

**Two Paths Forward: An Ethnographic Study of Somali Bantu Refugees Living In A
Northeastern City Public Housing Community**

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University of Pittsburgh, 2016

In 1991, civil war struck the Northeastern African nation of Somalia. In the nation's collapse, thousands of Somali Bantu were displaced from southern Somalia. An estimated 14,000 were eventually relocated to the United States, making them the largest refugee group ever resettled in the United States. When they arrived, the Somali Bantu, one of the most persecuted ethnic groups in Somalia, became a rural people thrust into a post-industrial global American society. They are one of the most culturally dissimilar groups to come to the U.S: they arrived with very little formal education, a language barrier; are Muslims in a predominantly Christian space; and are agrarians placed amid an urban social mosaic. There are about 50 Somali Bantu families living in this Northeastern city and socioeconomic factors have pushed one-third of these families into an isolated, impoverished and nearly all-Black American public housing project.

This ethnographic study is focused on 13 Somali Bantu male heads of household who live in this community. I ask two primary research questions: How do Somali Bantu men, who live in an impoverished, segregated public housing community, access and maintain employment? And, despite challenges of race and class, what resources do they deploy to assimilate toward the larger society? Over a three-year period, I used informal and structured interviews, more than 700 hours of participant and non-obtrusive observation, and census research to investigate how

Somali Bantu male heads of household are “survivors” who build beneficial social networks with middle-income white volunteers from faith-based and refugee support groups and that they also rely upon a set of friendly neighbors to settle into the public housing space.

Keywords: Race, class, immigration, refugees, resettlement, urban, ethnography

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all the Somali Bantu families who opened their lives to me and shared their stories over the years. And to my father, Earl Dyer, who passed away before I began graduate study in sociology. I know he has been watching over me. Thanks, Dad.

PREFACE

I would like to acknowledge all of my family members who helped me to weather this process. I would like to thank my mother, Jean Dyer, who fed my body and my spirit while this dissertation was being completed. I would like to thank by brothers and sisters, Earl, Yodorah, Venetia, Marcus, and Dana, who always offered words of encouragement.

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1.0 GETTING IN: BUILDING TRUST AND FAMILIARITY

1.1 RESEARCH SITE AND ENTRY INTO FIELD

It is early in March in 2011, and I am at one of the first meetings of the Somali Bantu Community Association in Southview Estates, a public housing community. There are seven of us in attendance inside the home of Mr. H.¹ The home is draped in colorful cloths that hang from the windows and walls. Mr. A, a small statured gentleman, is there as well. He is elected president of the group. At the end of the meeting, participants introduce themselves. “My name is Ervin,” I say, “and I am a student at the university and I’m doing a study in the community.” Mr. A. asks me – the only Black American at the meeting – “What are you going to do to help us?” I take his inquiry as an invitation, as an appeal not only to study the Somali Bantu but also to work in tandem with their efforts to make a successful transition into American society.

In this dissertation, I, too, hope to be helpful. I come to research through a sense of social justice, and an abiding curiosity in how multiple generations of the Somali Bantu adjust to life in America. My aim with this study is to contribute knowledge, both empirical and theoretical, to be socially relevant and contribute a better understanding of how African newcomers to America

¹ Mr. H and Mr. A are not their real names. Every name in this dissertation is a pseudonym to protect the confidentiality of those who participated with this project.

find opportunity to integrate into the larger society. My research is ethnographic. Ethnography refers to the process of trying to understand a given culture or behavior by going into the field and talking to people by being part of their everyday environment. It is a qualitative tool for understanding the production and reproduction of meaning-making practices (Neuman 2000). Compared to other methods of research, this qualitative method is considered more personal and up-close to the participants. It involves spending enough time with people in order to study how they act and speak, and to describe the natural contexts of their lifestyles. My goal as an ethnographer was to get an understanding of the processes of assimilation and integration and their connection to social capital on a small group of Somali Bantu men who live in an urban, impoverished, and racially segregated public housing community and to share how their lives are different from and/or similar to others in the community. To accomplish this goal, I used public records, historical research, and participant observation, and I drew upon the methods of other urban ethnographers who have observed men and people of color who lived in impoverished inner-city neighborhoods. An ethnographic approach was critical to understanding how and *why* the network formations have meaning and influence on the lives of the Somali Bantu males.

I begin this ethnographic process more than five years ago. Since 2009, I have informally and systematically followed this community. This study began in January of 2009; a writing colleague and university graduate student introduced me to a few Somali Bantu refugees whom she knew. I was invited to several Somali Bantu weddings, where I met other Somali Bantu families. I was introduced to a gentleman I'll call "Muya." He was one of the first Somali Bantu refugees to settle in my study area after the United States began efforts to resettle nearly 14,000 of them in cities across this country. After being here for about five years, Muya worked for the local county courts and his English was practically fluent. Though we only met in person

once, we stayed in touch over the phone. Muya often used me as a resource, calling to ask if I knew of available housing for other Somali Bantu families who were moving to town. I knew of one such place, a two-story home on the North Side, not far from where I live. I recommended the space, and Mr. H and his Somali Bantu family moved into the property in the winter of 2010. I befriended the family – listening to their stories of finding work, adjusting to school, maintaining friendships. After about nine months, the family could no longer afford to live in the home, where they paid \$500 a month for a four-bedroom, two-bathroom house. Mr. H worked a variety of low-wage jobs, and the expenses of rent, utility bills, and car payments made renting the home unaffordable. They moved to a public housing community not far away. When I visited the family in the public housing community, I soon discovered that 10 Bantu families lived in the same public housing community. I decided that this would be the locus of my study, following the Somali Bantu male heads of household and trying to understand how they navigate the assimilation process in a space that is racially, economically, geographically segregated.² How do they manage to develop multiple forms of capital (social, economic, symbolic, cultural, and human) and link to social networks that connect them to the broader community and to more opportunities when they live in a community where they are outsiders because of their culture, ethnicity, and background as Muslim and agrarian people. In other words, in a space bereft of beneficial social networks, how do they find jobs and opportunities to integrate into society?

Having received permission from the university's Institutional Review Board to conduct formal observations and interviews with the Somali Bantu community, I began my preliminary fieldwork in the summer of 2011. I began by visiting Mr. H. He would become one of my main

² I decided to study male heads of household because as a single male I had access to have private conversations with other males. In the Somali Bantu culture it would have been more difficult for a single male to have private conversation with married or non-married Bantu women.

informants, ushering me deeper into the Somali Bantu culture. I would go at least twice a month to his home. Initially, I felt like a stranger: a researcher who sat there, curious, but distant. In our early conversations, I decided to hide my notebook, only bringing it out toward the end of our sessions. I thought I could cultivate a stronger relationship if I minimized the interviewer/subject identities. So, instead, I'd sit there, watch action movies with Mr. H, help his young daughters with homework, or talk to his older son about doing well in school. After leaving the home, I'd jot down my notes on who came to Mr. H's house. On my visits, I'd chat with Mr. H about work, friends, and community. Mr. H speaks some English but was always more comfortable using his indigenous language Maay-Maay. In our early conversations, his eldest daughter served as an interpreter. Over the three-plus years that I knew Mr. H, his English improved to the degree that we could talk without the need of having an interpreter at every gathering. In those first few months of getting to know Mr. H and his life in the public housing community, Mr. H³ invited me to a meeting of the emerging Somali Bantu Community Association. These early meetings often took place at the home of Mr. H. At one meeting, I was introduced to Mr. A, who was elected president of the group. Mr. A invited me to join the board and I did, sharing with the group that I would use it as an opportunity to engage in participant observation. Mr. A was very receptive to me joining, believing that my association with the local university would benefit the group. He was friendly and became a valued second informant. When I joined the community board, I was the only African American on the board, which was composed of other Somali Bantu men and women, and several middle-age American white women, who were advisors. For three years, I sat in on monthly board meetings, participating in nonprofit training and aiding

³ I refer to my two main informants as Mr. H and Mr. A. With their permission, I referred to them by the first letter in their last names to help my English tongue avoid any tricky pronunciation. I use the Mr. as a sign of respect and appreciation for their engagement with my ethnography.

with plans for community celebrations, discussions on violence, and planning for holy day commemorations. It provided me the opportunity to collect data on the Somali Bantu network formations – witnessing the operation of both kinship links and associations that are formed across socioeconomics, ethnicity, religion, and race. I have conducted formal and informal interviews to gather data on their views on racial dynamics in the United States, particularly within and outside their community (there are few formal linkages with Black American people outside of the public housing community and a developing involvement and association with the members of the predominantly Black community in which they live). I took notes on the kinds of jobs the men held, how they felt about their work; I took note of their education levels, and listened as they talked about their hopes for their children in this new land.

By the summer of 2014, there were 20 Bantu families living in the public housing community, and I was able to conduct formal interviews with 13 male heads of household within these families. I remained active with participant observation through the Bantu community group and continued to take notes on how and why they seek associations with certain groups and whether or not these associations and contact with various social networks facilitated movement toward integrating into the larger American society.

Further, I wanted to understand how the Somali Bantu refugees navigated their “contexts of reception” (Portes & Rumbaut, 1996). They have settled in Southview Estates, which sits in the far, most northern corner of the city. It is a racialized public housing community that is economically and physically segregated from surrounding communities. On one side, it is divided from the city’s central north side neighborhoods by an expressway. On the other side, a hilly, forest-like terrain separates it from its two nearest low-middle income communities. It is a community beset with social dislocations that connect with poverty and low educational

attainment and joblessness.⁴ In the creation of underclass communities, poverty is not a neutral factor. It often runs parallel with family instability, welfare dependency, crime, and low educational achievement. “To the extent these factors are associated with poverty, any structural process that concentrates poverty will concentrate them as well.” Segregation plus poverty equals to harsh social disadvantages (Massey and Denton 1993).

I wanted to investigate how, by residing in this space, the Somali Bantu male heads of household were able to gain and access various social networks to negotiate the dynamic processes of integration, which involve building relationships, finding jobs, and fostering a sense of belonging to a community.

1.2 COMMUNITY AND SAMPLE

1.2.1 Community description

The Somali Bantu men I followed live in a place I am calling Southview Estates. There are only two ways to enter Southview, and each entrance is controlled by security. The guards sit in a booth and require that visitors and residents show a driver’s license and cite the address to where they are going before they are allowed to enter through a gate into the complex.

Southview is one of the most impoverished spaces in this Northeastern city. The 2010 U.S. Census reports there were 1,214 people living in Southview. Of that number, only 834 Southview residents over age 16 worked, and 58.1 percent of them were considered the working

⁴ 2010 Census reports that almost 40 percent of Southview residents are considered to be among the working poor; 45 percent are unemployed; and one-quarter had less than high school completion.

poor. The bulk of the workers was employed in manufacturing, retail, finance and insurance, waste management, accommodation and food services. It is the same kinds of low-level service employment that the Somali Bantu males are engaged with. The median income in Southview Estates five years ago was \$14,097, about \$500 below U.S. poverty standards in 2010 for a family of two. This disparity is heightened when you factor in that Southview residents earn \$37,296 less than the median household income of \$51,366 for other residents of the county in which the Estates is located. These figures do not take into account that many of the homes in Southview are densely populated and there is more family to care for.

The 2010 Census also provided a statistical snapshot of Southview Estates. There were 723 housing units in the Estates, and only 460 are occupied, and of that number, 96.3 percent were renters. At that time, 90.5 percent of the people who lived in the development identified themselves as Black or African American. It is a community of young people, as 54.9 percent of the people who lived here were age 19 or younger. Only 7 percent of Southview residents were married-couple families, and 54.5 percent of the families was headed by single-parent families. In terms of educational attainment, for those over age 25, 24.9 percent had less than a high school education; 64.5 percent graduated from high school (includes equivalency); 10.6 percent had some college; no resident had a bachelor's degree or higher.

Brenda Freeland is African American resident who has lived in Southview Estates since the 1970s. She remembers it as a place where working-class two-parent families – both Black and White – moved to escape slum conditions elsewhere. By the mid-1970s, said Freeland, the social composition of Southview changed as more poor and unemployed families moved into the housing development. This change was spurred by two factors: federal regulations that restricted residency income and which prohibited single mothers from co-habitation with the fathers of

their children; and the beginning of the decline in manufacturing, particularly the steel industry, which meant more unemployed families had to rely on public housing to survive. Over time, public housing became severely segregated spaces of concentrated poverty (Rainwater 1970; Greenwald and Anderson 1996; Trotter and Day, 2010). Soon, Southview became a community stigmatized for its crime and violence. By the late 1990s, fearing the space was an active market for crack cocaine, the city's Housing Authority shut down three entrances and installed two security stations to monitor the flow of people into Southview (Heltzel 1998; Toler, 1998).



Figure 1: Scene from Southview Estates, Summer 2013



Figure 2: Scene from Southview Estates, Summer 2013

The community provides a gym (which doubles as a meeting space), and has another building for arts programs. While some families have resided in Southview for generations, it can be difficult for newcomers. About a year after I began my preliminary field work, one Black American mother and her 10 children moved into the community. The family, including the mother, had to physically fight their neighbors to stand up to the daily harassment. “It’s hard living up here,” she told the daily newspaper in July 2012. It can be a violent community. In the summer of 2014, shortly before the close of my formal observation, there were three homicides in one seven-day period in late July and early August. All of the deceased were young African American men. One man was nearly decapitated, his body thrown into the woods, just behind the home of one of the Somali Bantu families I interviewed. Another killing occurred two doors

down from my informant Mr. H. His friend, another Somali Bantu, had to have his car door replaced because it was damaged by bullets.

1.2.2 Sample description

There are 20 Somali Bantu families in Southview. They are newcomers to the community, and my study explored the lives of 13 male Somali Bantu heads of households in this community. In adjusting to American life, Somali Bantu husbands, who often by tradition and custom have the most visible leadership roles in a family, are the first to find jobs and make decisions on where a family lives. As their decisions impact the whole family and by extension the whole community, it is important to get a sense of how the men navigated their new space and built associations and friendships. In the community, I informally spoke with Somali Bantu women, too. They were part of the households. But they are not included as part my formal research. I am a single man and being able to socialize with Somali Bantu wives and adult daughters in private conversations would have been problematic because of discreet social customs. So, after two years of preliminary observation and six months of formal interaction with the male heads of household, here is a synopsis of who they are.

They range in age from 28 to 55 years old. Most have been in the United States at least five years; others have been in America since 2004, being a part of the first wave of Somali Bantu people to arrive in this Northeastern city from refugee camps in Kenya. They are all married; all but two of the men are currently employed (of the two, each participant's physical health prevents him from working). Those who work have jobs in service positions such as cooks or butchers, or dishwashers. Most of them are concentrated at two different work sites. For

instance, seven work in food services at a large supermarket chain in a city suburb; nine work as dishwashers in the same supermarket chain in various locations in the city; one is a fresh produce worker at big box store in the suburbs; another is a dishwasher and cook for a Downtown hotel. They found jobs through assistance from white social workers, African immigrant leaders at a nonprofit, or through word of mouth from Somali Bantu friends. A network of white volunteers and immigrant aid staff would help them fill out the applications. A Somali Bantu friend or family would often provide transportation to the job interview (and if needed, serve as interpreter) and, in some cases, it was not uncommon for the men to share rides to work. To make ends meet, the families draw from two different resources. For the first eight months of resettlement, they get federal refugee aid that includes transportation to America, housing and basic furniture, help registering for Social Security, school, and medical assistance. Once here, they get county and municipal assistance that includes day care, citizenship assistance, and health services. Often, the men and their families rely on government assistance. Their rent payments are subsidized to make them more affordable; they receive food stamps, medical assistance for their children, and help with the process of citizenship.

English language proficiency varies. Some of the men speak fluent English, having studied in ESL classes, and proudly show off their diplomas in the home. Some are so proficient they have even managed to take job-training classes in community college. This is a notable achievement since many lived agrarian lifestyles in Somalia's Jubba valley and did not have the opportunity for formal education in their home nation. For others, they speak English but prefer to use their native tongue, which is Maay Maay. For all of the fathers/husbands I have interacted with, if there are young children in the home (children who are not teenagers), they speak their indigenous tongue with the children in effort to keep their language alive among the children.

Socialization within the Somali Bantu community occurs in a number of different ways. They try to meet once a month or more through the recently established Somali Bantu Community Association. As a predominantly Sunni Muslim group, the association opens the meetings with prayer to Allah and will serve breakfast or a light lunch. They debate dues, the agenda, the frequency in which they should offer public activities. The families do not see each other every day, but contact is frequent. They encounter each other on the bus. They give each other rides to the grocery store and to work. The men cut each other's hair for no charge. They reproduce their mutual support arrangements of their home community within American society.

At a reception before a Somali Bantu summer wedding in 2013, I go to the basement of one of the homes. The men are gathered there, sitting on carpet with their shoes and sandals kicked off. They are there for six hours before the wedding, sitting and talking and debating American culture and news of Somalia. Others, as they arrive, contribute food and soft drinks. As Muslims, most of the men don't drink alcohol or smoke. They gather and socialize over tea and soft drinks.

It is typical for the Somali Bantu homes to be decorated with the material traditions from the homeland: each window and wall is wrapped and draped in colorful cloth, which hangs almost from floor to ceiling. Bright, shiny pieces of foil hang from the light fixtures. It is a reproduction of how a Somali Bantu home would be draped to keep out the wind, sun, and dust in their native Somalia. Several posters of young Muslim people observing Hajj, the Muslim holy pilgrimage, or quotes from the Quran, the Islamic holy book, hang on the walls.

During my two years of preliminary fieldwork, I was introduced and became acquainted with two key figures in the Somali Bantu community, and they introduced me to others. As I moved along, I expanded my reach to other members in the community and to those who

participate in the community association. My goal was to speak to all of the male heads of households in the Somali Bantu community who live in this particular public housing space.

Because the population I followed was relatively small – easily defined by culture, ethnicity, and confined to a specific geographic area – 20 Somali Bantu male heads of household live in this isolated public housing community – I attempted to obtain a universal sample, hoping to include all of the Somali Bantu men who reside in this community. In the summer of 2014, I carried out formal interviews with 13 of the men, reaching 65 percent of the intended population. All the interviews began in the homes. Quite frequently, I met them in their home and then rode with them to work, asking questions as we drove along. Informally, I visited their workspaces, chatted at celebrations, at community meetings. All but two of the men felt comfortable enough using English. For the two who did not, their adult children were present and translated.

All total, the population of first-generation Somali Bantu male heads of household numbers about 50 in this urban Northeastern city. My sample of 13 represents about one-fourth of this entire community. A 2006 study by Guest et al. in “Field Methods” proposed that 12 interviews in a homogenous population is often enough to reach saturation. A sample size of 12 is not too large that it is difficult to extract thick, rich data, while at the same time it allows for data saturation without informational redundancy (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2007). I feel comfortable that my interview sample means that the perspectives I have gathered are generalizable to the remaining seven Somali Bantu male heads of household who live in the public housing community and to the larger population of Somali Bantu males in this city.

1.3 DATA COLLECTION: PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

Informally, I collected data for this dissertation between the winters of 2009 and 2014. With Institutional Review Board approval, I began my formal study and interviews in January 2014. In the summer of 2014, I spent at least four to seven hours a week with the Somali Bantu families. This included my interviews and time with the community association meetings, going to weddings, traveling overnight with the men to visit out-of-town family members. I wanted to collect data to help me understand how the Somali Bantu create and connect to beneficial social networks while living in a space of poverty and segregation and how and if the networks have a role in the processes of assimilation and integration. I wanted to observe and understand how the families help and interact with other families. How do they help each other get to work? How do they help each other study English or offer encouragement to study English or become U.S. citizens? I wanted to understand who they were friends with. How and if they were maintaining friendships across race and class? What are their interactions with local African American leaders in the public housing space? How are their kids being socialized and do they think of these networks as being beneficial? What hours do they work?

Much of this data was collected through observing their relations with other people, behaviors, and activities. Just by being in the same community with the Somali Bantu, I have witnessed their reliance on extended kinship relations. I have sat in meetings where they have cried over the harassment they are experiencing from others in the community. I have witnessed their joy over their children being accepted to college; seen preparations for marriage, etc. As an observer for more than two years, I heard them talk about their experiences on their jobs. I spent time with the families on the weekends, and during their days of special activities.

