. The workers feel like nothing less than units of labor. They also feel demeaned at their workplace.

Despite the nature of the job which is physically demanding, the workers have no sense of value. They admit that the pay is good however that does not compensate for feeling dehumanized. One participant said:

The job is degrading mentally.

Another says:

When you work there, half of the people treat you bad, you stand for 8 hours, when you get injured you go over to the nurse, you ask for help but they just tell you to go back to the meat. They might help you with bandages and stuff but they are not going to help you with anything major. All the people who are supervisors, they are the meanest. You can't talk to them; they can't talk to you politely. They would not say "How is your day?" "How are you doing?" "Are you hurting?" They don't care.

The working environment does not foster a sense of belonging and therefore they do not participate in programs designed to improve them.

One participant says:

The job also does not require English language skills though there are incentives for learning such as a pay raise. There are English lessons at no cost for the workers. Unfortunately, either because of time, family or lack of motivation, most workers do not attend.

Another participant explains:

It's a job that does not require you to speak English. You are basically standing there doing your job; you don't need to communicate with anybody for anything. You do not need to know the language. I am sure 90% of Somalis working there or I would say a lot of people working there do not speak English whether its Mexicans, Nepalese or Somalis.

Another says:

Even though when you are working there you know English, you will lose all your English because the only thing that you are using is your hands. So, you would literally lose every little thing you learned because you are not communicating using words but body gestures alone.



The toll on the body from the physical demands is great. Most of the workers have one complaint or another and the injury rate is high per the workers. These physically demanding jobs are usually done by immigrants or refugees. Most Americans cannot keep up with the demands and end up leaving within a week of starting the job. On the other hand, some refugee workers have been at the job for over 7 years. One participant explains:

My uncle is working there and he always complains, “My back hurts, my legs hurt”. I feel sorry for my people.

The same participant later talks about her experience working at the factory:

So, I would stand there for 8 hours and I started to get back pains and all the other stuff.

Another participant said:

When I was pregnant, I had a note from my doctor not to carry more than 25lbs. So, they moved me to bagging. Bagging is putting meat in boxes, carrying and pushing. It was way heavier than the doctor said, so I told my supervisor and he moved me to another section where it’s a lighter job. His supervisor moved me back. Everything was going badly and I had to stop. Two different women had miscarriages doing the same work. I protested but I was told I had to do it. The union and others tried to step in but he did not listen. I then took my FLMA (family and medical leave act) as the doctor advised me.

Race relations are not addressed. America is a society that segregates different ethnicities and places value on being white. With these dynamics, there is a need for active intervention to avoid the outcomes of this oppressive ideology playing out. Those discriminated upon react to being treated badly and may exhibit violent tendencies as a means of self-protection or resignation. Putting different ethnicities together without intervention has negative consequences whether in schools or the workplace. This is demonstrated by one participant, who talked about her school experience:

So, then I went for lunch in the cafeteria and I was sitting with my siblings while we are eating. We sat divided into groups of your color. We have Mexicans with Mexicans; the

other groups are white and Somali. The groups do not get along so they throw food at each other and fight.

Another describes her work experience:

When I got hired, we were a lot of Somalis hired together and now there is only one girl still working there. None of them lasted, just me and her and then I left. And she is the only who is still there from those that we did orientation with. Of all of us she is the only one remaining. She is going on to four years now. Her relationship with the job is she is always saying, "I want to leave, I want to go".

### **Major Theme: Life Goals Are a Kin/Community Endeavor**

Kin is central so they limit what they dream of achieving personally for the greater good of their community. They accept hazardous jobs with the goal of making money to help improve the conditions for other community members. Somalis have a strong responsibility towards family members both close and extended that have been left back in Africa. When resettlement happens, rarely is the whole family able to relocate together. Some family members may fail to qualify for relocation; others may be resettled in different countries whilst others may have been separated right from when they were fleeing the conflict in their country. Due to all these factors, there are kinship ties that those with the opportunity to resettle always consider in their decision making. To a casual observer, they can mistakenly be assumed to be lacking ambition yet they have done some complicated life calculations to minimize suffering for all concerned. One way this is demonstrated is by their job choices and the suffering they endure.