Participant observation was one of my main sources of data collection. My goal was to see and listen to the men at community gatherings, and in their homes. In order to develop a clear understanding of what happens in a specific setting, it is essential that the researcher participate in the setting (Gillham 2008). Here, the researcher becomes a participant of the given setting; while still maintaining an observer's stance. This does not mean that ethnographers cannot take on the role of advocates for the people in the setting in which they participate. In most cases, ethnographers spend a lot of time – months or years – with the people they are studying, sometimes forming lasting bonds with the subjects.

My participant observation came chiefly via serving on the board of the recently formed Somali Bantu Community Association. The Association meets at least once a month for about two hours. The information gathered through this group has been effective in collecting information on the language differences in the group, monitoring debates on launching community initiatives, noticing family connections, and witnessing the practice of Somali Bantu cultural behaviors.

My longtime participation observation showed the Somali Bantu that I am a committed friend to the group and not just a researcher. It has allowed me to come into the community and mingle and form useful relationships. With such relationships and contacts, I was able to gather information informally and spontaneously interview many members of the Somali Bantu community. Also, I believe the participant observation has made the Somali Bantu men more comfortable in my presence, allowing them to relax and not be afraid to show their unguarded selves. Often, at the community meetings, I am able, with permission of the group, to record the sessions. Using a recording device, I was able to play back audiotape to my two informants and recapture information lost to me because of language differences.

Most of my observations took place for two to three hours in the community on weekends. I was able to travel into the community on the weekdays, but was limited to visits that take place mostly in the evening.

I participated in larger cultural and religious celebrations, both in their homes (when invited) and in public spaces. These included Ramadan, weddings, and cultural festivals. I also observed the tutoring sessions between the children and a university student-led tutoring group – and observed the interaction between the university students and male heads of household. I went to the Southview Estates community meetings. I talked to local leaders at Southview Estates about Somali Bantu male participation in the community. In all situations with the men, I took fieldnotes, capturing individual behavior and interactions with others. After each observation, usually before driving away or while sitting on the bus on my way home, I jotted down my thoughts and preliminary interpretations of what I had witnessed. Each evening, I typed up my fieldnotes and first thoughts, incorporating initial analyses of my observations.

1.4 DATA COLLECTION: FOCUSED INTERVIEWS

Interviews provide data for the researcher through focused questions that are aimed at gathering targeted data. Interviews can take one of several styles and can depend mainly on the ethnographer, who can decide which type of interview best allows for elaboration and clarification (Babbie 2010). The main point is to allow the subject participating in the interview to answer the questions that are being asked without being limited by choices that are pre-defined by the interviewer. Always in my interviews I felt it was important to make the men feel

as comfortable as possible. I never dressed too formally, shunning dress shoes and ties. I did not want the presentation of myself to be one that distanced me, but rather one that brought me into community with the men. I usually wore golf shirts and comfortable pants, and sandals or tennis shoes, which is the type of shoes many of the men wore at home. For some interviews, if my interviewee sat on the floor, I sat on the floor. If my interviewee sat on the couch, I sat on the couch. If they offered me a drink of soda or tea, I did not decline it. If they offered me a meal – bananas, a cornmeal cereal, watermelon – I did not decline it.

I was also sensitive to the fact that my interviewees were newcomers in the United States. As such, they are forced to spend much of their time realizing there is much they need to do to catch up and fit in with the “new” place. They are constantly reminded that their language skills, their cultural knowledge honed in Somalia’s Jubba Valley are not relevant in their new lives. Rarely are they asked about their previous lives. In my conversations, past life was always a starting point. “Tell me about what you remember about Somalia?” “What was it like when you had to flee to Kenya?” These questions, I felt, became a place where the Somali Bantu felt welcomed into the conversation, became a partner in the research. Before I asked about the new life, I wanted to go to a place that was familiar to the interviewee. I wanted them to come into the process and partnership with their strongest voice. I wanted to give them a sense of strength about being able to share. I thought that sharing their first memories would empower them as equal participants. This approach gave me some deeply felt moments. They shared memories of loved ones being killed, encounters with hunger, lions, and the desperate months-long march to the refugee camps.

As I moved forward with the interviews, I used a common interview guide for each semi-structured interview, guiding the Somali Bantu male interviewees through themes of race,

friendship, economics, job opportunities. However, I also let my observations at the sites guide my questioning. Each of the 13 interviews lasted between 25 minutes to nearly two hours. I conducted these interviews where it was most comfortable and convenient for the participant, usually at their home, but occasionally we chatted on the way to a workplace, or celebration. I recorded each interview and also took notes by hand. Following each interview, I wrote “memos” of my field notes and each evening turned these field notes into profiles/short stories on each participant (Seidman, 2006, pp. 133-144), using these as a way to record interview highlights. These memos included my observations of the participant, the surroundings and, most important, my recollection of conversations before and after the formal interview.

The home visits were enlightening. I was able to notice the fathers’ daily routine, to see what they were watching on TV, to observe interactions with the children and wives. It also allowed for intimate participation. I ate dinner, I helped children with homework, chatted with their sons about education, I met their friends, I met brothers and other relatives. In these settings I saw and heard their lives. Interruptions from family and children were challenging, but going into their home allowed for a brief intimacy that would have remained hidden if interviews were in more public spaces.

My interviews were focused on their everyday life, including employment. I wanted to know what social networks the Somali Bantu men connected with to find their jobs? Who told them about the job opening? I wanted to know about wages. This can be a tricky subject, but all 13 of the men willingly – and without hesitation – shared their salary and earnings. To facilitate the interview, I kept my tone conversational, sharing with the interviewee my own history as a service worker and having to manage on minimum wage. I believe that work gave us a common history, allowing them to more freely share their history. This line of questioning will seek to

explain how they believe employment, even if it is low level, positions them for integration into broader social networks. My questioning sought to unveil their networks and friendships at work, networks and friendships in community, networks and friendships with their children's teachers, counselors, etc. For example, who are your friends at work? Why is it important for you to work? Why is it important for your family? How did your child get connected to this particular school? Is it important for your son to attend college – why? I also asked about their efforts at citizenship and civic participation: Do you want to be a U.S. citizen and why? If you are a citizen, do you vote? Why is it important to you to be a citizen?

The answers to these questions were sought in one-on-one semi-structured, open-ended interviews. These kind of interviews were important because, in speaking with me, participants revealed their own subjective view of what it means to find a job, to feel that they are part of a new society and it allowed the interviewee the freedom to offer the sense-making of a particular topic, rather than have it be interpreted by the interviewer (Blee & Taylor 2002).

1.5 DATA ANALYSIS

There were three components to my analysis of my interview and participant observation data. After collecting and transcribing notes, I edited my notes in order to detect errors and omissions and make corrections where possible. This process ensured that the data I've collected was as accurate, consistent, and complete as possible. This editing was done on two levels. First came field editing, done soon after the data was collected, as I transcribed and reviewed. Second was central editing, where I wrote my field "memos" to generate the summary of data that was used

in reflection. I did this as I moved through the interview process, to contemplate large amounts of data to break down to understandable sections.

This brings me to coding as a tool of analysis. My coding involved classifying or categorizing responses and data to try and determine patterns and theoretical understandings. This approach helped me to reduce scores of replies to a few categories containing the critical information needed for analysis. (Babbie, 2010). The coding of data for my dissertation was driven by highlighting categories that suggested network formations, friendships, and weak ties vs. strong ties. This was done to try to establish patterns that linked to processes of integration. This “open coding” process allowed me to uncover and open up my data by identifying ideas on social capital, assimilation.

Constructing my “memos,” I was also able to build biographies of the Somali Bantu males in this public housing community. This allowed me to build participants’ full histories to record data and build chronology. Once compiled, I used “grounded theory” to begin the analysis of these biographies or case studies. In other words, my theories are “grounded” or rooted in my years-long personal observations. According to Corbin and Strauss (2008), grounded theory is a method where the observer looks systematically at qualitative data (like transcripts of interviews or protocols of observations) seeking to develop a theory or explanation for a pattern of behavior. Grounded theory has been used since the 1960s, and its method is centered on the development of codes and categories to help organize thoughts and identify patterns. With grounded theory, data sampling, data analysis, and theory development are seen as interwoven practices to be used and repeated until one can describe and explain the research.

In 2004, Strauss named three basic elements every grounded theory approach should include. They are: 1) *theoretical sensitive coding*, generating strong theoretical concepts from the

data to explain the phenomenon being researched; 2) *theoretical sampling*, that is, deciding whom to interview or what to observe next according to the state of theory generation, and that implies starting data analysis with the first interview, and writing down memos and hypotheses early; 3) *comparisons* between phenomena and contexts to make the theory strong.

It was important to code for the concepts that govern my fieldwork because the theories represent an understanding of what may be happening in the life of the Somali Bantu men. Babbie (2010) describes an “interplay” that happens between data collection and theory. The theories of social capital and assimilation offer information and describe a particular set of relationships and factors that may confirm what is unfolding in the lives of Somali Bantu men in this particular public housing community. The collection, description, and analysis of data allowed me to look for patterns, interpretations, and meanings that confirm or define differences and clarifications in such concepts.

Like Stack (1974), I considered my informants as co-participants in my study. I relied on them to help interpret data, language, and critique events that unfolded in the lives of the first-generation Somali Bantu men. I conducted “check-ins” with my two informants over the course of the research, sharing with them my preliminary analyses. When possible, I also shared the biographies I created. They offered feedback and sometimes correction in case of factual error. The check-ins became a part of the continuous triangulation of data that I engaged in throughout the study. Triangulation also came as I relied upon preliminary fieldwork, literature research, which entailed reviewing past scholarship. This included using web-based materials or library resources. I used primary and secondary sources: newspapers, periodicals, scholarly journals, government documents and reports on the Somali Bantu and statistical reviews. This kind of triangulation ensures validity, creating information that is representative and not biased.

1.6 REFLEXIVITY

Researchers bring “characteristics, a history, a gender, class, race, and social attributes” to the research setting (Olesen 2003). It was no different for me. I tried to be fully conscious of who I am and what shaped my research interests. First of all, as an African American male, I have always been curious in wanting to understand how African peoples with a history of enslavement and marginalization found ways to adjust to life in Western cultures, particularly in America. I have believed that gathering any information would provide me with insight into how my own African ancestors developed social capital and negotiated race and other barriers to begin the process of integration away from their home nations. Secondly, before I became a sociology student, I was a daily newspaper journalist with an abiding interest in Africa and African immigrant life. I have traveled to the African continent to study religion in Ghana and Zambia, and health issues in South Africa and Tanzania. This research is rooted in that interest. Since the 1990s, I have been developing relationships with African immigrants. From these relationships, I was able to introduce myself to various African peoples who resettled into life in Allegheny County. Through my journalism work and early study, I learned the community of African immigrants was growing. In an attempt to get to know the diverse African immigrant communities in the city where I live and work, I participated in their lives as much as possible. I mingled with the communities by visiting church meetings, funeral rites, and citizenship celebrations. I danced at worship services, had casual conversation at prayer fellowships, and listened in to conversations at outreach events. I sat on floors and shared communal meals, eating

foo-foo, a West African dumpling, with my hands. I was working as a journalist when my paper first began to record the stories of the Somali Bantu people and their entry into the United States and the local Northeastern community where the study took place.

Several years later, I would be introduced to the community through a writing colleague, who had met and befriended Somali Bantu families because she was interested in recording their life here in the United States. It is through her connections that I was able to cultivate relationships and develop two key informants from the Somali Bantu community where my study is located.

Furthermore, my interest in urban areas is rooted in my own experiences of growing up in an all-Black public housing community. Some of my first memories are of living in Gilpin Court, a housing “project” in Richmond, Va. I recall my parents’ relationships there with neighbors and the extended kinship-like networks that sustained our community. In her work, Stack (1974) has documented the survival strategies adapted by low-income residents in a public housing community to deal with government and social policies that impact social mobility. In Stack’s work, I am reminded of the strategies my parents used for social mobility. As Stack has shown, extended kinship networks offer crucial resources that can enable economically challenged public housing families to survive. My parents relied on kinship: the extended relationships provided oversight for children, food and financial aid etc. But my parents also developed associations with people and institutions outside of our community to reach for mobility. My mother went to job-training programs, my father found jobs because of friends of friends who worked outside the neighborhood, and my parents sent my brothers and me to do the lawn work for Black college professors. By having access to their home and their values, we were offered a model of life that was beyond our working-class roots.

So, my life's history and, for the past two years, my preliminary fieldwork have given me a sensitivity to the African immigrant population I am studying and a respect and understanding of what it means to live in low-income housing. Ethnographic research changes the trajectory of the research just as it can change the researcher (myself). Crang and Cook (2007) argue that taking on the role of the researcher means that sometimes we enter the field as strangers. But I think my past experiences have lessened my sense of being a stranger because I am familiar with the values and behaviors that might be present in the group. My current identity may be Ervin Dyer, university researcher, but my current identity is influenced by my past.

Moreover, as a descendant of African people, I share a racial category, a continental linkage, a history of enslavement, and a past of having grown up in a public housing community with the population I am studying. Though I may be a familiar figure, I was not an "insider" in the Somali Bantu community. There remained a distance because of differences in language, ethnicity, and kinship. I may not have been completely an "other," but I was not completely an insider, either. I was not present nor invited to participate at several closed events. These events usually involved a family dispute that was being brought before a counsel of elders. I was not able to obtain interviews with men who were rather "reclusive," disappearing into family and work life. I never saw them at community events, visiting in the homes of others, or attending association meetings. One father, whom I met just after an association meeting, was coming from his home and getting into his car to run errands. He gave me his phone number and asked me to call. I did, but he never returned the call to confirm an appointment time. And, in January of 2014, two Somali Bantu were involved in an incident of gun violence in the community. The entire Somali Bantu community felt shame in this incident. Two of my planned interviews were cancelled and others shut me out. My Somali Bantu informants told me the families feared my

questions would bring exposure and shame on their families.

As a participant observer in the Somali Bantu community, my role is often changing. As an observer, I am looking at the ways in which Somali Bantu traditional culture has been transported to their host environment. As a participant, my role has often been to help bridge the gap between traditional cultural practices and the reality of navigating American systems, like education, health care, and work places. As a person they grew to trust, they viewed me as a link between the two cultures. In my years on this ethnographic project, I was able to engage, to some degree, in my subjects' social relations. It was common for me to see firsthand their social networks, or lack there of, and look at how they found assistance for jobs and other issues. In some ways, I became a part of their social relations. It was not unusual for one interview subject to call to ask for small loans to get his car fixed. I loaned him \$500 and he paid me back in installments over four months. Another asked me for information on how to begin the visa process to have another family come to live in America, or to call me for advice on transferring a child away from a poorly performing public school. They often asked me to read over their insurance papers, to find and set up meetings with an attorney concerning nonprofit filing.

Furthermore, my connection with the university persuaded some of the men to speak with me. After all, because their children work with university tutors, some of the men have personal relations with other university people – nonprofit consultants, community advocates – they understand the benefit of having associations at the university. So, university researcher was an influential status that I carried. I also believed that because of my personal story – I have worked in restaurants and in other service positions – I was able to relate to the men on the economic level they are experiencing now, and this became a bridge of sharing and understanding.

1.7 LIMITATIONS

This research has overcome various challenges and limitations. As mentioned before, the primary method of data collection for my ethnography was participant observation. There were socioeconomic and education barriers. My background as a university researcher is different from that of the participants. I am an African American male seeking a PhD and most of my interview subjects are men whose marginalization has kept many from being formally educated. With her work, Stack (1974) has mentioned that researchers must be conscious of the power they bring to the field because of race, education or other social privileges. I was aware. But I also feel that because my early years were spent in a public housing community and because of my parents' encounter with poverty, kinship assistance, and aid across racial and cultural divisions to enable their social mobility, I brought a personal connection and sensitivity to this study. I feel that this sensitivity enabled me to see the Somali Bantus' economic, social, cultural and personal backgrounds as being similar to my own and not different. I believe that this perspective facilitates building contacts and beneficial relationships. I see the men in my study not so much as strangers, but as the kind of male friends my father would have known and interacted with.

I was challenged by the inability to communicate fully with participants because of language barriers. I have learned some basics of the language that the Somali Bantu men use. I am able to welcome them and say hello. To the benefit of my study, most of the men take classes in English as A Second Language and are able to speak to me in English. Some are better at this than others. My strategy to cope with language differences was to rely on trusted interpreters. Usually, this involved an adult son or daughter in the man's household. When I am in community, our association meetings could be conducted in English, but the participants would frequently go back and forth between Kiziguwa or Maay-Maay, their native languages, and

Swahili. At the meetings, or when I went to weddings or other community events, I relied upon my trusted informants to share cultural intimacies and to relay what was being said. After more than two years in the community, these interpretations were highly valuable, and I did not have to rely on my observation notes alone.

Because I pursued this dissertation while maintaining full-time work, I was unable to “live” in the community with the Somali Bantu. However, the site of my study was a seven-minute drive from my home and a 15-minute bus ride away. It was nearby and I was able to visit for celebrations, meetings, and impromptu observations. So, there were frequent opportunities to travel into the so-called “natural setting” of where the Somali Bantu live. Once in the community, as a former journalist, I relied on my years of practiced interviewing, observational, and listening skills to collect data.

Admittedly, this ethnography is focused on Somali Bantu men as heads of households and the network formations that lead to their social and economic integration. I was not able to fully explore the role of Somali Bantu women in facilitating or participating in the process of accessing broader social networks. I know that Somali Bantu women were involved in fostering connections with health care providers, but I was unable to formally observe any of how this occurred. Furthermore, there are Somali Bantu people in the city who are not living in segregated, public housing communities. Given the locus of my ethnography, I was not able to record or fully document their experiences in this study.

1.8 RESEARCH ETHICS

For the preliminary fieldwork of this research, I received “exempt” status from the university’s Institutional Review Board. To ensure that high ethical standards are maintained during data collection, I collected all data for this project and informed each voluntary participant of her/his rights to refuse answering any questions and of their right to stop the interview at any time. All interviews were conducted in English, using a translator as needed or requested. My participant observations involving immigrant Somali Bantu were conducted in meetings, forums, dinners, in the homes of individuals. My interviews were all conducted in the homes and private spaces per the request of the interviewee. Once participants were recruited, they were contacted by phone or email (their preference) to choose the day and time of interview. Each participant was formally interviewed only once. No names or identifying information was recorded to protect the privacy of respondents. All data is kept in my possession and is accessible only to me.

In this chapter, I explain how I came to know the Somali Bantu and became immersed in their world and lay out the methodology of my ethnography. In Chapter 2, I examine the intertwining theories that shape the life of the Somali Bantu refugees in this public housing space. In Chapter 3, I explain the history of how the Bantu arrived in Somalia and how the weight of this history and its circumstances lead to their being discriminated against and being racialized in American society. It includes the exodus of the Somali Bantus from the Jubba Valley, their arrival in the Kenya refugee camps and the process of how they came to America. Chapter 4 takes a look at the Somali Bantu resettlement into the Northeastern city and their move into an isolated and impoverished public housing community. Once settled into the space, Chapter 5 examines the two contrasting social networks the Somali Bantu use to negotiate home and community life. In Chapter 6, I tell the stories of how and where the men find jobs and what

the jobs mean for them. In Chapter 7, I look closely at the lives of their sons and the two cultures they navigate. Chapter 8, the Conclusion, discusses and provides a summary of the major findings of my research, including the influences of the two paths that open the doors to the processes of acculturation, assimilation, and integration in the Somali Bantu receiving society and local community. The conclusion also offers recommendations to be considered to facilitate these processes for Somali Bantu and perhaps other immigrant groups.

2.0 PRECARIOUS TIES: MAKING SENSE OF RACE, INTEGRATION, AND SOCIAL NETWORKS AMONG SOMALI BANTU IN SOUTHVIEW ESTATES

2.1 INTRODUCTION

How do we make sense of the Somali Bantu in this Northeastern city? In particular, how do we understand a group that is Black but not African American? How do we situate immigrants and refugees with a precarious history of oppression in their home country of Somalia? How do the Somali Bantu make sense of the racial order in the United States as poor, immigrant refugees who are also Black? Given that they've been in this Northeastern city for more than 10 years, how is the younger generation faring? The literature for this project interrogates these issues as a way of making sense of the Somali Bantu experience in the United States. This study argues that a key component for understanding the experience of Somali Bantu rests heavily in the social support networks among themselves and those they build outside of their community.