My participants all talked to me about the various sacrifices they have had to make and how important it is for them to take care of business here in the United States whilst simultaneously providing for all the various needs in various places.

According to one participant:

When I was in high school, I had a job because my family had problems back in Somalia.

Another says:

The reason why my uncle still works there (factory), is because he has kids in Somalia and his wife lives in Somalia too and they need so much money and he supports them. But I think he needs to quit soon because his body cannot take it. His body is falling apart and he is old.

One other says:

Then, I was supporting my mother, my 3 siblings, and my aunt. You know when you have an African community everyone is your aunt so I used to support them too. It was a lot of stress because I was young and the job was very difficult. When you are responsible for your family, it is very hard.

We see that regardless of age or gender, the obligations to support kin elsewhere is great.

There are statistics that claim that Somali refugees are the most impoverished but the question is whether this is by the dominant cultures standards or whether these statistics take into consideration the money they remit.

### **Discussion**

*My most simple goal was to make clear that cross-cultural feminist work must be attentive to the micro politics of context, subjectivity, and struggle, as well as to the macro politics of global economic and political systems and processes.*

*Chandra Mohanty 2003*

What I aspire to achieve through this research is, designing culturally compassionate educational tools using my findings that can equip both the receiving community and the refugees make the resettlement tensions minimal and the community building the best that it can be. By looking at both sides I hope to be able to acquire insight into the missing links and the

misunderstandings and to provide suggestions to improve the currently tense relations. I greatly empathize with the Somali community because they have endured tremendous trauma right from living in a war zone to fleeing to displacement to resettlement. I would hope that America would be able to provide some reprieve from past violence and trauma yet at the same time I am also critically aware that they step into a complicated space once they arrive. They leave many other complicated dynamics to walk into a highly racialized, segregated, classist dynamic and they most probably do not have the necessary information or skills to navigate these choppy waters as they have not had to previously. It is unfortunate that they escape one trauma only to be confronted by another in the land offering refuge.

Situations that cause the refugee situation are varied and the levels of trauma are varied too. The women I have worked with have all had to adjust from life as they knew it to accommodate their new reality. The gender roles for the most part have been affected and their relationships in their communities have shifted. They do express sadness that their acquisition of the English language, more education or just working status has caused a rift. This is since they are no longer viewed as adhering to tradition but rather giving in to foreign influences. In the long run, their achievements help the larger community but they must suffer the daily taunts or isolations. There is the added injustice of them being looked down upon by westerners. They mainly are deemed backwards for their dress, lazy for lacking resources to get an education prior to arriving and threatening due to their religion. One thing that needs to be taken seriously is that women in the non-western nations are just as intelligent and capable of great things. The fact that their governments and societies are more repressive is not of their doing and therefore they should not be treated or referred to as inferior. Where is the common ground for the “First World” woman

and the “Third World” woman? Is it a case of one always being superior to the other? Where is solidarity found in being a charity case?

The Somali women in my research, rarely get the choice not to work. The decision to live in a rural setting has much to do with the availability of employment. Here, even the married women no longer financially depend on men. This may be partly explained as the result of the fleeing process which highlights their vulnerability and forces them to change their lifestyle from a dependent one to a more independent one especially when it comes to money. Somali women in the United States have low numbers of housewives, which is a great shift from their economic dependence on men in Somalia or Kenya. Other factors that help explain their changing economic status may be that work opportunities that do not require formal schooling or English language skills are more abundant in factories. While factors vary regarding how they become more economically independent, a consistent theme is the important role they play as contributors to their family and societal well-being through the money they earn. The scope and extent of their contributions to economic well-being of families, communities, and societies needs to be acknowledged both in data and narratives and given the recognition that it deserves.

In a country like Kenya, most groups are patrilineal however the power that women have had traditionally is great. Their role as carrying life within them, their role as producers of most of the food and their role as healers (especially after men come from battles) gives them power and agency. Their age also matters and the older they are the more power they have. They are sought after for their wisdom unlike the west that overlooks older people and finds them a burden to society. This background information is important because when you are analyzing Africans in America, it is very easy to take their behavior, beliefs etc. and misrepresent them if you are using a western lens. Africans believe in living in harmony with nature not dominating over it and

therefore they incorporate these beliefs into their everyday practices. An example is Muslims who have the *halal* way of slaughtering animals. *Halal* is any object or action which is permissible to use or engage in, per Islamic law. The term covers and designates food and drink as well as matters of daily life. One must consider the psychological impact for the Somalis in Fort Morgan or Greeley working in a meat packing factory where the meatpacking methods go against their religious sensibilities. Handling a product that is not *halal* must have some negative ramifications in the long run and cause trauma.

We need to redefine language used and research done. We need to clearly identify structures of oppression and put the blame where it belongs and not on those that are victims of structures and institutions they did not create. Many Somali women do not have a formal education but this is not a problem they created neither is it a result of negligence on their part but rather a violent system that negates women. They are ridiculed in many places and made to feel inferior simply because they have been previously disempowered. We need to find solidarity in humanity and not separate one group of women from another. We need to examine structures of oppression and put the focus of them whilst creating ways to solve the existing problems. We need to stop talking about veiled Somali refugee women as mutilated women and permanent victims of their past conditions. These women are from a different society and we need women from those societies who are willing to report with dignity to be the spokespersons. According to Mohanty (1991):

As discussed earlier, a comparison between Western feminist self-presentation and Western feminist re-presentation of women in the third world yields significant results. Universal images of "the third world woman" (the veiled woman, chaste virgin, etc.), images constructed from adding the "third world difference" to "sexual difference" are predicated upon (and hence obviously bring into sharper focus) assumptions about Western women as secular, liberated, and having control over their own lives. This is not to suggest that Western women are secular, liberated and have control over their own lives (p.338).

The rest of the world needs to have an open mind and be willing to listen with empathy not sympathy. These women do not need to be pitied but rather to have allies to join forces with them to start to undo the harm that has been done. We also need to carve out spaces where people can talk on their own behalf safely.

Cultural relevance in terms of research methods is critical. Applying a western framework to indigenous communities strips them of their agency. One thing that must be acknowledged with research is that the researchers come into communities, do their research and leave. The community does not get to walk away from any negative consequences a research project may leave behind. Researchers come in as knowledgeable persons yet rarely is the expertise of the lived experience of the community members put at the forefront of research projects. There needs to be a recognition of factors such as religion, class, national background, cultural norms and any other components that make up a woman's identity. Oftentimes, when differences are acknowledged in terms of these women, it is to subordinate them and deem the west and its practices superior. Differences such as poverty or educational opportunities get highlighted as if the west does not suffer from these social problems. The scale may differ however if we do not consider the historical context we end up blaming individuals for things that were done by the west and local leaders. Somali women suffer from being deemed primitive for the cultural practices and thus when they are approached it is from a disrespectful stance. They are not given the respect of having superior knowledge however that looks. The women are mainly presented in a light where they are victims of their society and accorded no agency whatsoever. Choices they make of their own free will are negate because the mainstream narrative purports that they have no such power or intellect. Usually this is contrasted with the western woman who is considered to have entire agency and she looks down sympathetically at these poor underprivileged women. By not focusing on the

West and its problems, we have a narrative that these women need to be saved. Who else but the Western savior without problems and with immense knowledge can get the job done?

There are the social obligations to community. Africans think and act communally and some much more than others. An example is the Somali. Their obligations to community are heightened due to their cultural structures. This has been to their advantage as they have fled and scattered all around the world. They have could rely on one another in distant places. Western values emphasize individuality and therefore Africans practicing community ethics seem to be an anomaly. There needs to be recognition that when it comes to Africa, it is left out of discussions about ethics and the focus is on corruption, poverty and disease. Cooperation of people supporting others worldwide does not get the highlights thus the Somali women's contribution to foreign countries GDP is overlooked. This is a great disservice because if we cannot acknowledge their contributions then we can also not give them the gratitude they have earned

Somali women have been erased in their histories or marginalized by culture and now they need to be illuminated. Since they rarely got the opportunity to get an education, most information available has gaps and in other instances the information is missing or distorted. Somali women need to unlearn the lack of value they were subject to in their society and think of themselves positively. This means there must be public narratives highlighting their achievements.