It is noontime in the summer and a little piece of Somalia, Africa, is on display in Southview Estates, a dense, low-income housing project in the far north corner of this Northeastern city. Left behind by urban renewal and shifting jobs markets, Southview Estates

(nearly all Black), is a space where census figures show most residents are jobless and welfare-dependent. But for more than 1,000 people it is also home – a place where they raise their children, take care of their parents, and watch over their neighbors. On a Sunday afternoon, under a sun as bright and warm as what you might expect in Africa, a group of Somali Bantu is walking through the streets, heading to the community’s gym. The group is commemorating the school achievements of their children and the Somali Bantu parents who support them.

The women gather in brightly patterned clothing, their heads covered with scarves. Some have their babies strapped to their backs. The men, many in dark pants and sandals, gather at the front of the gym, testing the sound equipment and organizing the awards. A council of elders – gray-haired men and senior women appointed as community leaders – sits on the bleachers near the front of the room. In Southview Estates, the Somali Bantu are celebrating. They have lived less than a decade in this city and want to mark how far they’ve advanced.

Roughly 50 families, some 200 Somali Bantus, now call this city home. Their roots here go back only about eight years, when three families came here from among the 14,000 who were a part of the largest single effort to resettle a mistreated ethnic minority in the United States. They've spread throughout the area, but mostly in patches in Lawrence and the North Side. Recently, 10 Somali Bantu families, because of economic struggles and changes in policy at the local Housing Authority, have relocated to Southview Estates.

In Somalia, the majority of the Bantu people lived in the fertile Jubba Valley, mostly as subsistence farmers and herders. Yet, somehow, Southview Estates, a place of concentrated racialized poverty in one of the wealthiest nations in the world, is a place both familiar and foreign to them. They recognize the racial segregation. In the Horn of Africa, Bantu people, actually a mesh of ethnic groups, were racialized from the time of slavery, marked by their dark

skin, wide noses and "hard hair."⁵ These distinctions, imposed upon them by the ruling Arab leadership in Somali society, turned the Bantu into a separated and persecuted minority. Even behind the walls and the squalor of the refugee camps of Kenya, where the Bantus fled to escape Somalia's 1991 civil war and drought, they were discriminated against – given limited living space and fewer resources.

In this respect, Bantus have much in common with the residents of Southview Estates, a community walled in by security gates that went up several years ago to reduce drugs, crime and violence in the community. In a land of plenty, Southview Estates residents have little.

But today is a day to leave the worry behind. This is a chance for the Somali Bantu refugees to rejoice both in who they are and in who they can become. It is a time filled with traditional songs that resonate in the sweet cadences of their homeland. There is drumming in the background and there is rousing dance. Rice and sambusa, a stuffed meat pastry, the food from the homeland, are on hand to feed the celebrants.

The children are being recognized for their academic performance, but also their orderliness and good behavior in school. But, before they hand out awards to Somali Bantu children and parents, the Somali Bantu take the time also to recognize the friends and associates who have helped the largely agrarian Somali Bantu families ease into the rush of urban life.

The local university is represented and recognized at the celebration. Scores of its undergraduates for years have formed close friendships with Somali Bantu kids, tutoring them and orienting them to public school education. The college kids even formed a university club to provide outreach to the Bantu families. The Bantu leaders call the group's president forward.

⁵ The Bantu are native to Tanzania, Mozambique, and Malawi. When the Arab slave trade brought them to Somalia in the 19th century, their hair texture and darker skin marked them as ethnically different and aided with the racialization of the Bantu (Besteman 2007).

Brett, a dark-haired 20-year-old sociology major from the suburbs of Pennsylvania, gets up to accept the award. He's wearing his khaki shorts. He's calling the Somali Bantu "awesome," and fist bumping many of the kids as he takes his seat.

Next, the Somali Bantu call forth Vanita, an African American who is 40-something. She lives in Southview and is the president of the local residents association. The Bantu thank her for supporting their move into the community and making them feel included. She is like our "Auntie," says the Somali Bantu host. Vanita, wearing oversized hoop earrings, accepts. "You all are part of our family now," she tells the assembled Bantu. "We help each other."

Another recognition goes to Kristen. A dark-haired woman of European ancestry, Kristen, in her early 50s, has volunteered through a local church to help the Somali Bantu almost since their arrival in the city. "Education is very important to making it in America," she tells the Bantu, after being handed her certificate.

On this sunny day, this celebration – and who is being recognized – says a lot about who the Somali Bantu are associated with, and these associations provide a glimpse of the social networks and economic pathways the Somali Bantu take to move through society. What is evident is that the Somali Bantu survive in one of this city's most impoverished spaces by primarily accessing two different social networks to find jobs and build a comfortable niche into the local community. In this dissertation, I argue that the first path involves sustained associations established with a mostly white, middle-class set of volunteers connected to refugee aid organizations and their friends, who help the Somali Bantu *assimilate* and *navigate* into the broader economic and educational landscape. The second path involves building friendly relationships with the neighbors in the impoverished community where they live. These relationships help the Somali Bantu to *integrate* into the local community, providing a space

where they are safe and can use their kinship links to (re)create elements of their communal life and sustain their cultural traditions and customs while building meaningful relationships with their neighbors' in their new home.

2.2 WEAK TIES

The first three Somali Bantu families arrived at this city's airport in February and March of 2004. The families know each other, but they know little else about the city, the people, and the culture into which they were entering. Everyone – and practically everything – is a stranger: the landlord, the neighbor, the grocery clerk, the snow, the flush toilet, and the aid worker. The Somali Bantu refugees are a group of people starting over with almost no resources. In Somalia and Kenya, the family was the chief resource. Their social interaction came largely through the context of strong ties – the primary relationships that are central to an individual because of a combination of shared time, emotions, intimacy and reciprocation that bind the relationships.

However, as newcomers who live amid strangers, the Somali Bantu in this Northeastern city must soon begin to reach beyond the “thick” ties of family and rely on a network of “thin” ties, or infrequent relationships – the people with whom an individual does not regularly associate – so that they can open up opportunities for access to new communities, organizations, information and ideas, resources, and especially employment. These thin or “weak” relations improve an individual's accrual of social capital, connecting people to beneficial networks outside of their limited, closed networks.

Weak ties are important relationships for the Somali Bantu because as refugees, outsiders to the United States, all of their new ties are, in a sense, “weak.” My conceptual framework for

this dissertation draws upon Granovetter's theory (1973) the "strength of weak ties. Granovetter developed this concept after reading Herbert Gans' ethnographic study, "Urban Villagers." Granovetter argues that a strong tie is a clique – a dense or thick social network – where everyone in the network has access to the same information and the same people, and that therefore these relationships are not necessarily useful for broadening social opportunities. Almost immediately, to survive, the Somali Bantu refugees must access resources through thin ties (with the new people they meet in refugee services, social services, Christian volunteers). These thin ties are necessary for the Somali Bantu to make their first connections to jobs. Because they come to America with virtually little to no formal education, they do not have the language or other skills to negotiate the job process. Many of them cannot even write their own names. They do not know how to fill out an application or how to do an online job search. Their very first jobs come because they are recommended by staff members at the refugee agency or someone who is friends with someone who works in the agency. These thin ties not only help the Somali Bantu with jobs, but also with finding housing and education options.

However, while the Somali Bantu are making these "thin" connections, they do not throw away their kinship relationships, and it is through these close relations of brothers, fathers, and cousins that they spread news among each other of the jobs, housing opportunities, and school choices they learn about. In other words, the thin ties and the "thick ties" of family and kinship are inter-related and both become a resource for entry into the U.S. economy, and for finding quality education for their children.

However, because of where the Somali Bantu live and work, any opportunities generated by "weak ties" must be explored through racial policies and a race structure that favor white citizens. Historically, this Northeastern city, since World War II and before, has pushed African-

descended people into segregated neighborhoods, denied them access to labor unions, equity in jobs and housing (Trotter and Day 2010); all actions that helped to dislocate and segregate Blacks from the “weak ties” of beneficial larger networks (Cayton and Drake 1945).

Such disparities in this city continue in the 21st century. Black residents who live here face more severe poverty than any other racial group in the area (Center on Race and Social Problems 2014). Across six areas, including family life, economics, intergroup relations and mental health, Blacks severely lagged behind their white counterparts and in some cases – such as professional employment and family life – are at the bottom among the racial groups. Blacks in the city live largely in segregated communities where they are disadvantaged by poor transportation and waning public safety. Economically, Black males have unemployment rates that are two to three times higher than their white counterparts, and when they are working, nearly 60 percent are employed in low-paying service or sales positions. In this city, Blacks are left behind when it comes to being prepared for high-tech jobs and those related to the education and health care industries.

This city’s history of racial separation is important to consider because when the Somali Bantu come to this city they unknowingly enter into a racial order where in one instance Black labor is least preferred, while at the same time, immigrant cheap labor is desired. Prior to entering the United States, they were rural people blocked from accessing education networks beyond their religious training, which offered memorization of verses from the Koran and some recognition of Arabic language. Given their skill set, low-wage service jobs are the only jobs accessible to them.

It stands to reason that the combination of historical and contemporary inequality places the Bantu in a precarious situation, leaving them no way to get a foothold into American society.

However, the Somali Bantu are able to navigate such racial challenges because they arrive connected to a set of services related to their refugee status. This puts them into social relations with the broader community and links to jobs and services that are absent and not immediately available to African Americans who live in racially segregated communities. Because of this, the Somali Bantu newcomers access the weak ties provided by the large non-immigrant or white community to help the Bantu begin to find homes, and fill out the volumes of paperwork to apply for Social Security and housing services, register children for school, find jobs, secure translation services, and access medical services. To maximize their opportunities, the Somali Bantu use a strategy that draws upon a network of volunteers and workers attached to health and human service agencies. In order for them to make a home in their isolated public housing community, they also draw upon a network of neighbors to learn to navigate a community that can be challenged by poverty, crime, and violence. These two primary networks are full of new social attachments for the Bantu. They both offer the weak ties to make progress into both the broader and local culture. But to understand to what degree they are or are not being absorbed into these cultures we need to examine the process of assimilation.

2.3 ASSIMILATION

The majority of the Somali Bantu speak a language – Maay Maay – that many in the United States have never heard of before. They dress differently and are a community overcoming malnutrition, trauma from refugee camps, and brutalities of civil war. In addition, they are making the transition from a polygamous culture where they lived basically raising corn and mangoes to living in an urban post-industrial economy. “It is going to take them some time to

adjust to America,” says Mama Ibim, the tall Nigerian woman who heads a local resettlement organization. “We can help with some levels of self-sufficiency and getting them to understand electric lights, transportation systems, but they are not just going to melt into society.”

The idea of melting into society is based on the nearly 100-year-old classic “melting pot” theory of assimilation. It was developed in the 1920s by University of Chicago sociologist Robert Park who suggested that human and urban ecology should investigate how immigrants or different ethnic groups assimilate, or “melt,” into one national culture: being American.⁶ Park was referencing the process of how different European ethnic groups became American. The process was known as straight-line assimilation and it was thought to involve four levels of adaptation: contact, competition, accommodation, then finally, assimilation, or melting seamlessly into the larger American cultural pot (Alba and Nee 1997, 2003; Rumbaut 1997).

Assimilation refers to the structural process whereby immigrants or refugees become participants in the host society. For the Somali Bantu it is a process of access – facilitated initially by their weak ties – that attaches the Somali Bantu fathers to the labor market, education institutions, welfare and health systems, political citizenship, and norms of American life. This process can influence cultural, behavioral, and ideological change but the Somali Bantu do not simply “melt” into the larger culture.

My inquiry assesses the survival strategies of African refugees, those from a war-torn nation, who are thrust into an impoverished, segregated American community. How do these socioeconomic factors and history shape their relationships and opportunities for network formation and immigrant mobility? Clearly, where they live and the role of residential segregation matters. The structural features of spatial segregation allow access to economic

⁶ Park borrowed this idea of “melting pot” from playwright Isreal Zangwell, whose play “Melting Pot,” staged in 1908, became a metaphor about assimilating into American society.

opportunities, better schools, and superior quality of life issues for some, while they block social and economic equality for others (Massey and Denton 1993). These inequalities are often parallel to race and class divisions and the distinctions become a “color line” that push groups into a lower social order, effectively limiting their mainstream assimilation (Du Bois 1903; Bonilla-Silva 2003).

These ideas challenged the classical assimilation theory, which offered that “melting” into the larger society was part of the process of upward mobility for immigrants and their offspring. It was considered to be a straightforward process, whereby assimilation and upward mobility went hand in hand. If you obtained one, you were on track to achieve the other. Now, we understand that while the younger generation of Somali Bantu may be more acculturated to American society – adopting the language, having similar taste in clothing, obtaining higher levels of education – the barriers of class and racial separation are obstacles to socioeconomic mobility. So, for the Somali Bantu fathers, who are enmeshed in poverty, we have to reconsider the idea that each subsequent generation is able to achieve higher social and economic status simply because it becomes more culturally and linguistically similar to the American middle class (Rumbaut 1997; Zhou 1997). Now, we have to understand that for these refugees, there is no straightforward relationship between assimilation and upward mobility (Rumbaut 1997).

Contemporary scholarship maintains that the differences between new immigrants and old immigrants can be seen on two levels: changes in the immigrants themselves and changes in America as a host society. In terms of the immigrants, there is recognition that somehow race made a difference in the degree of assimilation. Some scholars emphasize that the new immigrants (those who came to America post-1965 U.S. Immigration Act) from Latin America and Asia – and increasingly those from sub-Saharan Africa – are considered racial/ethnic

minorities in America, and their minority status may therefore hinder or make “bumpy” their full assimilation into the white middle class (Gans 1992; Portes and Zhou 1993).

According to the Migration Policy Institute (2012) Black African immigrants represent one of the fastest-growing segments of the U.S. immigrant population, increasing by about 200 percent during the 1980s and 1990s and by 100 percent during the 2000s. It found that African immigrants generally fare well on integration indicators, with college completion rates that greatly exceed those for most other immigrant groups and U.S. natives. Black Africans are much more likely than other immigrant groups to be admitted to the United States as refugees. The report also found that assimilation for the Somali Bantu is made more “bumpy” because they have the lowest level of formal education among African newcomers; receive the lowest median annual earnings; have the lowest English proficiency; and have the lowest levels of family or job connections in the United States.

Moreover, the Somali Bantu, part of the new immigrants who are entering the United States, are coming into an American host society that is changing economically. The demand for semi-skilled and skilled labor has been substantially reduced by changes in the economy. Several scholars have argued that the assimilation and upward mobility of the 1890-1920 wave of European immigrants were facilitated by the industrialized economic expansion of the time, but that today’s economic context is less favorable for the incorporation of new workers due to the advent of a service-based post-industrial economy (Massey 1995; Portes and Zhou 1993; Gans 1992). The Somali Bantu were able, through their ties and friendships with the white middle class, to access lower-level employment, giving them a footstep toward assimilation in the broader community. However, there are no factories or jobs centers in Southview Estates, so all of their employment is outside of the housing project, providing them almost daily interaction

with different people from different neighborhood and ethnicities.

This interaction outside of the public housing development is offering the Somali Bantu fathers levels of acculturation that could aid their assimilation process into the broader community. The concept of acculturation may help explain what is happening with the Somali Bantu and how, why and when they may be modifying and/or adopting “cultural patterns” to fit into American space. Acculturation is the “process of adaption to new conditions of life” (Thurnwald, 1932) or “cultural change” (Jibril 2008) and is an ongoing, dynamic phenomenon (Spindler 1963). It cannot be pinpointed to just a singular event, but rather is a complex process that unfolds and changes over time. The process manifests itself in both individuals and groups that interact across political, cultural, social, and economic dynamics. For the Somali Bantu, these dynamics influence and control their degree of cultural modification and how they negotiate when to deploy their “homeland” cultural patterns and when to access the cultural patterns of the host nation. For example, when they are among family and in their local communities, where they feel protected and secure, many of the Somali Bantu still speak their same language, engage their same cultural practices, and keep their ethnic identification (Gans 1992). When they are on their jobs, individually and as a group, where they seem to appreciate the diverse experiences of the broader world, the Somali Bantu fathers engage in using the English language to build relationships. They dress differently than how I have seen them dress in their home (they don’t wear sandals on the job), and some of them adjust their prayer schedules because they have to work on Friday, traditionally a day of worship for Muslims.

For the Somali Bantu, when to access which cultural patterns seems to be part of their larger strategy of resilience and coping in their new land. For instance, a study of Somali refugees in San Francisco (Jibril 2008) opened the door for understanding that an acculturation

strategy of “integration” (Berry 2003) could be used to maintain original culture and at the same time allow for participation in the larger society. What this helps us to understand is that while the processes of acculturation and assimilation are separate, we cannot deny, of course, that assimilation – becoming a part of the common cultural life – can be interdependent on levels of acculturation (Teske and Nelson, 1974).

Because of where they live, in the poverty and racial isolation of Southview Estates, we should consider the notion of segmented assimilation, a theory based on the recognition that American society is now extremely diverse and segmented, including having a Black underclass residing in central cities where many new immigrant families first settle upon arrival. Immersion in and contact with these communities push the Somali Bantu fathers – and their sons – onto paths of lower mobility by the limited levels of acculturation and assimilation that are available to them. Once settled into poor spaces, the Somali Bantu become subjected to the same challenges of concentrated poverty that grind at the lives of the impoverished residents already living in this space. These challenges include being connected to networks that are limited by race and racialization, and underclass conditions, which constrain social mobility. Different African people fare better than others when immigrating to the United States. Some of this varies because of the immigrants’ personal assets and motivation, the stability of their home nations, and the strength of the job networks in the ethnic communities to which they are received (Konadu-Agyemang, Kwadwo, Baffour K. Takyi, and Arthur 2006).

Finding jobs remains a key first step to the Somali Bantu fathers acculturating and assimilating toward the larger society. However, they don’t live where the jobs are, so it is also important to consider what role their home communities play in helping them settle into their host nation. For this, it is important to consider the idea of integration.

2.4 INTEGRATION

In the spring of 2013, the Somali Bantu organized the first “Moms and Cops” forum, which was hosted in Southview Estates so that Bantu families could build better relationships with the police and learn about social services available to the community. More than 140 people attended the forum, including several of the neighborhood’s Black American residents. In January 2014, winter’s cold does not stop scores of Somali Bantu from showing up at the neighborhood gym for their first community celebration of the Prophet Muhammad’s birthday. For more than a year, working with a neighborhood-based social service agency, the Somali Bantu partner with a mental health worker to offer counseling outreach to Bantu families. And, drawing on a network of supporters, the Bantu community hosts its Education Day to celebrate and promote academic achievement. At the celebration, held in Southview, the president of the local residents’ council referred to her Somali Bantu neighbors as “family.” By referencing this figurative term of “kinship,” the council president acknowledges that she sees the Somali Bantu as belonging to her neighborhood and as being someone she should care about. One of the leaders in the Somali Bantu community, who helped to organize the festivals and celebrations, described the team work in his native language: *acamo wadajir baa wax ku goyan*, meaning “we can break the burden in us together,” or in unity their is strength.

In Southview Estates, the Somali Bantu have found a place where they have the respect of their neighbors. The Black American neighbors support the festivals and celebrations, but they are also called upon to watch the Somali Bantu children when the Bantu have to go to work or run errands. And, for the Bantu, Southview Estates provides the opportunity to openly practice their faith, their first language, and their customs. In Southview Estates, it is not uncommon for the Somali Bantu to decorate their homes with the colorful materials and cloth that reflect their

cultural and religious life and which would adorn their living spaces in Somalia. These events and practices show that the Bantu are integrating into Southview Estates. This is different from assimilation because the Somali Bantu are not trying to “melt” into this all-Black space.



Figure 3: Colorful fabric decorates the homes of Somali Bantu, reflecting their vibrant material culture.