I center on Somali refugee women because they are a marginalized group and many a time they have been excluded or minimally included. Their inclusion changes the dominant narratives as we know them and begins to right the omissions that have previously happened. The story looks very different when you include those that have been left out and this forces people to acknowledge those who have always been there but have not included. This makes the invisible visible and the minority significant. It also shifts power relations because suddenly the story includes others and



the power dynamics begin to shift. Once the women's point of view and challenges are included in the dominant dialogue then there is hope of creating positive change and addressing previously ignored issues. It brings us closer to getting equity for a gender that has previously been in the shadows.

## CHAPTER FIVE: RECOMMENDATIONS

This research tries to determine how past trauma and the current living environment affect the resettlement process for Somali women in Fort Morgan, Colorado. There are a lot of factors that come into play. Despite the autonomy to work and earning high wages in the meatpacking factory, we cannot dismiss their past and neither can we overlook the working conditions and social environment they are living in. Their social status has risen due to the autonomy they have acquired since moving to the United States however, there have been negative consequences for women from the men in their society due to the disruption of cultural gender norms where the woman stays home and the man goes out to earn a living. Divorce rates are escalating at a phenomenal pace. Fleeing the war also greatly increased the number of single women either from death of a spouse, separation of family members or divorce. These women now must negotiate bringing up their children in a most challenging atmosphere where they are away from their established cultural social support networks.

Creating change requires many different methods and plenty of flexibility. The local community is an integral part of the success or failure of any initiatives. There needs to be an acknowledgement of the refugee women's knowhow and therefore getting them on board and involved is the best approach. Enabling communities and individuals the access to creating their own solutions is a moral necessity. The days when strangers came in with foreign ideas are being phased out as this has proven to be an ineffective and disrespectful way of operating. The more local organizations and individuals are empowered the better the outcomes because nobody from the outside understands the intricacies of the community better than those who live in it. If local leaders have a hard time accessing information, then it is close to impossible for a stranger to be

given that information. Trust starts on a small scale with those one knows and later can be expanded to strangers but it does not go the other way around. Western thinking conceitedly believes that academic smarts make one eligible to walk into any community and work effectively with no prior exposure or historical and cultural knowledge. In the case of the Somali woman, understanding her previous state of disempowerment and establishing rapport with her is critical. This may take a considerable amount of time but if any success is to be realized then patience is of the essence. Western settings usually do not allow for extensive periods of time being dedicated to setting ground work with no tangible results. The refugee experience is unique and thus needs to be handled delicately and more harm can be caused by bulldozing one's way into their lives. They may be intimidated enough to act like they approve of what is happening even if this is not the case.

There cannot be any legitimate studies of a people devoid of their history and an understanding their cultural nuances. Without history, there is not a credible context because history informs our present times. The past events whether negative or positive give us an idea as to the current situation. If the historical context is ignored, the larger structure of problems is missed and only a narrowly focused image appears. Problems over time have complex intricacies and they need to be included. According to Mitschke et al. (2016):

While integration programs are meeting the physical needs of refugees, more is needed to ensure mental health stability. Emerging research is showing that attention to these needs through peer programs that are culturally competent and sympathetic to cultural sensitivities have successful outcomes. This in turn appears to shorten the transition period and help to make the transition less traumatic. This study provides qualitative data supporting the need for transition programs that are peer-centered and culturally competent. (pg.4).

History enlightens us when things do not add up for example the assumption that Somali women are too feeble to stand up for their rights against their men. The patriarchal undertones of such an assumption needs to be deconstructed. In this case, we need to go back and excavate the details that inform this present-day rhetoric.