Rather, with integration, the Somali Bantu are able to maintain elements of their culture and ethnic identities, and not simply aim to adopt the larger culture as their own (Dryden-Peterson 2009; M. Stewart et al, 2012). Dryden-Peterson in her study of African immigrants in Boston describes integration as an individual and interactive process that enables immigrant newcomers to develop new ties within existing community structures, such as relationships with new neighbors, and new friends. Integration, argues Dryden-Peterson, is not only driven and achieved by the immigrants’ individual traits and motivations but also by the social, political, and economic contexts into which they migrate and the institutions with which they interact. In Southview Estates, the Somali Bantu find themselves among a set of friendly neighbors and

become increasingly involved with the community's institutions such as the local residents' council and the city's Housing Authority. Being connected to the residents' council – a volunteer organization –develops a sense of integration because it connects the refugees to the same issues and goals as the larger community, such as neighborhood improvement and reduction of crime. The council generates “closeness” and local integration because it is a small organization (residents get to know each other more easily), and this can more easily facilitate belonging and a culture of welcome (Dryden-Peterson 2009).

What I began to see with the Somali Bantu is that simultaneously they were both assimilating AND integrating. First, there is primarily structural assimilation into the broader economy on the strength of weak ties. Second, there is integration into Southview Estates fueled on the strength of thin ties with neighbors and local acquaintances such as social workers.

There are five practices that mark their integration. 1). They've befriended their neighbors, 2). With their neighbor's help, they've learned how to stay safe and report crimes, 3). They've carved out spaces to meet and celebrate their cultural traditions, 4). They are building networks through participation in volunteer groups, involvement with local governing and service agencies, 5). They are organizing politically.

The integration is an active process between the Bantu and their neighbors. The Somali Bantu are using neighborhood ties to integrate into the urban space where they live; such bonding and developing social ties are facilitated because they share a community and have similar interests that connect them to their neighbors. (Grant and Sweetman, 2004).

2.5 ACCRUING CAPITAL

Abbas grew up in the Jubba Valley with his grandparents and parents. His aunts and uncles lived in huts just down the dirt path. In their gardens, his family grew watermelon and corn and worked long, hard hours to care for the crops. “Me and my brother, we watched the animals. The monkeys would come to garden and had to be chased away.” The neighbors would come and share their goat and his family would share their corn. It was a world of reciprocity and kinship support networks. When he was 8, this world collapsed. In the civil war, in 1991, soldiers raided their home one night and he and his family had to run for their lives. Abbas was separated from family and was left at the river, “12 inches from a hippo.” Displaced villagers he did not know scooped him up and together they walked the long journey to Kenya, where he was reconnected to family in the refugee camp.

Abbas’ story reveals that the Somali Bantu had social relations and social resources connected to their life in the Jubba Valley in Somalia. When they were forced into exodus because of the civil war, many of the social networks were broken. As refugees in America, the Somali Bantu arrived without financial resources or the formal education that would enable the mostly rural people to seamlessly adjust to life in an urban, technological, Western society.

To survive, and successfully be incorporated into their new space, the Somali Bantu would quickly need to connect to economic and social resources. In finding jobs, schools, a bank, getting to know their neighbors, the Bantu are accruing capital.

What is meant by “capital?” For Bourdieu, capital is “any resource effective in a structured arena of social action or field that allows one to obtain the specific profits that arise out of activity and contest within that arena (Wacquant, 1998, p. 26). For Bourdieu (1984), capital comes in four main forms: economic, social, cultural, and human.

First, economic capital refers to the resources that can be used to purchase goods and services. Because of long-held patterns of discrimination, the Somali Bantu have largely lacked access to economic capital throughout their history in Somalia (Besteman, 1999).

Second, there is social capital, which refers to the ties of relationships that individuals embrace and access to negotiate their everyday lives. Social capital becomes an important form of capital for the Somali Bantu because it is one of the most readily available forms for incorporating the refugees into the receiving society. Social capital is useful and necessary for people's well-being because it can generate opportunities for work and advancement, provide solutions to personal problems, and lead to trusting, reciprocal relationships that bring security and enhance people's quality of life (Bourdieu 1986; Coleman 1988). For Bourdieu (1986), social capital is also "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more institutionalized relationships or mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital."

Third, cultural capital refers to the personal, cultivated qualities derived from educational knowledge and cultural experiences usually bestowed by family members or from tradition and practices. For Bourdieu, cultural capital focused on the reproduction of social class through the state, the school, and the family. It exists in two main forms: institutionalized, such as educational credentials and embodied, or the long-lasting dispositions of mind and body (Bourdieu 1983). The Somali Bantu's cultural capital (their native language, agricultural skills) has limited use in an urban Western context. Furthermore, historical discrimination has limited their opportunities for education in Somalia and in the United States. The Somali Bantu parents struggle with how to navigate the U.S. educational system on their own and do not know how to

pass this cultural capital along to their offspring.

Fourth is human capital. This has been defined as the embodied collection of skills and knowledge, talent, training, or experience that enables someone to perform labor and have value in the economic system (Coleman 1988). While they may arrive in America with little economic resources, the Bantu bring various levels of human capital. They come with skills as cooks, entrepreneurs, and carpenters. Significantly, they arrive embodied with a work ethic and resilience that have been cultivated through years of surviving as racialized and persecuted people and as refugees having to work low-skills jobs to help family. This is an important concept to recognize because it helps to show that while the Somali Bantu arrive here with few resources, they do not come with nothing. Though they are disadvantaged, they are not completely deficient. In fact, their resilience opens up intragroup processes, and work and social opportunities that aid in their incorporation into the social mainstream and their local new space.

Finally, Bourdieu also references symbolic capital, which is a more abstract concept that relates to an individual's honor and prestige. It is often an acknowledgment of social position or how others pay attention to you. Symbolic capital often prompts a sense of duty, and is a capital that rests on recognition. For the Somali Bantu, recognition as a refugee came with acknowledgment that they are survivors, but also that they are a people targeted as being deserving of housing, health care and other services.

It is worth emphasizing that social, cultural, human, and symbolic capital are all non-economic forms of capital, but much like economic capital, they all yield profit that can come in the form of being connected to jobs, identity, or education that offer non-financial rewards such as social approval and status.

It is also important to remember that although separate and distinct, each of these capital

forms can be acquired, exchanged, and converted into the other, and that different forms of capital can overlap in practical, material, and symbolic exchanges. For example, as the Somali Bantu gather new experiences, this convergence of capital is at play in their lives, enabling the processes of assimilation and integration.

First, consider the role of weak ties and the idea that all social relations and social structures facilitate some form of social capital (Coleman 1988). As refugees, the Somali Bantu get connected to diverse “weak ties” during the resettlement process. These connections attach the Somali Bantu to two networks of beneficial relationships as they enter new social relations and new social structures. The middle-class white social workers and faith-based volunteers (who have access to broader job networks and the values of the larger culture) help the Bantu fathers find jobs and navigate the American education, housing, and social welfare systems. In this regard, the Bantu are being attached to the larger, macro structures of American society.

But it is important to remember that for the displaced Somali Bantu, when they arrive in America, all networks are new networks – even the networks in a distressed public housing community. The Bantu accrue social capital in the local community of Southview Estates that can be converted to cultural capital, the knowledge of how to keep their families safe. Their friendly neighbors tell the Bantu how to mind their own business, how to call the police, and how to avoid violence.

Each network has varying degrees of trust and expectation. The relationships involve information sharing. But, what is also being shared are norms, ideas, and behaviors “or local knowledge” about what is appropriate in the work and community space. As they accrue social capital, it can be converted to cultural capital as the new social networks provide the Bantu exposure to new ideas, knowledge, and education that they are able to absorb and pass along to

their sons. This is especially relevant for newcomers such as the Somali Bantu because they have no local cultural knowledge (a form of cultural capital) upon arrival to the United States.

In a new society, one of the other ways the Bantu began to compensate for limited cultural knowledge is by using their human capital: the resilience, toughness, and work ethic that was nurtured through years of experience as refugees. This resilience is often converted into cultural capital because it is embodied into what the Somali Bantu know and can do and can pass along. It can also be converted to social capital as their resilience opens them up to being engaged by diverse people. This accrual of social capital then aids in the transfer of cultural knowledge/capital. For example, as the Bantu learn how to fill out forms for employment, how to take tests, how to set up a phone account, how to use the bank, or how to direct their children toward higher-performing schools, they are able to transmit this knowledge to their children.

These matters are important because without accrual of adequate levels of capital, it would be more difficult for the Somali Bantu to fully merge into the American education and economic systems. Despite what success they may find integrating/assimilating into their new society, race and class remain enduring barriers to full participation. It is critical to examine each of these barriers and their implications for the Somali Bantu.

2.6 RACIALIZATION AND CLASS STRUCTURE: ENDURING BARRIERS

Ibram, a round, muscular factory worker, has to stretch his paycheck to support his wife and three kids. He understands that he has limited financial resources available in Southview, and that leaves him frustrated. None of his neighbors has much money. None of them owns a business. This lack of resources complicates his chances of becoming an entrepreneur. When I

talk with him in his house, he's alone and sitting in the dark, where he admits he'll have a beer or two to unwind. Before coming to Southview, Ibram, 30, lived in California, where his father told him and his 11 siblings to be bold and "go into the world." He dreamed of being an entrepreneur and opening a liquor store. He knows that drinking or selling alcohol is against Muslim culture, but he believes there is a market as he "see many people drinking in America." However, Ibram's dream is stuck. He makes \$9.15 an hour working at the chocolate factory. Between his time in the factory and using his money to take care of his family, there is nothing left to save for Ibram. He left high school in ninth grade and his pay all goes to help his family. Who can he borrow money from? His Somali Bantu friends are just as economically challenged as he is. He can't turn to his neighbors, or the local parents "who talk bad words in front of their kids."

"I don't want to be a part of this place, but what can I do?" he asks me. "It get me depressed in my head and makes me drink beer." Even if he could find the resources, there is no building in Southview to be purchased as all the property is owned by the Housing Authority.

Ibram is frustrated and limited by the racialized income boundaries of his community. It is a neighborhood of low-income Black Americans, African immigrants, and mixed-raced residents (2010 U.S. Census). In fact, living in Southview highlights the long-held conundrum of race in America. It was more than 100 years ago when DuBois (1903) introduced his concept of double consciousness to demonstrate that race is a structured, lived experience for Blacks in America. Since then, the "race problem" has generated multiple conceptual frameworks to explain how racial inequality operates within a society.

According to scholar Bonilla-Silva (2001), racialization structures a straighter path to assimilation for whites, but racialized Blacks are thrust into connection with systems that more likely marginalize or segment a Black immigrant to downward levels of assimilation. He argues

that racism is more than an idea that others have about people who are different from them. Racism happens when those in positions of power develop a set of social practices and an ideology to maintain advantages based on their racial classification; when the group in power develops a structure to reproduce their systemic advantages. Furthermore, the group in power receives greater economic benefits: access to better jobs, primary political position, higher social estimation (they look better, are smarter, have the license to physically and socially segregate).

In summary, racialization is structural, organized around social relations, and hierarchal; it pushes some to the top of society and others to the bottom.

Historically, Blacks have been targeted for prejudice and discrimination. This anti-Black sentiment and a history of racial disparities – slavery, Reconstruction, Jim Crow, the War on Drugs – pushed African Americans into a cycle of poverty that maintained inequality across generations (Alexander 2010; Massey and Douglas 1993; Trotter and Day 2010; Du Bois 1935; Wilson 1987).

When the Somali Bantu enter into Southview, they enter a space where Blacks have been historically and are currently discriminated against. Entering this space puts the Bantu at-risk for being impacted by the same structures that oppress the African Americans living there.

For example, when the Bantu first arrived here, social service agencies placed some of the families in lower-income neighborhoods. Some of the neighborhoods were all Black. In these communities, the Bantu fathers told me they were alienated from their neighbors, and frustrated by crime, rodents and poor housing quality. With the assistance and guidance of the white volunteers and refugee aid services, the Bantu resettled into more moderate income communities, which offered sturdier homes, shops, more services, and more diverse people. However, the Bantu could not afford to remain in these neighborhoods. To cope economically, the Somali

Bantu began to move into Southview Estates. Without housing policies that can support the Bantu living in more diverse communities, they are threatened with having to live in a segregated community of concentrated poverty, which places them under precarious conditions that structure their inequality (Duck 2015).

Their class position is also problematic for the Somali Bantu fathers. All of the Bantu fathers work in low-skilled jobs as butchers, cooks, as janitors, or in some other low-wage position. Ibram works in the chocolate factory. They live at or below poverty levels. Their class position has implications for the refugees' assimilation and integration processes. At the opening of the 20th century, sociologist Dubois gave us the term "color line," arguing that the intersection of race and class would cause the darker races to be dominated and exploited by the white race. This meant that Blacks were pushed into separate, race-based sections of society and the color line became one of the most important factors for reproducing class hierarchy. Whites, on one side of the color line, benefited from access to better jobs, neighborhoods with better-funded schools, and access to relationships and social networks that enabled them to reproduce their class advantage and move higher in society. Blacks, on the other side of the color line, however, were denied entry into broader social networks – schools, jobs, and neighborhoods.

The combination of economic marginality and racial oppression reproduces class inequality (Rainwater 1970). In fact, discrimination by race and class is like a two-fisted pummeling. In the 1970s-80s, the work of sociologist William J. Wilson posited that segregation by income amplifies segregation by race, leaving low-income Blacks clustered in neighborhoods that feature disadvantages that include exposure to violent crime, poor quality schools, and being cut off from viable job networks.

Therefore, when the Somali Bantu are attached to this segregation by income, it limits their accrual of social capital, cultural capital, and economic capital. “The form and effects of cultural and social capital are defined by physical vectors,” such as the characteristics of urban space and the collective constructions of class, race, gender that take place within these spaces (Fernandez Kelly 1995). In other words, limited access to networks provides limited and impoverished social capital. In the impoverished Southview Estates neighborhood, the social networks offer limited information about the outside world, which makes access to mainstream employment more difficult. Social capital is therefore toponomical, dependent on our physical and social location (Fernandez Kelly 1995; Portes 1998).

Wilson (1978) connected the underclass to changing economic and structural conditions, saying that the underclass “represented a massive population at the very bottom of the social ladder plagued by poor education and low-paying jobs.” The city’s deindustrialization restructured the economy. With the loss of manufacturing jobs that paid livable wages came an expansion of jobs in the low-wage service sector. These low-wage service jobs are dead-end and the wages are so poor that a person can work 40 hours a week and be challenged to care for a family (Hansen 2003; Applebaum 2003).

The loss of decent jobs and livable wages pushed people into “Poverty concentration [which] has the effect of devaluing the social capital of those who live in its midst” (Wacquant and Wilson, 1989). In other words, “social isolation and the concentration of disadvantaged people ... facilitate serial patterns of social contact and exposure,” that limit their construction of a beneficial social life (Young, 2003).

In this community, the Somali Bantu are exposed to very limited political, material and industrial resources on which to build a better life. They live in conditions that are nothing short

of economic, educational, and race-based “apartheid” (Massey and Denton 1993; Kozol 1991; Wacquant and Wilson, 1989). When they moved here, in addition to entering into a racial order that contains anti-Black sentiment, they’re entering into impoverished spaces that are socially isolated and dislocated from resources, which can make it challenging to establish networks and accrue capital with neighbors who are burdened with joblessness (Rainwater 1970; Massey and Denton 1993; Anderson 1999).

How do they survive? It’s important to remember that immigrant groups come to the United States with varying forms of capital. Some are highly educated people from middle class families. Others are received into well-established immigrant networks (Migration Policy Institute 2012). The Somali Bantu, aided by their refugee status, were able to develop and access helping networks from the broader community before coming to Southview Estates. Had they not, it would have been more difficult to establish the weak ties or “thin” networks that helped them find resources. Otherwise, how would they have found jobs in a community where 60 percent of the population is jobless? Where would they have discovered how to navigate urban school choices so that their children would not be assigned to one of the lowest-performing schools in the district?

Going to the best schools possible is a critical advantage because schools help (re)produce cultural capital and the cultural knowledge that is key to the acculturation of second-generation Somali Bantu. Once they leave school, the second-generation are able to convert their new cultural capital into economic capital, finding better jobs because of improved language skills, study skills, ties to better networks, and aspirational attainment.

Race and class are enduring barriers to social mobility. In their native Somalia, race and segregation blocked the Bantu from learning higher skills. However, once in the United States,

given their low levels of literacy and agrarian ways, they defy the odds. Because of their association with refugee aid groups and white volunteers, they find and keep steady jobs and gain prideful satisfaction out of them. Problem is, the only positions that they are able to access are low-wage, and service oriented. This may be good for the Somali Bantu fathers, as the jobs give them their first steps toward structural assimilation, but their precarious class position is disadvantageous for their children.

Like it was for their fathers, for the sons, too, class can become a persistent obstacle to moving forward in society. Their fathers' class positions and their limited contact with the middle class puts them and their sons at a disadvantage for middle class cultural capital. As a result, the sons will need to work extremely hard to advance through educational and economic opportunities. In Southview, the fathers often talked of the higher positions they desire for their sons. But when the sons reached working age, the fathers could often only point them toward positions in the same factories and service economy where they found themselves. In the end, marginal jobs with low pay and poor benefits push the Somali Bantu into neighborhoods with income-based segregated housing and poor quality schools. These factors limit their social networks and disadvantage the sons' social mobility. These factors threaten to become enduring barriers that limit the Somali Bantu social and economic integration.

2.7 CONCLUSIONS

The Somali Bantu are seeking the best chance to have a “good life” in America, Mr. A told me one Saturday afternoon as we sat in his home on a brown sofa under a large image of a smiling President Obama. The Bantu aim for the good life by navigating two processes – assimilation

and integration. They are new to America, and their agrarian way of life in Somalia's Jubba Valley and in the refugee camps did not prepare them for employment beyond low-skilled service positions in the city they now live in. To cope with the low wages and high costs of urban life, they have moved into one of the city's most segregated and isolated communities. To be poor and racially segregated are huge barriers to advancement in the United States.

In order to move toward a "good life" with their family and friends – the Somali Bantu try to negotiate different types of relationships—all of which are new, all of which seem equally as important as others. These are their neighbors, co-workers, service professionals, school authorities—all of these relationships are negotiated with varying degrees of trust and reciprocity. These are weak ties, the secondary or "marginal" relationships, the people whom an individual does not frequently associate with. These relationships – associations with white, middle-class volunteers and connection to university students – are crucial because they attach the Bantu to the benefits such relations can bring – benefits such as their first jobs, information on housing choices, and navigation of government, education, and social service bureaucracies.

Network formation and access to weak ties are important in the assimilation process (Granovetter 1973). Scholars suggest that assimilation – contact and movement into the larger society – is at-risk by race and class structures and residential segregation. For the Somali Bantu, these weak ties broaden their opportunities to find resources and social networks that are outside of kinship and ethnic networks, and that link the Somali Bantu to information that is outside of their close networks. When the Somali Bantu connect with these weak ties, they build "bridges" to additional resources that make moving forward possible. These informal and extended relationships offer access to beneficial information that sometimes is not circulated among close relationships.

As the Somali Bantu in this public housing community attempt to assimilate and integrate into American society, class and race are two social structures that have significance in their lives. Both create experiences that potentially limit their social mobility, which in turn can also limit the social capital their offspring (the second-generation) can use to make it into the broader society (Portes and Zhou 1993). Class impacts the impoverished low-skilled Somali Bantu. The labor demands have changed in America and the demand for semi-skilled and skilled labor has been substantially reduced by high-tech economic changes. The industrial engine that fueled the jobs and mobility of European immigrants from 1890-1920 is over (Massey 1995; Portes and Zhou 1993; Gans 1992). What this means for the largely agrarian Somali Bantu refugees who were blocked from acquiring high levels of formal education is that it is tougher to get a decent-paying job living in an urban, service-based postindustrial economy. In this new economy, with limited opportunity to train or pursue more education, it is more difficult for the fathers to have mobility beyond their work as butchers, laundry helpers, and janitors. Living in poverty creates a shrinking circle of opportunity to gain wealth and access better education for your children.

Racism impacts the Somali Bantu. In America, the groups in power structure political and social controls that give them greater economic and social benefits. In America, Somali Bantu people become subjected to America's class and race structures, which can "racialize" (Rainwater 1970; Omi and Winant 1994; Bonilla-Silva 1997) people who are pushed into low-income segregated communities. This marginalization forces the Somali Bantu into areas of concentrated Black poverty and relegates them to the underclass, a whole segment of society plagued by poor education and low-paying jobs (Wilson 1978). There is nothing neutral about living in the underclass. It is a place that destabilizes social and economic well-being and negatively controls an individual, a family, and a generation's life chances because of the

connection to joblessness, poverty, welfare reliance, failing schools (Massey and Denton 1993). The groups in power in society benefit from different forms of capital; subordinate groups have access to less social and cultural capital. This distinction helps to make both class and race structures enduring obstructions to the social mobility of immigrants (Portes and Zhou 1993). In other words, the sons may be optimistic of moving forward, but the reality of being able to crack through class and social obstacles can be extremely challenging.

To counter such precarious conditions and limiting dynamics, the Somali Bantu reach across two social networks – friendships with middle-class volunteers and friendly associations with their Black American neighbors. The white volunteers in social networks help them to develop the cultural capital and external resources that can hopefully lift non-white new immigrants beyond the structures that reproduce the ghetto underclass. These networks provide the Somali families with the opportunities that give the second-generation better chances to advance toward the broader society. The associations with their Black neighbors in the public housing community provide the Somali Bantu with the information to navigate crime and violence, but also to manage American race relations and poverty. The relationships provide enough of a welcome so that the Somali Bantu can integrate and begin the process of recreating their own cultural community and religious identity while, at the same time, get involved in the social and political life of the local community.

What is being accessed in these networks are various types of capital, the beneficial resources that come from the relationships in the social networks of everyday life that produce capabilities to seize opportunities and create mutual support arrangements. By tapping into networks of weak ties and having access to thin social relationships, residents of low-income

spaces, such as the Somali Bantu, can access information and knowledge to work within the social system (cultural capital) that leads to better jobs and better life chances.

We can better understand how the Somali Bantu in particular, might be poised to access social and cultural capital by understanding that since their arrival in the United States in 2004, due to their refugee status, the Somali Bantu have relied upon networks across race, class, and geographic differences. This strategy yields resources to counter the negative impact of being in a space where racialization, stigmatization, class distinctions can isolate groups from the larger society. For the Somali Bantu, their decade-long experience of living in America has facilitated contact with diverse groups. This contact has structured an access that enables them to build connections with social groups that can be beneficial in moving them toward the larger society. Before we look more closely at the Somalia Bantu life and networks in this Northeastern city, it is important to review the history that has brought them to America.

3.0 A ROCKY PAST: ENSLAVEMENT, COLONIALISM, CIVIL WAR

Jubba Valley in the 1980s is a fertile agricultural region in southern Somalia. As a little boy, Mr. A grew up in this region, surrounded by family and extended family. They lived in clusters of small homes made of mud, some of which were brightly decorated with flowers and abstract impressions. They were independent farmers who worked the land not as a business to make profit, but as an enterprise to care for and feed themselves; their farm was self-supported, and not controlled by the government. Much of life centered on the mosque, a small brick building that sat in the middle of the community. Mr. A remembers it as a happy time. “It was a place where we no pay rent, no pay bills,” he told me.

During the day, the family took care of a grove of 15 coconut trees, fields of maize, and an orchard of mangoes. Chickens freely roamed the grounds. The area was so lush that the neighbors would call it “the green tree neighborhood.” At night, the family would gather atop blankets, under the light of the stars and firesticks (candles on poles), and share stories. A granduncle would visit frequently to pass along oral history.

Mr. A and his family are Somali Bantu. The Bantu people are not native to the Horn of Africa. How they came to settle in the Jubba Valley, a lush, productive region that sits between the Shabelle and Jubba rivers, and the conditions that drove thousands of Bantu into exodus in Kenya, and eventually into America is the beginning of their story.

The Somali Bantu call themselves Mushunguli – a reference to their cultural and linguistic connections to the indigenous populations in Tanzania, Mozambique, and Malawi. Centuries ago, in a mass migration across Africa, the Bantu-speaking people moved eastwards from their roots in central Africa. Once settled in these new areas, as the oral history is recounted by folks like Mr. A's granduncle, the Bantu became exposed to 18th and 19th- century Arab enslavers who, often using brute force and violence, invaded the region, capturing and dispatching untold numbers of Bantu men, women, and children via Zanzibar's great slave market to the Persian Gulf and Middle East. Some Bantu people were assimilated into the larger Arab Somali culture, while others, the descendants of fugitive slaves, began farming for the ruling Muslim clans.

In Somalia, however, the Mushunguli maintained their southeast African cultures. However, in this Horn of African nation, their physical features – the texture of their hair, the shape of their noses – cast them as ethnic minorities. They were considered the people of the “hard hair,” a group separate and unequal from the ruling Somali coastal people who were linked to Arab ancestry. The Bantu were also called by the derogatory terms of “adoon” or “habash,” which translated to “slave” (Lehman and Eno 2003; Besteman 1999).

This history is important to review because the roots of the Somali Bantu struggles are shaped by these past encounters. It raises my first research question: how does the history of marginalization hinder the Somali Bantu people and their contemporary attempts to assimilate into a post-industrial, urban, racially segregated host society?

In Somalia, the Bantu people are about one-tenth of the 9.5 million people who live in the diverse, multiethnic country, and discrimination engulfed every dimension of their lives. It was so pervasive that they were shut out from economic and development opportunities, excluded

from access to government services, access to private jobs, education, and from opportunities to participate in politics. They were socially limited and denied the opportunity to intermarry with other clans (which could aid the assimilation process).

Segregated from the ruling Arab society, the Bantu settled in and made their life in the Jubba Valley, where they reproduced their ancestral traditions from East Africa such as matrilineal kinship and ceremonial dance. They were farmers who had few material possessions and tilled plots of land no bigger than 10 acres, on which they grew maize, beans, cotton, rice, fruits and other crops (Lehman and Eno 2003). In this isolated space in Somalia, the Bantu were also stigmatized for their life as agriculturalists, and for their cultural practices such as their traditional, ceremonial dances, which made others question their credibility as Islamic people.

3.1 A TIME OF SLAVERY

The isolation and unequal treatment of the Somali Bantu are largely related to the intra-African slave trade: a history that, over time, pushed the Somali Bantu into a caste-like system. Slavery of the Somali Bantu can be traced back to more than 1,000 years ago, when Persian and Arab traders made contact with East Africa. Many of the Arab traders settled in the eastern part of the continent of Africa and established friendly relationships with the various clans, even with the people who became known as Somali Bantu. In the 15th century, the Portuguese established colonial rule in Tanzania, Mozambique and other portions of East Africa, disrupting the cultural, social and economic intimacies of the region. Two centuries later, forces loyal to an Arab Sultanate ousted the Portuguese but expanded the enslavement of people in Kenya and Tanzania. The people in Tanzania were terrorized by the slave trade. They were often captured and

marched 400 miles from the interior of Tanzania to its coast along the Indian Ocean and, from there, shipped to the port city of Bagamoyo in southern Somalia. Many were sold to European buyers, but some were sold to African buyers, made to toil on the plantations in Somalia's Shabelle River valley. From 1800 to 1890, between 25,000 and 50,000 enslaved people, including the enslaved and displaced Bantu groups, came here and carved out a life for themselves on this fertile ground (Besteman 1999; Lewis 2000; Lehman and Eno 2003).

Earlier though, by the 1840s, fugitive slaves ran south, hoping to return to Tanzania. Liberation leaders tried to guide the Bantu out of slavery, but were unable to cross Kenya because of an unforgiving landscape and hostile Kenyan tribes. The Bantu peoples reshaped their life and made their home in the Jubba River region (Lehman and Eno 2003). There, they lived in mud huts and worked in the fields. By 1900, an estimated 35,000 former slaves were living here. Over several generations, many of the Somali Bantu slaves converted to Islam. This ultimately secured their freedom, because the Quran, the Muslim holy book, forbids Muslims from owning other Muslims. Though free, they never quite escaped the shadow of slavery. They became segregated deep in the forested Jubba Valley, located in Somalia's southern region.

"The creation of the Jubba Valley as a racialized space was ... affirmed and nurtured during the colonial period" (Besteman 1999). As racial distinctions became territorialized in the Jubba Valley, the Bantu were deemed socially inferior. They were stereotyped as lesser and considered native. In a European construct affirmed by both the British and Italian colonial administrators, the Somali people with Arab ethnicity – because of their physical characteristics of lighter skin, hair texture and more angular features – were upheld as distinct and superior to Black African Bantu peoples.

This construct enabled the encounter with the West to continue to limit the Somali Bantu people. The Italians came into Somali lands in the late 1880s and eventually colonized the Jubba Valley region. And although the Italians abolished slavery in their territories in the early 20th century, by the middle of the 20th century, however, the Italians confiscated Bantu farms and introduced labor laws that forcibly conscripted the freed slaves to be laborers for the Italian colonial plantation system from 1935 to 1940. The conditions under which they toiled were so severe and harsh that they were “indistinguishable from slavery” (Lehman and Eno 2003).

In his work, “The Wretched of the Earth,” Fanon (1963) argues that colonial practices disrupt the conscience of the nation and denigrates into petty identity politics (creating an us vs. them) where race and religion are used as tools of exclusion and inclusion. “The colonial world,” according to Fanon, was a “world divided ... white against the dark; the rich against the poor, the indigenous against the foreigner.” These divisions were the backdrops of life in Somalia, structuring the life of the Bantu, and pushing them toward the bottom of society.

The British took control of Somalia from the Italians in 1941 and shut down the forced labor practices. A few decades later, in 1960, Somalia gained its independence. As the nation tried to rebuild, Somalia endured an uneasy peace, and state-sanctioned discriminatory policies continued to limit the Bantu peoples. In 1972, the government declared that the language Af Maxaa would be the official written language. This decision further alienated the Somali Bantu, who spoke mostly Maay Maay, from mainstream politics, government services and education. By the 1980s came a series of legal statutes that stripped most of the Somali Bantu from ownership of their land. As a result of the displacement brought about with the loss of land, some Bantu people migrated to the urban areas, where they gained a foothold in society as low-level workers in the building trades, and other forms of manual and semi-skilled labor.

When Mr. A. reflects on the history of the Bantu people, he has this to say: “Somalia declined diversity in my country. They declined diversity, and that is where the problem came in. Diversity is important. There were many people, and people can contribute ideas, can understand cultures, can help us move forward. We didn’t try to find that out.”

3.2 CIVIL WAR AND EXODUS

By the early 1990s, political unrest had destabilized Somalia, and the social and economic marginalizations of the Somali Bantu were exacerbated. In 1991, as a result of the overthrow of Mohammed Siad Barre, who had been a military dictator for 20 years, the nation fell into civil war. The fight for power between Arab clans in the south, and the British-controlled north, took its toll on the Bantu population, who were the backbone of agricultural production in the south. The war devastated local markets, and the interruption in food supplies led to a Somali hunger crisis. As a discriminated people with little political representation, the Somali Bantu were seen as outsiders – they had limited relationships with the Arab clans and were seen as separate from the people of the North – so they were severed from traditional and established networks of protection. As a result, roving warlords and militias from each side attacked the Somali Bantu without fear of state reprisal. Most of the food produced by Somali Bantu farmers was stolen, and the Bantu people were victimized by atrocities such as rape, robbery, and murder. Very rapidly, the Somali Bantu world, centered on family life and subsistence farming, began to unravel (Besteman 1999, Anthropology News 2009; Lehman and Eno 2003, Abdi 2015).

War first broke out in Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia, and the fight eventually came into lower Jubba. Mr. A was a young boy when the war crashed the threshold of his village,

destroying property and lives. Of his experience, he had this to say: “I remember the whole war. People came into your house and ask you for money. If you didn’t have money, they kill you. I remember everybody running.”

I am sitting with Mr. A in his home one winter at noontime, when he shares this story: Mr. A’s great-great-grandfather was a slave in Somalia. His family lore tells him that when freedom came, his great-great-grandfather relocated to the Jubba Valley and had a chance to start a new life. Over time, he built a substantial farm, planting mango trees and working the land to feed his family. The farm stayed in the family for generations, that is, until the civil war broke out in the early 1990s. The fighting eventually brought unspeakable brutality to the Jubba Valley and Mr. A’s family would need to leave their land. One day Mr. A’s uncle visited and said the situation was deteriorating. The family decided that rather than to die at the house, they would leave. Mr. A, at the time, was about 10 years old. Before the family could depart, he remembered that a soldier came to their village and lined up 10 people just to see how many people one bullet could kill. His uncle was placed in the line and shot dead. It was not safe for Mr. A’s family, so they left Jubba with hopes of getting to Kenya. They left in the midst of a very harsh drought in Somalia, and the Somali Bantu had to beg for food. Mr. A remembered arriving at a busy crossroads, and going to a gas station with about 50 other children to forage and beg. At the last minute, Mr. A decided it was too crowded to beg successfully and he walked in another direction. When he came back, looking for the other children, he found they had all been killed – caught in the crossfire of two groups – and their bodies lay dead on the road. Immediately after, his family began its long walk toward the border of Kenya to reach a refugee camp. It took four weeks, and the Somali Bantu had to guard against lion attacks. Mr. A’s 2-year-old sister died of thirst. He remembered his throat being so dry that he could not swallow food.

Other Bantu had stories just as harrowing. “We walked to Kenya,” Rasheed remembers, moving his hands to show walking patterns. “We walked for two days and two nights. We couldn't cook because soldiers would see the fire and smoke and come kill you. People died along the way. Lion eat people. No food, people die. No water, people die. It was dangerous.”

By 1992, the Bantu people began to flee north, leaving en masse for refugee camps about 40 miles away in Kenya. In the tumult of the war, an estimated 2 million people were dislocated from Somalia (Abdi 2015). By January 1994, an estimated 10,000 Somali Bantu had left their homes and were living in two camps: Dadaab, in northeastern Kenya, which is estimated to hold 160,000 Somali refugees; or in the Kakuma camp in northwestern Kenya, near Sudan, which is where most refugees are moved in preparation for resettlement to America. The two camps are both administered by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, or UNHCR, the Kenya government, and refugee leadership. And, both camps are located in the semi-arid Kenya outback, with sporadic water and electric service; rationed food supplies; and tents for homes. If the Somali Bantu made it to the Kenyan refugee camps, they were survivors, but it was still a difficult life. Mr. A and other families were some of the first groups of Somali Bantu people to arrive in Kenya during the exodus. Once in Kenya, many of the families tried to begin anew. Rasheed married, and his two oldest children were born in Kenya, one in the Kakuma refugee camp and the other in Dadaab.

Once in the camps, the Somali Bantu struggled to find a way forward. For a year, Rasheed went without work, before finally landing a position doing housekeeping. He did that job for three years. When he wasn't working, he rode a bike and rented himself out. He ran errands and rode people to their destinations on the bike, like a taxi. In between jobs, he survived on the street. He did whatever he could to buy food and help his family. In Kenya – as in

America – he said, you often have to make a choice between working to support your family or going to school and not eating. “If I go to school [and not work] my family no help, my family no clothes, and my family no food.”

Like other Somali men, Rasheed never had a chance to go to school. Not in Somalia, and not in the refugee camps, where many Somalis were able to take classes and language lessons to prepare to transfer to a different nation. In America, he learned the language by watching TV, and listening to the men on his job. He has never had an ESL lesson.

3.3 THE REFUGEE CAMPS

In Kenya, scores of Somali Bantu families resided at Dadaab, one of world’s biggest refugee camps. It hosts more than 463,000 refugees, according to the UNHCR. The camps are so vast, they are like small cities, containing their own bars, schools, clinics, banks, small-scale farming, and markets.

Discrimination is rampant in the camps because the majority of refugees are Somali people from Arab-descended clans. These clans, who controlled Somalia, were also fleeing the war. As result, so much of the social order in the camps resembles much of life as it was in Somalia. This meant that when the Somali Bantu did find jobs, they are earning but coins a day working the dirtiest tasks. They worked extenuating hours in jobs that consisted of digging latrines, washing pots at restaurants, and sewing, among other service tasks. Mr. H told me the Bantu people got the worst food, were harassed, and many of the Somali Bantu women were raped as they left the camp to get firewood. They survived on food handouts of corn, oil, sugar and some condiments. Food was incredibly scarce. Violence, starvation, and the death of

newborns were common events. Some likened the refugee camp to a prison as travel outside the camp was forbidden without permission.

The Somali Bantu were oppressed and targeted by other Somali clans. They got pushed to the periphery of the camp, where they were most vulnerable to bandit attacks. To strike back, they fortified their spaces with walls and armed security. Camps across sub-Saharan Africa that deal in refugee warehousing have several features in common. They are located in insecure areas and often semi-arid conditions. Most of the people who fill the camps are particularly vulnerable populations who have no place else to go. This includes single-mother families and the elderly. Displaced able-bodied men who are able to find work elsewhere, which is often done illegally, almost never permanently reside in the camps.

Decimated by war, Somali Bantu survivors tried to rebuild their lives in the crowded, isolated refugee camps. In Somalia, the Bantus were barred from school, which left them with limited education. A fragile education system in the refugee camps did offer the opportunity for the Bantu to attend school to learn to read and write basic Swahili or English. Mr. A lived in the camp from 1992-2004. While there, he went to school and learned some English. But in the classroom, the Somali people teased him and refused to sit beside him in class.

Hafiz remembers it was a difficult time, too. He lived in Kenya for 10 years before arriving in the United States in 2004. At the camp, he had no chance to go to school. Hafiz had to scrape by to help his family try to get enough food to eat. The outreach of NGOs provides a ration of grains each month, but it was not enough. To help out, Hafiz rented a bicycle. This way, he was able to run errands, pick up supplies and carry people to town on the bike. He would rent the bicycle for a week and split the profit with the owner. It was a competitive business as there were many young men on bikes hustling to make extra money. Hafiz explains, “If people didn’t

chose you, [to run errands on the bike] you went home with nothing. You really had to look out for yourself. So, if there was no bike, there was nothing in your pocket.” Hafiz had another side business. He and a crew of other men looking for work would build housing foundations made out of mud. If people came and were interested, they paid the crew to finish building the homes. During the rainy season, this was tough, because the rain would wash the mud foundations away.

In the camp, by the time he was 8 to 10 years old, Hafiz took on the responsibilities of someone who was much older. He was fortunate, he says, because he met a Somali Bantu businessman, “a good working guy,” who had a store in Kenya. “He hooked me up. He had a market, a meat store. I was really moving his meat, taking it home in a wagon or a bike. I helped to sell the meat. I was trying to help my family – most of the time I was skipping school. They wanted me to learn English. I was a fast learner, but I didn't focus on school.”

Shahid also worked in Kenya as a young teen. He was 12 when he found a job as a cook with a Kenyan militia group in the refugee camp. Because he worked at such an early age and so often, he didn't have much time to go to school. His mother died when he was a little boy in Somalia. He came to Kenya with a sister. They didn't have clothes or shoes. He only spent a year in school. Still, he thinks fondly of his work experience, “My job prepares me for life in America. If you're working and you get money, you have a good life. If you have no job, life is bad. If you're working you have money for rent, money to buy a car, money to buy anything.”

Among others, these stories are important because they show the entrepreneurial and persevering spirit of many of the Somali Bantu men. To survive the poverty of the camps, and to aid family, the Somali Bantu men worked hard in dirty, menial tasks for little money for long hours. In the long arc of their lives, it is not behavior that keeps them impoverished but an

unfortunate history of enslavement, racialization, war violence, and low wages that keep them unable to integrate into society.

By 2000, Shahid and his sister were moved to the Kakuma camp in preparation for passage to the United States. They were happy and ready to move, but the 2001 terror attacks on U.S. soil on Sept. 11 disrupted the resettlement process as security clearance was made more rigorous due to reports – and fears – that Somalia was a nation sheltering terrorists. The delay, fostered by stigmatization from the West, caused thousands of Somali Bantu to languish in the barren camps; while they waited, many children died of malnutrition (Washington Post 2003; Swarns 2003). However, by 2003, the U.S. State Department said it would begin interviewing refugees to determine resettlement eligibility. To qualify, the Somali Bantu would undergo a security check, medical exams, literacy training and cultural orientation. These tasks mostly took place in the Kakuma refugee camp, near Sudan. There, the mostly unschooled peasant farmers learned basic English, how to flush a toilet, and received lessons about modern appliances.