A variety of frameworks used to analyze refugee situations are problematic. They either focus on deficits, individual choices, cultural practices or the larger societal structure. Such frameworks omit the significance of focusing on localized environments which then leads to greater insight on the direct impact of policies from place to place. By focusing on local settings, generalizations are rendered invalid. If we shift our emphasis to concentrating our attention on the resiliency of people and their achievements, it would highlight community strengths and help determine what their local social assets are. Another problem is analyzing Somalis as a homogenous group which leads to misconceptions. Somali's around the world have been able to make positive strides by tapping into the local resources hence the importance of looking at a local area instead of generalizing.

The following recommendations are for the receiving community, providers and the community members. They are not intended as a critique of work currently being done but as a dialogue for learning and improvement.

### **Race Relations**

Providers and communities need to have an active and continuous vocabulary with which to discuss poorly understood racial and power relations in the United States. Race is a huge factor in America when it comes to a community's wellbeing. Rural areas such as Fort Morgan tend to be racially segregated (white) and they have little to no exposure of other ethnicities thus their race relations skills tend to be poor. When there is an influx of a minority group, tensions rise and

relations between groups is strained. Without intervention, these situations get dangerous especially when people act on their fears. Such communities would be well served to invest in an expert who can assist them in facilitating learning sessions. Local universities are a great resource. Having regular learning sessions addresses the changing dynamics in a community immediately. Eventually members get comfortable tackling complicated subjects as they occur or at least know where to access resources.

### **Provider Life Long Learning**

Providers who have not spent time with the diverse people in the community they serve often feel competent based on academic knowhow. They are usually lacking in social nuances of those they serve. Such providers go about their work possibly causing harm since they have not had training in intricacies of cultural social relations. For example, it is common for most Americans to know their family's medical history but refugees on the other hand most likely do not have access to this important information due to the complications of their situations. Is it possible to diagnose and subsequently treat these refugees effectively without this information? This dilemma is best tackled by using alternative methods for obtaining information that likely involves learning about the person's background. This recommendation does not in any way minimize the provider's accomplishments but rather challenges them to expand their knowledge to include a new demographic they may not have previously encountered/considered.

### **Health**

Health is a great determinant of quality of life. When we are healthy we are best equipped to handle daily life activities. Health is also something that is greatly determined by our behavior, environment, education and access to resources. Health literacy in my opinion is subjective. What is considered literacy in a Western context includes English proficiency. It is possible for a person

to be extremely knowledgeable of their health and able to explain it only in their mother tongue. This is not a deficiency when it comes to understanding one's health. Accommodations for providing translation and some cultural knowledge on the provider's part can bridge this gap and improve health outcomes for those that do not speak English.

Diagnosing an illness is a complicated task and one of the problems that occurs in America is that the patient is not given sufficient time with the health provider to explore all the possible things that may be going on. Another factor is that culturally diverse groups understand their bodies differently and because of this, they determine what they consider good for them which may conflict with Western medicine. An immigrant or refugee patient refusing to take certain medication is not supposed to be viewed as incompetent or obstinate when it comes to their health. There needs to be an exploration as to why they do not approve of taking the prescribed medication. Health providers need to expand their knowledge skills to other cultures especially if they work in settings that are serving a diverse population. The entire burden cannot fall on the patient to get fluent in the language of the healthcare provider. Life situations call for continuous education, flexibility, and empathy if providers want to be competent. Integrated knowledge and action for the mutual benefit of the community is necessary for all providers and it includes getting involved with community members outside of the workplace. This is crucial to establishing trust. Furthermore, engagement must be reciprocal such that as patients are telling the provider about themselves the provider must be willing for the patients to get to know them too (within reason). Providers need to get culturally immersed otherwise they will not understand the subtle nuances that are not articulated using words that may contain the most important information. Community leaders need to create community think tanks to discuss the current health situation for the community members, things that are lacking and suggestions for improvement. Constant

community asset inventory helps to determine how many problems can best be solved within the community and what outside resources are required and how to attain them. Providers need to be willing to hear from the community members about what is working well and how it can be expanded whilst also hearing about the problems that need solving. The idea of providers being the experts because of formal schooling may become a barrier if you patronize the community you are working in.