3.4 UNEASY BEGINNINGS: U.S. POLICY ON ASYLUM

The door to allow Somali Bantu refugees to resettle in America was first opened when Congress passed the Refugee Act of 1980, which allowed for refugees to come to the U.S. to escape Communist or Middle East nations. U.S. refugee resettlement policy shifted post-Cold War from being political and ideological to being a more humanitarian selection policy, one that wasn't driven by foreign policy or refugees' ability to assimilate. The UNHCR says resettlement refers to the selection and transfer of refugees to a third state, which agrees to admit them with

permanent residence status and provide them with rights comparable to those enjoyed by the country's own citizens, including the opportunity to become naturalized citizens (Boas 2007).

In 1999, nearly a decade after the beginning of the civil war in Somalia, the U.S. government, with vocal advocacy from the Congressional Black Caucus, had decided that the Somali Bantu people were a persecuted group and eligible for resettlement to America. It then launched the largest resettlement ever undertaken by the U.S. State Department to place more than 14,000 Somali Bantus in 52 American cities by March 1994. More than half of the newcomers were expected to be children under 17 (Besteman 1999; Boas 2007).

By 2005, a time when most Somali Bantu were arriving in the United States, the Immigration and Nationality Act defined a refugee as an alien “displaced abroad who is unable or unwilling to return to, and is unable or unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of, that country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion” (U.S. Immigration Policy on Asylum Seekers, 2005).

In the 1990s, the United States, under pressure to meet its committed quota of African refugees, was more likely to be the resettlement nation after efforts failed elsewhere. Without the possibility of resettlement in Tanzania or Mozambique, Somali Bantu scholars Lehman and Eno (2003) wondered if the refugees were ill-served by having them settled in a Western land that almost certainly meant an impoverished life in government-subsidized housing in American cities and reliance on a U.S. welfare system that manages poverty but provides few opportunities for social mobility. According to a 2003 analysis by the Center for Immigration Studies, more than \$5 billion per year was spent on food stamps, Medicaid and other benefits for refugees in the States (Boas 2007). There were those who argued the money would be better spent

supporting intraregional resettlement in Africa, which, at the same time, would have boosted African nations' economies, while resettling Somali Bantu in neighboring African nations that were religiously, linguistically, and ethnically familiar. There were also claims that an institutional bias by U.S. resettlement agencies pushed against intra-Africa resettlement, thereby funneling U.S. resettlement and development funding into their own agencies. But resettlement into America can be problematic as well, as shifting and limited government budgets and economics can make it difficult to provide sustained support to the Somali Bantu refugees. In recent years, resettlement resources have been diverted to the U.S. focus on terrorism. The lack of support can make it more difficult for refugees to thrive in their new land (Boas 2007).

In coming to the U.S., the Somali Bantus would join a surging group of African immigrants heading to America. The numbers of Africans coming to the U.S. jumped from 3,318 in 1990 to roughly 20,000 a decade later. The growth, in part, was sparked by the end of the Cold War – when refugees coming from the Soviet Union and Vietnam were in decline and refugees coming from Africa were on the rise. There has been criticism of the massive resettlement effort of the Somali Bantu. Barnett (2003), which suggested that the process was too influenced by a global human rights agenda, that there was too little exploration of repatriation within Africa, and that there was a negative perception that Somali Bantu are terrorists. A case was made that today's refugee resettlement is not based on national security interests, but rather stemmed from advocacy by influential non-governmental organizations. This influence was claimed to be the force that drove the decision to accept the Somali Bantu as a persecuted "group" without refugee status on individual claims. Barnett's 2003 report goes on to say that the lack of effort to resettle African refugees in Africa was based on the Western concept that "Africa is a basket case," referencing the Afro-pessimism that aid to African nations is futile. However, Barnett's report

argued that clearly rural/agrarian people, such as the Somali Bantu, could have been absorbed into stable African nations. Some of the Somali Bantu refugees have successfully been re-integrated in their ancestral homeland, Tanzania. Another criticism found that any effort to re-integrate more Somali Bantu into African nations was met with skepticism from UNHCR officials and failed because Tanzania and Mozambique were never guaranteed development assistance, or logistical or political support. Moreover, in the process of determining who gets resettled, many of the refugee contractors did not speak any African languages and knew little of the people or region where they worked, which makes it difficult to keep families together and avoid the fraud of other groups posing as Somali Bantu to get resettled in the United States (Barnett 2003).

The Somali Bantus and other African refugees do seem to lack a comparable level of resettlement assistance that was provided to other groups. The Hmong, from southeast Asia, who were resettled in the United States in 1982, were given three years of government assistance (time to finish their education, to be promoted on a job, and to stabilize family connections). In contrast, the Somali Bantu must push toward self-sufficiency in eight months. Without appropriate support, according to Boas' report (2007), people coming here are vulnerable and could be entering into "an intergenerational cycle of poverty, which is hardly a humanitarian act and could have dire consequences for both the African refugees and their American neighbors." Despite these concerns, the Somali Bantu still came to America. They were resettled in Boston, Charlotte, San Diego, Tucson, Ariz., Lewiston, Maine, and other cities. Similar to the U.S. Great Migration, a multi-decade movement that began in the early 1900s and had millions of Black Americans leave the rural South for the industrializing North (Trotter and Day 2010), the Somali Bantu were also moving from an agrarian way of life into an urban economy. As an oppressed, persecuted minority in Somalia, the Somali Bantus were blocked from formal education. They

came to America possessing limited capital in terms of education levels, language and the knowledge of urban skills. They were farmers looking for jobs as fast-food workers or as cleaning people in a time of a deep recession in the American economy. Just like with the marginalized rural U.S. Blacks, who migrated to Northern cities at the turn of the 20th century, Somali Bantu were unskilled for urban living and most could work only low-wage, low-skilled, manual labor positions to earn a living (Besteman 1999; Swarns 2003). And, as we shall see in the following chapters, in this Northeastern American city, these class realities would impact where and how the Somali Bantu are able to rebuild their lives. Chapter 4 introduces us to Mr. H and Mr. A, two different Somali Bantu fathers whose stories highlight the reasons how and why the Somali Bantu began their move into Southview Estates.

4.0 COMING INTO SOUTHVIEW

This chapter discusses the everyday life of Mr. H and Mr. A as representative of Somali Bantu refugees adjusting to life in a public housing community impacted by race and poverty. It also shows how their refugee status shapes their social practices and interactions and enables them to thrive in this neighborhood.

4.1 ON THE MOVE: MR. H

In June 2011, Mr. H was pulling his kitchen utensils and putting them in boxes. His kids are gathering their shoes and stuffing their clothes in Black garbage bags and Black suitcases – the kind with wheels that roll behind you. After a year-and-a-half, the family is leaving their two-story home on the central North Side. It is an old home, but it is spacious. It has four bedrooms, two baths, and a laundry room. In the community, a new public library is two blocks away; museums, sports stadiums are in walking distance. A full grocery and business district are five blocks away. A small, welcoming mosque is across the street. A 100-year-old African Methodist church sits on the corner. From his front door, Mr. H can peer down the street and see in the distance the neighborhood jewel: a sprawling inner-city park with a duck pond, tennis courts, tree-lined walking trails, and a nationally known aviary. He is in the midst of a vibrant, diverse

neighborhood with access to downtown and multiple public buses to serve various neighborhoods, and he is leaving. Mr. H is moving to Southview Estates, an isolated public housing community once reputed to be a violence-prone drug haven.

Mr. H's decision to move to Southview Estates speaks to two larger patterns: the Bantu refugees, as low-income workers, cannot afford to live unassisted in more moderate neighborhoods, and to care for their large families and to not be pressed economically, they need to live in more affordable housing. Mr. H struggled with low-paying odd jobs and the toll of economic adjustment was distressful. Mr. H, like many Somali Bantu, prayed for an opportunity to find a place to reconnect to family and recreate life that was much more supportive, like they would have had in the Jubba Valley. And, moving to Southview, despite its reputation, provided the families with not just the place to cope economically, it also created a space where they could build stronger cultural and kinship ties.

"We need help," Mr. H told me, referencing his family. Mr. H is married to Kasha. She is his first wife; he is her second husband. They met in the refugee camp. He has eight children: stepdaughter Maraam, 21; stepson Amir, 16; Arif, 14; Lunah, 10; Asha, 8; Malika, 5; Kamila, 2; Juwan, 4 months. His rent is \$500. The water bill is more than a \$100 a month, plus there are electricity and gas and telephone bills. Between car repair and diapers, groceries and clothing, he is economically overwhelmed and cannot manage.

In 2004, Mr. H came to this Northeastern city from the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya. He was part of 14,000 Somali Bantu arriving in the United States. Like many Somali Bantu, Mr. H has taken a few English As a Second Language classes (once proudly showing me a certificate he's earned). It's a significant achievement as he came to the United States having never gone to school in Somalia. With the aid of a refugee agency, and friends who are friends with the

volunteers who helped his family with resettlement, he was able to find his first job, working as a janitor and cleaner at a care facility for the elderly. He was paid \$10 an hour. As a strategy for acculturation and assimilation, as much as possible, the Bantu fathers took ESL classes and stayed connected to the resettlement volunteers to find jobs. The classes for Mr. H became a way to gain some confidence in moving toward the broader society. I learned this as Mr. H said to me that the English means “he can talk to [new] people, the school teacher, and ride the bus.”

But the Somali Bantu also depend on family as a way to find jobs and begin the assimilation process. After a year and a half in the Northeastern city, Mr. H moved his family to Omaha, Nebraska. He followed his cousins there and worked at a poultry factory, cleaning. It was a nasty job, he said, having to mop up the blood and chicken parts every night. He was there four years. Then, he decided to bring his family back to this Northeastern city. Because his return coincides with a national recession and the federal government has cut back on its supply of Section 8 vouchers, which provide housing assistance to needy families, Mr. H does not get support with staying in the home on the central North Side. The Housing Authority tells Mr. H there is space in a housing development about a 10-minute drive from where he lives.

Mr. H shows up at his new home in Southview Estates, he is moving into a space where two apartments have been remodeled to accommodate one family. There is fresh white paint on the walls. There are two bathrooms, a small kitchen with stove and refrigerator and five bedrooms. Mr. H is pleased to be here because he'll save money. His rent is only \$375 a month and there is no water, or gas, or light bill. The family gets \$1,100 a month in food stamps.

4.2 ON THE MOVE: MR. A

It is August 2011 and storm clouds are gathering over the community of Lawrence, where Mr. A sits outside of his home on 32nd Street. He is considering moving the big-screen TV, the children's mattresses, and couch back into the house. But soon his friends – volunteers from a local church – arrive to load Mr. A's furniture before the rains come. He is moving to Southview Estates, too. Much like Mr. H, Mr. A cannot afford to live in Lawrence, a rapidly gentrifying community that is full of diverse families, ethnic restaurants, small art galleries, and small businesses. In Lawrence, Mr. A's rent is \$500 a month. Then there are the water, electricity and gas bills to pay. He is leaving the small two-bedroom home; he lived on the first floor and other Somali Bantus who were like "family" lived on the second. He is also leaving behind the convenience of a neighborhood full of services. There is a grocery nearby that he could walk to; Rosefield, a vibrant, walking neighborhood full of small shops and restaurants was 5 minutes away; Armory Park, where his children would play, and a library were a few blocks away. "The neighborhood was really, really good that I can't even imagine. If I want to walk around and go, that is not a problem. What we needed for the house, say like shopping, for example, if I didn't have my car, [in Lawrence] it was easier. I don't have to drive, or if I have [a] problem with my car, I don't have to call somebody, we could get there with no problem."

As low-skilled and low-wage workers, the Somali Bantu, now among the inner-city poor, do not make sufficient wages and must rely on social service assistance to help provide the basic necessities of life. In Mr. A's case, he works a part-time job in the produce section of a big grocery store. He could not afford the range of utility fees and housing costs to live in Lawrence. He needed the assistance of subsidized housing. When he came to this Northeastern city, almost immediately, he went to the city's Housing Authority to seek help. Living space in a public

housing development was his second choice, but the Housing Authority told him it was the only space that was available and that there were no more vouchers for Section 8 assistance. A week after Mr. A applied, he was assigned to Southview Estates. These two case studies show that their low-wage income is a structural condition that pushes the Bantu into areas of concentrated poverty, which has the capacity to affect their inner-city life. The social networks they access as refugees help to minimize this threat.

4.3 MR. H – WHO IS HE?

Mr. H is 40, now. When he entered the U.S., the government assigned him a birth date of Jan. 1, 1973. He is a small man, his skin the color of an aged hickory tree, and he has large almond-shaped eyes. His eyes always seem to be red. (He would later find out this is because he's become diabetic.) He is quiet, but quick to laugh. And demonstrative: he is always holding his young daughters; listening to them read.

Mr. H is an always-smiling father of eight. He has some English-language training but prefers to speak his first tongue: Kiziguwa. His friendships are mostly among Somali Bantu and groups that help African immigrants. He has worked in a laundry and in janitorial services. He is a member of the newly formed Somali Bantu Community Association, but his role is limited: he will host meetings but shies away from formal leadership. His use of technology is mostly for entertainment; chiefly this involves watching movies on TV. His greatest concern is that his youngest daughters, all born in America, are losing their cultural roots. One day, he nearly cried

when he revealed to me that they often cannot understand him when he addresses them in Kiziguwa; he needs the older children to translate.

Like many Somali Bantu refugees, Mr. H feels sadness about his children losing the language. For the refugees, it is a function of coming into a new place and fearing the loss of their original culture. For Mr. H, the language Kiziguwa denotes the tribal community he belongs to. It is a common language spoken among the masses of Bantu people in Somalia. It is the language he shares with his wife and with his eldest daughter, a frequent interpreter of our interviews. But because his children, especially the younger girls, go to American schools where they read, write and practice English, their understanding and use of Kiziguwa is fading.

Like for most of the Somali Bantu, Mr. H's background shows the remarkable journey they have made to become U.S. citizens. He was born on Musagiyo, a farm in the Jubba Valley where he grew up and worked with his identical twin brother and his other three brothers and three sisters. His father was a farmer, and cows, chickens, and goats rumbled across their land. In Somalia, Mr. H worked as a homebuilder. He'd walk into the jungle, cut trees and sell the wood and fix people's homes. He then worked for a farm company, as a deliveryman, carrying bananas, mangoes, on his back for 20 miles to sell at the market. He then had to walk back. Along the way, he and the other deliverymen had to be on guard against lion attacks. When the war came, the family walked to Kenya, where they stayed first in the Dadaab refugee camp and then in the camp Kakuma, a Swahili word meaning "nowhere." Mr. H lived in the United States for nine years before he became a citizen in 2014. Mr. H's refugee life in the U.S. has resulted in him learning a new language, gaining new jobs, and being able to drive across the States, and getting citizenship. These levels of acculturation have been instrumental in opening up access to networks. It has replaced his old life where he worked as a builder and brick maker in Jubba.

4.4 MR. A – WHO IS HE?

Mr. A is 30. He is a married father of four who is more cosmopolitan. He has had some formal education in the United States and has completed a few community-college classes. His English is fluent, and the fluency gives him access to a wide array of associations, including contact with advocates in other immigrant organizations, faith leaders, a broad circle of professional women who assist with housing and settlement issues, and connections at a local university with a tutoring group, including a recently named Rhodes Scholar. He uses Facebook, webpages, and email to sustain new relationships. He's employed now at a big-box store in the suburbs, but has worked for a major airline as a customer service representative. His greatest concern is giving his children "as many models of success as possible."

He has brown eyes that blaze with intensity. At the time I first met him, he had lived in this Northeastern city for four months. He first settled here in 2004, but by 2006, he had moved to the western United States, where he talked his way into a job as a records clerk with a state's Health and Human Rights Project; later he would go to work as a customer service representative with a large airline. In 2011, he realized the cost of living out West was expensive and he returned to the Northeastern U.S. to begin again. Mr. A became a citizen in the summer of 2012. Mr. A highlights two concerns: that family networks matter for Somali Bantu, as the networks often keep them attached to information on jobs. But he also shows that advanced language skills and higher education for the Somali Bantu refugees can provide an opportunity to broaden networks and participate in the larger society, such as gaining citizenship.

“Being an American is important,” he told me. “There is lots of racism everywhere, but in America it is more easier to deal with. People can hear you here. You have a voice. Things are way, way better. [But] giving my citizenship to this country has been hard. It’s like letting my ancestors and everybody go.”

Mr. A’s fluency in English underscores the importance of learning advanced language skills. He does not consider it as a step to losing his Bantu identity. He still speaks Kiziguwa in the home and at meetings. Rather, he considers speaking English as a way to give a power to your community, a way to communicate concerns, and a way to be heard.

Mr. A was born and raised in Jubba. His family had a farm there and they lived in a compound of mud homes. The family took care of their maize crops during the day and sang and danced in the evenings after mealtime. Two decades ago, Mr. H and Mr. A were neighbors in the Jubba Valley. Mr. A remembers his mother would leave the compound and walk the narrow dirt paths to the market. On her return, she would stop at the home of Mr. H to chat with his family. As the adults shared stories of village life and community happenings, Mr. A would play soccer in the green fields with Mr. H and his siblings. Today, both Mr. H and Mr. A are first-generation Somali Bantu refugees living in this Northeastern city. They are neighbors again, this time living a short narrow dirt path from each other in Southview Estates.

To make ends meet, more Somali Bantu families have settled in Southview Estates. When I first followed Mr. H on his move to Southview, there were seven Bantu families living in the public housing community. Two years later, there are 20 families living in this space. And, there are more who want to come here. Once in Southview, another benefit accrues for the families. They are able to (re)create community, developing a space where their close proximity to family and friends – now within walking distance of each other – means they can care for each

other, share information, access the same language and cultural practices. These familial contacts become a resource for finding jobs and for maintaining identity. Families living in impoverished spaces use a variety of strategies to survive in those spaces. One strategy is relying on reciprocal relationships and mutual trust and forming networks of cooperative help (Stack 1970).

As refugees, the Somali Bantu lack economic resources and face fiscal stresses immediately on their arrival in this Northeastern city. This means they must rely on government assistance. The federal Office of Resettlement decided to provide agencies with \$800 per resettled person. Half of that sum goes toward overhead, and the other half goes toward covering the family's expenses during their first months in the United States. A family is expected to pay back at least \$850 per adult member for the airfare cost of arriving in the United States. Across the nation, in the first few months of the Somali Bantu resettlement, churches that volunteered to sponsor Somali Bantu families were advised to offer a budget of \$5,000 a year for a family of four – or in other words a sum of about \$416 a month, or \$96 a week to help cover rent, medical help, and dishes and diapers (McGill 2004; Besteman, 1999).

Government resettlement aid ends after eight months. In four months, the resettled Somali Bantu refugees are pushed toward having to make it on their own. In doing so, they had to face a dizzying array of obstacles: find a job; find safe housing; find a support system.

4.5 GETTING SETTLED: A SOMALI BANTU VILLAGE

When they arrived in this Northeastern city, a Catholic charity, recognizing their status as refugees, aimed to help the Bantu carve out a path to community and support services. The goal was to house at least 50 Bantus near one another on the North Side, in an apartment building that

Catholic Charities was to renovate. In 2009, that space was rated substandard and the charity would need to consider new housing for the Bantu.

A church-owned property was rehabbed, but it was located in an underserved, low-income area, blighted by high crime and poverty. It was also built as transitional housing, and the Somali Bantu were to live there no longer than six months. In time, there would also be competition from other resettled groups, who also needed space to begin anew. The rent was to be \$450 a month for a three-bedroom apartment.



Figure 4: Somali Bantu Education Appreciation Day

Also, when Mr. A came to this Northeastern city in 2005, he recalls being a part of conversations with the charity and the city's Refugee Center. There were plans to house all of the Somali Bantu families in Southview Estates. According to Mr. A, the goal was to create a community nestled within a larger Black community and it was being called a Somali Bantu

village. Mr. A recalls that the charity and the Refugee Center were very involved and thought that the plan to congregate the Somali Bantu in one central location was a good idea. But there were volunteers from local churches and other groups concerned about where the families would live. Based on news reports and the perceptions from the white volunteers and white aid workers. Southview Estates was not a safe place to live. There were concerns about security and the idea cooled. Nevertheless, over time, the Somali Bantu “village” in Southview Estates began to manifest itself because of a combination of circumstances. More and more, impoverished Somali Bantu families, attracted by the relatively low cost of living, came to this public housing community; the rebuilding and razing of several public housing communities meant that families had to be relocated and the only available space was in Southview Estates, and finally, a scarcity of vouchers to support Section 8 subsidized housing in middle-income communities meant that the only option for support was for the Somali Bantu to live in Southview. When they came, they made it a place that they could call home. The families see each other practically every day. They pass on the bus. They give each other rides to the grocery store and to work. In many ways, their interaction in Southview manifests the Somali Bantu “village” that social service agencies envisioned when the families first began arriving in this city. Through their interaction in Southview, it is possible to see the (re)creation of their home culture.