### **Mental Health**

There is an emphasis to focus on physical health which is important however there is very little emphasis on mental/psychological wellness. There is great stigma attached to those who may be experiencing challenges in mental health and many cultures shun these people. In certain cultures, the people with mental illnesses are kept away from the public yet not necessarily given any assistance or medication. Families find them to be a source of shame. The United States mental healthcare system is often underfunded and services get interrupted or cancelled all together leaving patients struggling or worse dead. When funding gets cut, the communities that get hit hardest are those that are of low socioeconomic status. Racial discrimination is also a factor when it comes to health providers (majority who are white) serving people of color. The field is predominantly white and their implicit biases negatively affect the kind of services they provide informed by racial differences. Their fellow white patients get treated well because they feel comfortable with them whilst the people of color receive inferior quality care based on fear of the “other”. All these factors compounded result in people of color suffering worse health outcomes. The social environment is biased against them and they cannot access the services they need or when they do they are treated in an inferior manner. Growing problems for those who have mental health challenges means a large number end up in prisons instead of getting medical help.

In terms of the Somali's populations mental trauma, is great however providers cannot approach them as they do Westerners. First there is the issue of lack of trust for strangers so this must be overcome over time. Secondly, there is a stigma attached to mental health for them so the subject must be approached delicately. Another important thing is that the providers need to learn about this population and some of the things they have been through to treat them competently.

### **Depression**

In the case of depression, using internet or phone applications may be a great way for reaching out to those with depression coupled with home visits since they tend not to want to be around too many people. They isolate themselves and therefore if information needs to be relayed this may be a viable medium. What is essential is to have the messages made suitable to the intended demographic and disseminated in a way that they will engage so they can express their struggles. If new therapies are available this would also be an appropriate way to relay such messages. People with depression may prefer to communicate online since the stigma is lessened and they are not in direct contact with those that they believe shun them. In the case of ethnic minorities who have different cultural outlooks on depression, learning about these resources may help them discuss their misgivings and perhaps help providers learn about their conditions. They can also connect with people with similar challenges who are willing to share their experiences.

### **Education**

Education is a large component for Somali refugees in the resettlement process. What is usually not understood is the cultural setbacks to acquiring an education for a female as opposed to a male. When the Somali female comes to the United States, she is usually far behind her male peers if she had the opportunity to get some formal education and in several cases, she did not get the opportunity at all. This being the case, it is not beneficial to place her in a class that corresponds



to her age because she will feel incompetent and overwhelmed. Lack of English skills most times is another major barrier.

Most ESL (English as a second language) classes are standardized. This presents challenges since the Somali local dialect has nothing in common with the English language. Older Somali women are very reserved and do not trust outsiders hence their learning is at a much slower pace. Working with communities that have English language barriers, have been traumatized by war, and have different cultural beliefs requires specialized skills. It takes a long time to become proficient in a language outside of your mother tongue and this is a major challenge to learning for the Somali population. A person in this predicament cannot learn English by making associations but rather would require a tailored program. Once the language skills are acquired, the student would need a bridging program for regular school curriculum to get them up to speed with their peers. This process may take some years and therefore such as student needs backing from the education system coupled with a modified curriculum. If one imagines learning everything anew such as American history, algebra, Ethnic Studies, and other subjects that one had not been exposed to previously it may illustrate what a monumental task lays ahead for that student. It is difficult and can be disheartening because of trying to master a lot of new information all at once. Only a dedicated educator using traditional teaching tools coupled with new creative ones can keep this student motivated and hopeful. It is worth investing in these resources to generate successful and progressive citizens in the refugee populations.

Due to language barriers, Somalis who are bilingual need to be hired to do translations. In America, it is highly unlikely that you will find natives speaking the Somali language unlike the abundance of Spanish speakers. In certain instances, such a medical or court translations, there is the need for formal education however in simpler settings native language speakers should be

utilized. They are an asset that should not be neglected. They also are more likely to have some level of trust with the community compared to a total stranger.