4.6 THE VILLAGE IN SOUTHVIEW ESTATES

On many levels, while their refugee status has given them access to networks and opportunities to acculturate and integrate that could detach them from race and poverty, once the Bantu arrive

in Southview, they are reminded of where they come from. The structural conditions remind them of the refugee camps. The geography and ability to rely on each other by being so close reminds them of their life in the Jubba Valley. They decorate their homes in the bright cloths they would have used in Somalia. In warm weather, the Bantu mothers – their colorful clothing and headscarves blowing in the wind – will visit and sit with the other Somali Bantu ladies. They are often caring for the youngest children, who are outside playing and riding their bikes.

The men cut each other's hair for no charge. "Cutting hair is not money. It's something we do for free. We don't charge each other," said Mr. H. "I don't ask my brother to pay." When they give each other rides to work or the market, there is no charge.

The closeness of the Somali Bantu families reminds Mr. A of Somalia and the Jubba Valley, too. One evening, we sit in his living room and he tells me "One thing about the Somali Bantu, we all are like one big family. We all know each other. Not from the refugee camps," he said, "but from home," where clans are connected by linkages to great-great-grandfathers.

I see this closeness frequently. At a reception before a recent Somali Bantu summer wedding, I meet in the basement of the one of the homes. The men are gathered there on carpet with their shoes and sandals kicked off. They are there for six hours before the wedding, sitting and talking and debating American culture and news of Somalia. Mr. H, as the stepfather of the bride, serves as host. Others, as they arrive, contribute food and soft drinks. They gather and socialize over tea, bananas, lamb's meat, or chicken and rice. As Muslims, most of the men don't drink alcohol or smoke. At least not publicly – in their homes, privately, I have seen a few smoke cigarettes and sip beer. It is not unusual for me to visit a home, kick my shoes off, and be offered shi-shi (hot tea) and bananas. A short prayer is made to Allah and we begin talking or watching

TV. “It’s more comfortable here [in Southview Estates] because of the Africans. Nobody bothers us. But I feel like I’m in Africa. We see no white people,” said Mr. H.

For many of the Somali Bantu families, being in Southview Estates – the socioeconomics and geography – is strikingly similar to living in the impoverished Kenya refugee camps. The men don’t work here, Mr. H told me. They stand on the corners or walk around all day, just like back in the refugee camps where men don’t have jobs. The vast empty, grassy spaces – the “background” he calls it – remind him of the Jubba valley savannahs. “It’s Africa here,” he said.

4.7 THE CREATION OF SOUTHVIEW ESTATES

And, of course, Southview Estates, this “Africa” in America, was not created in a vacuum. To understand how it came to be so segregated and impoverished means understanding the historical, political, social, and economic contexts in which it developed. In this Northeastern city, at the beginning of the 20th century, Blacks lived in fairly integrated communities. During the Great Migration, thousands of Southern Blacks came to this city for jobs. The city became crowded and European immigrants – with jobs and access to different neighborhoods – decided they no longer wanted to live so close to Blacks. Over the years, the lack of access to jobs and “white flight” created a Black ghetto. By the mid-point of the 20th century in this Northeastern city, early racism and a scarcity of economic resources, along with urban renewal – the forced removal and tearing down of Black and poor neighborhoods – and the development of the public housing projects, became formidable barriers for the mobility of this city’s African American masses (Tucker 1909; Cayton and Drake 1945; Greenwald and Anderson 1996).

Southview Estates was one of two housing projects built during the postwar period as a

result of Truman's New Deal program. When it was completed in 1962, city planners used the isolated land to house 3,000 low-income people in a space of less than a square mile. Unlike the city's other housing developments, Southview was secluded and removed from any commercial area, as well as from the mill jobs along the riverfronts. Furthermore, negative perceptions that portrayed Blacks as criminals who fueled neighborhood deterioration shaped the racial segregation of life in the housing projects. As more Blacks moved into the housing projects, the more the white tenants moved out (Massey and Denton 1993; Trotter and Day 2010). The "white flight" meant that between 1970 and 1990, Blacks began to make up more than 80 percent of all public housing residents in this city.

The public housing development sits at the far-most northern edge of the city on one of the highest plateaus in the city. It is not easy to get there. One has to cross a high-level bridge or trek a narrow, sloping two-lane street that resembles a road in rural Appalachia. The development was built by the city's public Housing Authority between 1955-1962. The Estates has a history of crime and violence. So much so, that in the mid-1990s all but two of the roads leading into Southview were closed off by concrete barriers.

The bulk of the housing is a series of non-descript brick two-floor housing units that line the broad avenues of Southview. Over the years, the Housing Authority has tried to minimize the density. Some units have been razed and now many of the residents live in one-family apartments that are connected to multiple units. One family lives on a second level and another on street level. The apartments have small front or backyards. In their first summer in their residence, Mr. H would plant a small garden of corn and salad greens in their front yard.

An apartment tower designated for senior citizens rises in the middle of the development. From it, one can see out over the long, asphalt streets that are laid out on a grid and in the

distance see downtown, a place that seems almost unreachable. Surveillance cameras hang from most of the street posts. Residents complain that some of the cameras don't work and do little to prevent crime. Around the grounds, the grass is often unkempt, and residents dump their garbage in huge dumpsters set at the edge of the street.

There is one small market that sits on the ground floor of the senior high-rise building. When people enter, they must place their bags at the front when they shop. Otherwise, there is no industry here—no bank, no mosque, no gas station, no department store, no full-service grocery, no library. It is a place bereft of a middle class. The elementary school that served the community closed in autumn 2012, because of school district budget cuts. When it shut its doors, the scores of middle-class teachers and education professionals who had come into the neighborhood disappeared, too. There are few community institutions, too. There is a tiny health clinic, run by a Christian non-profit. There is an Urban League satellite office, a faith-based agency that offers tutoring, and there is Youth Corner, which coordinates – mostly in the warm months – soccer and football leagues, and other sports and life-skills programming for teenagers.

Southview Estates' hilly and tree-lined topography separates it from its nearest neighbors, two predominately working-class communities, one of which was home to the former mayor of this Northeastern city. Being so geographically separated, the people of Southview Estates never integrated into the wider community and it became its own island of poverty. The natural and class boundaries served to landlock Southview Estates away from opportunity, producing a ghetto where class, race and cultural distinctions are reinforced and stigmatized. "A natural area is a geographical area characterized both by physical individuality and by the cultural characteristics of the people who live in it" (Zorbaugh, 1926). With these boundaries, residents

of Southview Estates were marked as strangers – a people different and distinct from the white residents in the working-class communities that sandwiched them in.

For people who don't drive, two public buses come into Southview Estates. They both access downtown. But to get to the closest major shopping mall and employment district, which is about two miles away, residents would have to walk a mile to a bus stop or travel into downtown and transfer.

Bottom line: Families have to be poor to live in Southview Estates. It is literally state-sanctioned concentrated poverty. In Southview, the subsidized housing helps provide a place to live, but Mr. H and his family of eight and the other Bantu families here will never own a home here. Neither will any of the families who rent here and have been in Southview Estates for generations. For the 460 families who live here, concentrated poverty connects them to concentrated disadvantage – higher crime, poorer health, and lack of access to jobs. Living in Southview Estates means the possibility of being entrenched into a circle of deprivations – failing schools, broken families, lack of jobs, violence, crime, and drugs. “The coincidence of rising poverty and high levels of segregation guarantees that Blacks will be exposed to a social and economic environment that is harsher than anything experienced by any other racial or ethnic group” (Massey and Denton, 1993).

Increasingly, it is becoming an African diasporic space. In the 2010 Census, 4.3 percent or 62 people who lived in the Southview Estates identified themselves as being from sub-Saharan Africa (Somalia, South Africa). Living in a community with such high rates of joblessness and poverty, the Bantu families are enmeshed amid the urban underclass. The isolation threatens to cut their families away from working-class role models, and greatly devalues their social capital and connections to informal job networks (Wilson, 1980).

Chapter 5 will take a closer look at how the Somali Bantu cope in this community and how they draw upon two primary social networks to begin the process of “surviving” in the larger society and making a home in Southview Estates.

5.0 NAVIGATING HOME AND COMMUNITY FOR THE SOMALI BANTU

The Somali Bantu now live among the Black urban poor and find their lives and interactions connected to the networks and social relations that are present in Southview.

The Bantu know they cannot make it here alone. Their stories reveal that one strategy they use to navigate this impoverished space is by accessing networks within and outside the community. In this space, they encounter local residents whom they call “no-good” and “wonderful.” The Bantu shun the “no good,” the people hanging on corners suspected of being connected to drugs and violence. However, they bond with the “wonderful” people, a network of kindly African American neighbors who are middle aged and older men and women who are protective of each other and their neighbors. The other network they access is an alliance of mostly middle-aged white women, who are connected to local churches and refugee relief agencies, as well as college-age tutors who are connected to a local research university.

Within the context of the U.S. social system, where the racialized caste system confers differential access to social and cultural capital, each network provides advantages according to its level of privilege and power in society. I use “wonderful people,” because this is what the Somali Bantu call the majority of their neighbors in Southview Estates. I refer to the circle of professional and white volunteers as the helpers, because in describing their relationships with the white people, the Somali Bantu would say “he helped me,” or “she helped me.”

5.1 LIFE AND DEATH

When Mr. A woke up at 7 a.m. on August 1, there was yellow police tape stretched a few yards from his front door. Overnight, a 19-year-old Black man was fatally shot in the chest. The victim was a resident of Southview Estates. He was killed following a late-night basketball game when a group of boys – believed to be from Southview – approached the group and said that anyone on the court who was not from Southview would have to die. Minutes later, according to news accounts, 10 to 12 shots rang out and the young man was found dead, just doors from where he lived. The next morning, Mr. A is up early to take his wife to work and get two of his four children ready for school. He soon discovers that the police are on site and have sealed off the area near his home in a search for evidence. He is startled by the crowd and must navigate the police and the curious onlookers as he makes his way to his Honda SUV. He starts up and leaves.

It has been a violent few days in Southview Estates. In the summer of 2014, at the end of July, three homicides take place within three days in Southview. All the victims were Black American males. All three homicides occurred within steps of the homes of Bantu families.

Two streets over from Mr. A, his Somali Bantu neighbor, Mr. H, parks his van next to a car riddled with bullets. At the nearby corner sits a pyramid of stuffed animals, candles, and sympathy cards: it's a makeshift, street-corner shrine to where Eric (not his real name) was shot. The 19-year-old was just coming home from his shift as a laborer when two groups of people started shooting at each other. Eric was caught in the crossfire and hit in the eye by a stray bullet. He died a few blocks from his home. Neighborhood people said Eric had his future snatched away. The local paper reported he had just finished his first year at community college and was considering applying to four-year universities. Scores of people, including some of the Somali Bantu, gathered at a nighttime vigil for Eric. "There's not enough candles to burn anymore,"

lamented one Southview Estates mother. “To look at all these homicides, it's as if we are a community filled with nothing but killers,” she said.

Down the street from Mr. H, more police tape marks the wooded area next to Shahid's home; he, too, lives a short distance from where a victim's slashed body was thrown into the nearby woods. The killing was particularly brutal. The victim's throat was slashed and his arms were severed. Police say the man, 33, was not a resident of Southview. Neighbors are stunned by the violence. They tell me that a “bad element” is part of their community and they feel abandoned by law enforcement. There are several surveillance cameras mounted throughout the housing community. “Why aren't these cameras finding these criminals?” asked the mother in Southview Estates. “Why aren't the police making arrests?”

Residents say they need help and they are fearful when the violence sparks because, just like with Eric, it's easy to be caught in the crossfire. The Somali Bantu families believe the violence makes it bad for “all of us,” said Mr. A.

5.2 SOUTHVIEW ESTATES AND VIOLENCE

Such acts of interpersonal aggression signify that the Somali Bantu live in a space where violence is unpredictable. It's also a place where violence has rules. To avoid trouble, neighbors say they mind their own business. In Southview, they tell me, there are not enough jobs to keep young men occupied and they have too much time on their hands. Mr. A, Mr. H, and Shahid work outside of the community and have little contact with the people on the corner, who they assume should either be at work or in school. One late summer morning, Mr. H gets into his van,

and drives to his job as a grocery aide. He passes the men on the corner. The blast of hip-hop music almost drowns out the Swahili music Mr. H has on the CD player in his van. “This is no good,” he tells me, referencing the bands of people – mostly young men, but some older men, too, standing – or sitting in lawn chairs – on corners. “In America, it is good to work.”

When Somali Bantu families first began to move into Southview Estates, many of them heard rumors that violence and crack sales plagued the neighborhood. Upon arriving, they were harassed and targeted for vandalism. Mr. H says most of the harassment came from Black males teenagers who saw the newcomers as prey. To keep themselves safe, the Somali Bantu learned from other Southview residents to avoid interactions with the groups of people congregated on the corners. When the Somali Bantu are home, they remain largely cloistered among their family. But because they live on the same blocks and share the same public spaces – bus stops, sports fields, parking areas – the Somali Bantu cannot avoid the “no-good.” Thus, they are never far from the violence that sparks. Sometimes it is just steps from their front doors.

5.3 COPING WITH VIOLENCE

Two weeks after the three homicides take place in Southview Estates, the issue of deadly aggression and safety comes up at an August meeting of the Somali Bantu Association. Our earlier meetings were held in Southview, in the home of Mr. H, but after about a year and a half, the group meets across town in a new cooperative for international populations. The cooperative provides office spaces and other services for refugee/immigrant groups in the city. Here Mr. A expresses his concern for the community as a whole. He feels connected to Southview and is

concerned about safety; but his comments also reveal that the Somali Bantu understand that while there are neighborly Black Americans in Southview Estates, who work to make the community safer and stronger, there are also people in the community who are “not good.”

Mr. A: Living in Southview Estates, there have been shootings. It is not about us (Somali Bantu people), it is other people fighting. The Somali people are really concerned. If we have our children outside, if we are coming home from work, coming from the store. This is senseless shooting, it can happen to anyone. Vanita Less is concerned. She is asking what can housing (authority) do? They sent a letter. They want a meeting with all residents. There are a lot of “wonderful” people in the community. How can we help each other, come together and solve this problem. People are concerned that it doesn’t involve immigrants, but what do we tell our children about going outside? We are living in the same neighborhood, we have to be concerned. Today in the world, there is no safe place. We have to find a solution. Southview Estates is beautiful, we know each other now. Every community has somebody who is not good.

The heightened violence makes clear that, as a way of coping, the Somali Bantu classify people into a good and bad binary. The Bantu cannot completely avoid the contact with the community residents they call “not good” – those who they perceive as the alienated and jobless people on the corner who are often linked to the underground economy of drug dealing and its combustible harassment and violence. In referencing or commenting on the behavior, the Somali Bantu say it is “not good” or “he is no good,” which can be compared to the Black American saying that a person is “up to no good” to describe criminal behavior.

But, the three days of violence also highlight that they also are in contact with another group of people who reside in the community – friendly Black American neighbors who reach

out to the Somali Bantu, welcoming them to the neighborhood and engaging in reciprocal relations. These friendly neighbors are middle-age or older, some of them work, but they are responsible, long-time residents of the community who sit on their patios and stay close to their homes. These men and women, just like the Bantu, disdain the violence and aspire to have a community free of gang and drug tensions, which they say are driven by restless young men. These residents who look out for the Bantu are the people Mr. A classifies as “wonderful.”

When Mr. A speaks of wonderful people, he is speaking of people like Vanita Less, a longtime Southview Estates resident who is the president of the Southview Estates Citizens Council. She has an easy smile and a voice that is like a sonic boom. She is self-assured and after living in Southview Estates for more than 20 years, raising her family here, she has taken a leadership role in the community. She is one of the “wonderful” people in the neighborhood. One of those who has reached out to befriend the Somali Bantu. The “wonderful people” value community collaboration and working hard to improve the neighborhood. The Somali Bantu know they can seek Vanita’s partnership to make the community “beautiful,” a word Mr. A uses to mean safe and respectful, a neighborhood where they can live in peace. I run into Vanita one Saturday evening just before a Somali Bantu education celebration in the Southview Estates gym. She has used funds from the community’s Citizens Council to provide water and soda for the celebration. “I do it because these are our neighbors. They live here now. If they are here, they are family. We want to do what we can to help them,” she told me. Vanita Less is among the community residents who share critical information with the Somali Bantu to let them know of community meetings, how (and when) to call the police, how to access the nearby food bank, and how to safely complain about and address harassment in the neighborhood.

Tahir, 24, met these “wonderful” people when he first moved into the neighborhood. He

is a young Somali Bantu father who had only lived in Southview for two months when we talked in his home. He said he was anxious about first moving here. He heard the reports on TV of violence and heard the rumors from his social workers that it was a dangerous community. But he tells me one morning before he heads to work: “Southview is a great community. I have African American friends. It’s a lovely place. Now, since I’m here, I have not seen danger [meaning he has not been personally threatened]. Nobody bothers me. I say ‘Hi.’ It’s all right. It’s not like I thought it would be.”

In the wake of the three murders, many of the Somali Bantu were approached by their friendly African American neighbors who were concerned about their well-being. Residents of Southview Estates care about making their community safe. When violence strikes, the neighbors often join forces to write a joint letter to the public housing authority seeking better protections and responses. They see their Somali Bantu neighbors as being a part of the neighborhood and reach out to include them on the letter. As one African American neighbor told me, “we need everyone at the table. If they are living here, they can help us shut it [the violence] down.”

5.4 OUTSIDERS?

When the Somali Bantu first began to move into Southview Estates in 2011, they were strangers. Brenda Freeland, a 30-year resident of Southview Estates, remembers when the families began to show up. They stood out because of their traditional Bantu style of dressing and their language. To ease their cultural trauma, it was valuable for them to hold onto their Somali Bantu identity and their refugee status (Weine and Ware 2004; Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977).

Since their days fleeing the civil war in Somalia, so much in their lives had been disrupted. By displaying their language, dress, and culture they are resisting acculturation to Southview Estates, their local host environment, and seeking a continuity of self-identity. When they first arrived, the Southview Estates resident noticed that the families – all married couples except for one single mother – stayed mostly to themselves. Once a month, said Freeland, you may see one mother at the food pantry, at a tenants’ meeting, or at the Ruth’s House, a faith-based community center. But you never see the fathers at any community activity, she told me.

The fathers were working. Many of them work at night, so they tend stay within their own group. One evening in August of 2012, four Somali Bantu families – men and women – attend a tenants’ association meeting because the agenda is scheduled to address the harassment many of the Somali Bantu complain about in the neighborhood. The meeting begins at 7:30 in the gym. It is easy to spot the Somali Bantu families: they sit quietly together, in the colorful clothing – the women in their headscarves. After about an hour, they begin to trickle out of the warm gym into the night because the meeting moves so slowly.

When they first moved to Southview, the Somali Bantu differences – religion, culture, dress, and work life – alienate them from many of the other residents. This has caused harassment toward them in the neighborhood, at school, and tension with a local mosque. According to a January 2013 report from the city’s Housing Authority, most Somali Bantu residents of Southview Estates felt unsafe, discriminated against, and targeted. Most reported they had been victimized by crime – having their windows broken, having rocks thrown at them, sugar poured in their gas tanks, verbal harassment, as teenage African American males taunted them as “ugly” and “go back to Africa.” One Somali Bantu resident said she would rather go back to Somalia, where conditions are worse “and die there than to live here” with her personal

safety threatened. Most said they felt excluded because there is no place in Southview Estates that recognizes their Muslim holy days or allows a space for them to meet. The tensions were so high that when the Housing Authority held a meeting in the community with the Somali Bantu. The families were invited to the meeting in small groups because the Housing Authority did not want a parade of Somali Bantu coming to a meeting all at once because it might cause the perception with some residents that the Somali Bantu families were receiving special attention. The Housing Authority feared this perception could cause even more tension and harassment. It is a blustery day, about 10 in the morning, when small clusters of Bantu women walk to the meeting, their colorful dresses blowing in the breeze, like rainbows flapping in the wind. The men sit in the room in their kofis (small, knitted caps that rests on the back of their heads) and their thawbs, the long, robe-like garments; For the next 30 minutes, small groups of Somali Bantu continue to show up at the center. While the Housing Authority feared conflict would erupt, the meeting instead became a moment of intercultural understanding.