For Somali children to be successful in their quest for an education, it is important for schools to ask parents and the Somali community leaders to help identify the community's needs. Schools could then collaborate with other community agencies to support parents in ensuring that they are active contributors to their children's success. External services that could also be offered to refugee children are the likes of homework help, alternative learning tools and inclusion in community get together. Formal informational sessions for parents to help them navigate the larger social system is necessary and could include such topics as scholarships, parenting strategies, or the criteria for high school graduation. According to Ali et al. (2012):

The Somali community should not be viewed from a deficit perspective, as each community has cultural wisdom and strengths that can enrich schools and their ability to reach out to the families of students that attend their schools. Community strengths, therefore, need to be identified, emphasized and utilized within the school to guide the implementation of culturally appropriate activities. A Somali Language tutorial program could be held in the school during non-instructional times. Also, community leaders could be invited to the school to talk about their work and act as positive role models for Somali youth (Ali, et al., 2012, p.10).

There are no standard formulas for fixing community issues and the more flexible and varied the solutions are, the better the outcomes. There needs to be a diversion from a strictly Western framework in indigenous and rural settings. Addressing ethnic communities from their point of view and not imposing solutions is key because otherwise this leads to a waste of time and resources. Local solutions for local communities are the direction we need to go in. Nothing comes easy and lazy broad solutions that are supposed to work across the board need to be eliminated. It is hard work to solve issues and therefore we need to put in the effort if we truly want to see a sustainable change. Empowering local leaders and other stellar individuals is the way

for better outcomes because community organizing principles such as building community capacity and social capital are enhanced.

### **Art as a Tool**

Arts are an extremely effective and accessible tool for spreading messages about health and other social matters. There are so many possible venues including public parks, pavements, walls, galleries and any other spaces. Art does is not confined to certain spaces but rather, it flows through many different spaces. For this reason, every community regardless of socioeconomic status can find the spaces where they can express themselves. Art is also therapeutic and not bound by language, religion or other constraining mechanisms that work in the rest of society. Art can be easily morphed from one form to the other and the messages can be changed accordingly. In terms of cultural relevance this is one of the best mediums because it can be tailored to fit the culture. In places like South Africa when apartheid was at its height, the only thing that survived and was available to the Africans to send messages and liberate them from their oppressors was art. This is how they mobilized to enact change. Art when done right calls people to action. Teachers can use artistic methods creatively in the classroom to tackle complex issues. An educator's positive influence is a bonus for a student who is struggling and can greatly encourage and steer them towards a path that is not detrimental. Educators have great influence on their students and if that is harnessed right the results are spectacular. Many a student has cited their salvation from taking a negative path to an educator that cared about them and took the time to mentor them.

### **Interconnections**

When we expand our understanding of community, we are better able to include contributors that we may have not considered as part of the community. In Fort Morgan, every individual, organization, business, city official and others in the town are interconnected. An

example of this is that Cargill meatpacking factory is the biggest employer, this means that they are the greatest generators of revenue for the town. The workers earn a wage and they spend their wages paying for services such as rent and buying food. The factory also supplies many places in America and other countries with beef purchased from ranchers who provide the cattle. The tanning industry gets raw materials (hides) from the factory and the list goes on. The negative environmental impacts of the factory also affect the whole town be it air quality or pollution from waste. Due to the interconnectedness, everything and everyone matters when you want to assess the impact. A problem that may seem small most probably has been caused by the greater influences. Looking at the big picture ensures a comprehensive analysis.

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## **APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

### Semi-Structured Interview Questions with Kiswahili translations

1. What is your experience like living in Fort Morgan?

Nielezee juu ya maisha yako hapa Fort Morgan?

2. What are your experiences like with the education system?

Nielezee juu ya masomo hapa?

3. What have your experiences been like seeking medical treatment?

Nielezee juu ya kwenda kwa daktari au sipitali?

4. What is your experience like at your place of employment?

Nielezee juu ya kazi yako?

5. How was your living experience prior to coming to Fort Morgan?

Maisha yako kabla ya kuja Fort Morgan yalikuwaje?