5.5 THE “AUNTIE” NEXT DOOR – DISCOVERING THE LINES BETWEEN NO-GOOD AND WONDERFUL

At the meeting, a Somali Bantu wife describes, through tears, some unpleasant early experiences of settling into Southview and her first encounters with inconsiderate neighbors who offer little supervision of their children. Fahima is a Somali Bantu wife who has lived in Southview Estates for about six months. She talked of the harassment that the Somali Bantu experienced when settling into the housing project: broken windows, profanity-laced graffiti on their homes,

dumped trash in their yards, and stolen property (if the Bantu children had bikes, the older kids would take them). When she approached parents about the children's behavior, she was shocked by some of their responses. She said they did not want to hear that their children were stealing bikes or breaking windows. When she came to their doorstep to discuss the issues, she said the parents asked the "African" to leave.

"This is not the way we should behave toward our brothers and sisters. I don't know if we are doing wrong living with them [the no-good] but we are trying. How can we have more relationships with our brothers who live in this community, or sisters who live in this community?"

We don't need our kids to be in trouble. We are not here for troublemaker. We are not here to do criminal stuff. We are here to live because of our education level. What I mean is, I might not have even first-grade education, I might have six-dollar job, if I go to the rental place, I have seven kids. I might need six bedrooms; which is going to cost like a \$1,200, and I still have to pay gas, electric, water, I cannot afford that. Family of 10 in the house, six dollar an hour for your job, you cannot pay that, that's why we need to live in the housing authority, because of our income and education. We did not mean not to have education, but our country did not let us have education and that's why we are here today. If we did not make it, how are our kids are going to make it. That is why we are in the United States. And that's why we are living in the housing authority.

If you people [the Black American neighborhood residents and housing authority leaders] are here [because of the same structural challenges], we really will get behind you. We will listen to you, whatever, I mean it."

Fahima's testimony gives voice to the structural barriers of low wage and limited education that push the Somali Bantu families into Southview, where they move to seeking affordable housing. Through her language, we also come to understand how the Somali Bantu make sense of their neighbors: they see them as family (she calls them "brothers and sisters") and are concerned about their well-being. In other words, good neighbors equal good community. When Fahima finished her testimony, an elderly African American woman at the meeting stands. She appeals to Fahima through faith. Looking directly at her Somali Bantu neighbor, the elderly lady explains that the Somali Bantu can build bridges by relying on education attainment. Her response also focuses on the value of using education as a tool of assimilation. Her language is also inclusive: "me and mine" and "our agenda."

"God is good. Just to let everyone know, you've got the right people here, me and mine. I was moved to tears almost as it relates to things people have been through. You said something about English being a problem and a language barrier, and what not. We have a strong GED program; make sure everybody gets involved in that, because the one thing that happens once you can speak the language then you can understand exactly what's going on and what people are saying. And that's what we want to make sure that happens. That's first on our agenda. Education is key."

The intercultural exchange underscores that despite the violence and harassment, Southview is also a place of caring neighbors. They bond over the same economic and class issues. It reveals that some neighbors are interested in helping the Somali Bantu survive in this space. It reveals that the social world of the "ghetto" is not all harsh and bleak. While resources and interactions can be strained, there is a sense of neighborliness. The overriding perception is that the ghetto is alienating, but the reality is that in the midst of these bad experiences, the

Somali Bantu families find hope and help. The elderly woman believes education and language improvement are steps to fuller assimilation and she encourages the Somali Bantu to pursue this path. The meeting was productive. The Housing Authority produced a report on the problems and sent letters to all residents warning of consequences such as evictions if families were connected to vandalism. The harassment died down.

In many ways, the Somali Bantu have positive interactions with their “wonderful” neighbors. Rasheed, a tall Somali husband with five young children and a baby on the way, lives in the last brick home on Mulberry Street, which runs into a dense, wooded road that was been sealed off by the Housing Authority years ago to cut off the flow of drug traffic. On the day I visit, Rasheed’s five kids are in the basement playing. I can hear the ball bouncing against the walls and floor. He likes for them to stay close to the home to avoid the “street.” Though he lives next door to his cousins, he recognizes his friendly neighbors, including a Black American female neighbor. Rasheed works overnight at the chocolate factory. His wife works long hours at a local shipping company, boxing products for delivery. When he and his wife have to work, the neighbor babysits. While the neighbor does not look too much older than Rasheed, he calls her “Auntie,” which is what he would have called a respected female friend in Somalia. This is significant because it reveals that people living in poverty and oppression continue to rely on fictive kinship to survive, these relationships involve trust and reliability and an understanding that your neighbor is worthy.

In Southview Estates, social relations with their Black American neighbors are important for the Somali Bantu. The relations are facilitated because the “wonderful” people of Southview Estates, in my analysis, share parallel histories with the Somali Bantu. Black Americans have a history of enslavement and racialization, which includes labor and resource exploitation, and

discrimination (Cayton & Drake 1945, Du Bois 1899, Massey & Denton 1993). The Somali Bantu have also faced enslavement, colonial oppression, racialization and discrimination (Besteman 1999, Lehman and Eno 2003). Indeed, encounters with these structures have caused each group to end up in Southview Estates. At a basic level, the Bantu and public housing residents understand and rely on values such as kinship to help each other make it. In other words, the Somali Bantu and their Black “wonderful” neighbors are not really strangers.

Prior to coming to the United States, the Somali Bantu had a limited but highly positive image of African Americans. In the camps, they had heard of Muhammad Ali, the African American boxing champion who was also Muslim. They heard about his athletic feats but not his stances against American racism. In addition, the few African Americans they met in person were connected to refugee relief and were mostly people who came to assist them: physicians, researchers, human rights workers. All of the helpers were professionals who showed great care to get the Somali Bantu through the tough and lengthy resettlement process. Most of the Somali Bantu lived and worked on farms or in rural areas. Their access to technology was extremely limited. Mr. A told me: “because of the lack of radio to listen to the news, it was rare for people from the villages to know what was going on around the world.” Whatever images were able to filter through came via entertainment-oriented media and did not show the broader, deeper experiences of Black life. In the refugee camps, the young men say they would have heard some of the music of Jay-Z, but would not have heard the news of the killing of Amadou Diallo, the immigrant Guinean who was shot 19 times by New York City police officers in 1999, just a few years before the Somali Bantu began their resettlement to America. These limited representations of Black life become familiar and accepted, fueling the perspective that Black men in America fully participated in the labor market. There would be little or no exposure to understanding life

in public housing or the daily experiences of Blacks in impoverished communities. This is unfortunate because these experiences would have been similar to the Somali Bantu reality in Somalia and Kenya where, because of their racialization, they were limited to the lowest-level and most menial jobs, if they found work at all.

The color line in American society was a surprise for the Somali Bantu. This is what Mr. A. emailed me one evening as we chatted on gmail:

I have heard about Muhammad Ali, but not until I got here that I came to know about Malcolm X. In terms of jobs and economics, for Black men during my childhood living in Somalia, at home in the village that was born in, and throughout the refugee camps in Kenya, there weren't many jobs except in the banana plantation industries and small family-owned farms. I had a thought that was going to change, and maybe in Kenya it may be different than in Somalia, but there wasn't much difference in employment equality and economic equality. Since I haven't traveled outside Kenya – and my biggest move was from Kenya to the U.S. – my expectations were so high in terms of employments in Black Americans before I got to the States. [But] what I see, it reminds [of] back home where we only depended on humanitarian reliefs and I came to the point of where I can tell, wherever we are in the world, our conditions in terms of employment, life style hasn't changed yet.

The Somali Bantu experience in America provides them a fuller perspective on the range of class positions of Black Americans. Life in Southview Estates is certainly providing experiences with people they call “no-good,” but they are also experiencing the neighborhood “wonderful,” the people who do not mind reaching across culture and language distinctions to provide friendships and personal interactions that connect the Somali Bantu with information on how to be safe, build bridges to neighborhood/community services, and foster unity on shared

community concerns. In this way, it is understandable as to why Somali Bantu families have easy-going relations with most families in Southview. Despite the ethnic and language differences, the residents of Southview espouse the values of reliance upon family, understand the struggle with low-wage jobs, and share the stigma of living in an impoverished space.

By focusing on the stories of a few, we can get a glimpse of how their Southview neighbors help them to integrate into the community, feel welcomed as family and feel comfortable enough to publicly practice their traditions. In Southview, the Somali Bantu fathers are not trying to erase or hide their traditions and practices. They see Southview as a place to be equal and not as a place where they have to “melt” completely into the culture to fit in.

5.6 SHAHID, THE PIONEER IN SOUTHVIEW ESTATES

Shahid is 32 years old. On April 1, 2011, he moved with his second wife, Halima, and six children into Southview. “When I first moved here,” he said, “I was a strange person.” They were the first Somali Bantu family to move into Southview Estates. They live in a two-story residence that stands just beyond the security station. It is a Sunday morning when we sit in his kitchen, at a small, gleaming white table. His wife is a few feet away preparing samosas, small pies filled with goat meat. Coming into Southview Estates is a story he relates with pride, sharing his family’s sense of being pioneers in this space.

Shahid remembers when he first filled out papers at the Housing Authority to move to Southview. Most of his white caseworkers told him the community was no good. He initially applied for public housing in a more centrally located, diasporic community, but there were no

residences open there. They told him, you can go to Pinewood, a community east of downtown. But he heard from other Somali Bantu who had first settled in Pinewood and they said it was not good to move there. In Pinewood, an impoverished community that is nearly all-Black, the quality of homes was poor and less stable. The Somali Bantu complained of rodents, slum landlords, and there being too little opportunity for the Somali Bantu to live near each other. No, he said, “let me try Southview Estates.”

Shahid describes meeting two kinds of people when he moved into Southview. While the people who hung out on the street harassed his family, other neighbors gave him information on how to live safely in the community. As we discover in Shahid’s story, when the Somali Bantu first began to move to Southview Estates, many of their teenage Black male neighbors saw the Somali Bantu newcomers as strangers and targeted them for harassment, which grew quite intimidating. Shahid’s neighbor, a middle-aged Black American man, and his partner noticed the harassment. Within days, the neighbors told Shahid to report the harassment to the housing complex office. He also told him which children and families in their section of the housing development were friendly and which to stay away from. In addition, he shared with Shahid that to be safe “you don’t get into somebody else’s business.” After that, Shahid, when he would speak with the neighbors, would call them “Hey Brother, hey sister.” In response, the neighbor told Shahid: *“He would say ‘you are a good person.’ He told me to be safe [you] don’t get into somebody else’s business.”*

These meaningful encounters become mechanisms for bridging the worlds of the Somali Bantu and their Black American neighbors. Over the months of my observations, I saw that the African Americans felt the Somali Bantu were good neighbors who minded their own business, were respectful and peaceful.

5.7 MR. A: INTEGRATION THROUGH INSTITUTIONAL COLLABORATION

With Mr. A's story, we see that community integration occurs not only neighbor-to-neighbor, but happens also when the Somali Bantu get attached to neighborhood institutions. Mr. A, the leader of the Somali Bantu Community Association, understands that his refugee community is coming into a space that is distressed. Two winters ago, at the second organizing meeting to form the association, he sat in a white plastic chair in the circle with other Somali Bantu. He was comfortable in his bare feet and gray V-neck sweater, and spoke about how he was optimistic that, despite earlier troubles and harassment, positive social relations would develop in the community and would help transition the Somali Bantu into the new space. At this point, he has only been living in this Northeastern city for less than a year, and in Southview Estates for a few months. Shortly after he moved to the public housing, his home had been burglarized and his computer and television was stolen. He said: "I lived in a war-torn country. About a year ago, my house was burglarized. I felt as if I was back in war. I did not feel safe in coming into a home where my TV was gone. I didn't feel safe in the house. I slept in the car with my wife. I took my children to an aunt's house. There was fear I felt about living in this house. Then courage came. Southview is not the only place this can happen. Bad people are everywhere." He went on to say:

"We need connections for assistance. We (as a refugee population) get here (to the United States) eight years ago – we figure out it is important to come together as a community to help each other. There are families living here in (Southview Estates) without contact. We benefit from being Somali. There is a culture there. But both cultures (Somali Bantu and African American) are very, very beautiful. In Southview Estates, we are minority, a small community, we need help."

Mr. A is speaking of local networking and accruing social capital. In his short time in Southview Estates, he would get connected to and receive recognition and aid from the local citizens' council, which provided him with information on how to report crimes, and expressed concern over the vandalism and harassment targeted at Bantu families.

Vanita Less, head of Southview Estates Citizens' Council, always saw the Somali Bantu as members of the community. She told me she was interested in what they needed for jobs, funerals, and police issues. She's been supportive of their community activities, providing small levels of funding for food, and attaching the Bantu to her friends and associates to help get information to the refugees. In the summer of 2013, Vanita Less helped facilitate a session called "Moms and Cops," which was held in the community's recreation center to address violence. But Less also used her ties to other agencies to bring in a local hospital worker, child welfare representatives, and local police to address health and other issues relevant to immigrant communities. And, when the Somali Bantu first begin to experience harassment, she responded. To address the matter, Vanita Less, called on Margie Jones, a Housing Authority administrator to provide assistance. Jones, a Black American, now lives outside the community, but she grew up in Southview with Vanita Less. Jones pushed the Housing Authority to send letters saying that harassment of the Bantu families would be investigated and perpetrators would be evicted.

Within a year, Mr. A would become secretary of the Southview community citizens' council. In his role, he works to make sure all residents understand their legal rights against eviction and late-charges. What he learns, he shares with his community, as the legal issues are particularly difficult for those who are still struggling with English.

Months later, Mr. A is in a meeting at Ruth's House, a former church that provides social services – child care, tutoring, community gardening to the Southview community. At the

meeting, Mr. A is talking to two local education activists who are visiting. He is describing his associations with his neighbors.

“Southview Estates is way better than what people say. People say this is worst place to live, but to me, this is the best place. I have seen the leadership here. The citizens council, they take action. They cry with us. The same pain we feel, they feel. This is a very nice community.”

Mr. A’s comments reinforce the fact that the Southview community is a friendly space, and that the citizens council is an organization for all of the community’s residents. Working with the council, they can make Southview a place where refugee families can settle down and raise families in relative safety. His view counters the stereotypes that impoverished urban communities are disorderly places where violence, drug dealing, and alienation make life dangerous for everyone (Duck 2015). For the Bantu families, Southview is a place to start anew

5.8 A “TOUCHING” MOMENT: SHARING TRADITIONS IN SOUTHVIE ESTATES

It is 10 a.m. on a cold Saturday in January. The streets of Southview Estates are quiet. As people who celebrate the Islamic faith, the Somali Bantu community is preparing for its first public celebration of Mawlid, the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad. It’s about two years since they first began to settle into Southview and, in the community’s gym, which sits in the middle of the housing development, they are planning a public, open faith-based celebration. In their homeland, the Mawlid was a joyous holy day and the Somali Bantu want to replicate the joy of that tradition in this segregated community. During the set up for the celebration, Vanita Less

drives up in a white SUV. She has a trunk full of water and soda pop that she delivers for the occasion. “We used our tenant’s fund to pay for this,” she says. “We wanted to support our friends. I can’t stay, but I’ll try to stop by later,” she says before driving off. Inside, several Somali Bantu men who are organizing the event are bringing in prayer mats and vats of rice. A couple of mothers with their children are sitting and waiting. Tahir, the young imam, who planned and initiated the event, asks the young boys who are there to help lay the mats. Later, in the corner, at one of the tables, Mr. A and Tahir are sitting, speaking with Dora Briggs, a resident of Southview Estates, who identifies as Christian, and a worker with the Housing Authority. She is on site to open the gym and make sure the microphones and other supplies are there. As they speak about the order of the day, the three share a moment that speaks to racial and cross-cultural connection. Briggs is speaking:

I heard about what was happening in the [Kenyan refugee] camps. I had to be prayerful for your nations and for people being refugee. I had a brother living in New Orleans when [hurricane] Katrina came. He spent three days floating in the water without help. So when I hear you guys were coming over, it reminded me of my brother because they were calling him the same thing. They called them [the people of New Orleans] the refugee people. So, I really don’t like dividing people into “us” and “you” because we are one people in God. At this event, “us” is coming together now and learning and listening to each other. Knowing the resources we have. It’s a good thing. I’m looking forward to all of us coming together as a Southview community. It’s only because of God that we are heard.

As she bonds with Mr. A and Tahir, she tells them: “Feel free to touch me. I lost hearing in one ear, so if I don’t respond to you, it’s because I’m not hearing you, OK. I’m not ignoring you, OK. So, just touch me and let me know that you need something.”

This story shows that similar life experiences draw the Somali Bantu and their Southview neighbors into agreeable, interpersonal and intercultural relationships. They each have traversed social spaces where their education and employment have been structured or limited by being marginalized and/or racialized by skin color and other physical features. The two groups are linked in overcoming adversity. It showcases a moment of shared identity, and opens the window to understanding how the Somali Bantu become more fully integrated into Southview Estates. Berry (2001) talked about how acculturation was a two-way process that involves contact and change in both groups. On an individual level it changes behavior. In this instance, it shows how the Southview neighbors and the Somali Bantu in their contact began to recognize each other as both different and familiar. When that happened, the Bantu were able to turn Southview into a home: they are comfortable citizens of the space now and are holding religious celebrations here and “touching” the lives of their neighbors with their history and traditions.

5.9 OUTSIDE “HELPERS”

The Somali Bantu rely on their African American neighbors in Southview Estates to moderate their behavior and understand what it takes to survive in the community. But, the Bantu also maintain social relations with folks from outside the public housing community who enable their resettlement into America, too. This “other” network is a collective of mostly white women. They have professional backgrounds in law, education, social services, and years of volunteerism to immigrant service agencies. They are highly educated and come from middle-income backgrounds. In many ways, this network of white people stands in contrast to the networks of

Black American neighbors who live inside the community. The outside network provides a flow of interactions and connections to social institutions that attach the Somali Bantu to better school choices, Christian summer camps, and facilities and programs at the local university that allow for broader exposure to life outside of the public housing community.

Where did these networks originate? The refugee Somali Bantu community established this network of ties during the process of resettlement into America. This collective of white aides was linked to immigrant service agencies, and faith-based charities. They helped the Somali Bantu negotiate the public school bureaucracy. They helped them find apartments, buy appliances, connect to their first jobs, understand utility bills, and connect them to public safety information and citizenship preparation.

When he first moved into Southview Estates, Shahid talked about the “white folks” who helped him. He spoke of the the university undergraduates who came to tutor his children and who helped Shahid fill out citizenship papers; Christina, a white volunteer with a refugee aid group, helped with the paperwork for his job and health care; and Kim, a friend of Christina’s, who took the family shopping for a washing machine and other household appliances.

5.10 ENCOUNTERS WITH WHITE HELPERS

The white “helpers” are staples at the Somali Bantu Association meetings. In the early organizing of the association, they helped to build the infrastructure. They are present at weddings, and cultural celebrations. Their vast and established friends’ network has connected the Somali Bantu to jobs and ESL classes, provided better school choices to students, and

afforded countless assistance with community outreach, providing the Bantu with speakers for their events, and advocacy to negotiate social service and educational bureaucracy. The white helpers who come into the community are mostly middle-age white women who work as attorneys, have responsibilities to refugee relief agencies, or come from mainstream churches. There is also a group of white helpers who are white men and women who are around less frequently but who work to aid the Bantu. These include attorneys who provide advice and assistance with immigration services and teachers who aid the children. Almost since their arrival in this Northeastern city, the Somali Bantu have been assisted by a group of university students who created a special tutoring organization that serves the families.

These groups of white helpers are important. First, the Bantu reside in a county where 81.5 percent of the population is white, so to have social ties to white networks give the Bantu a larger base from which to seek resources. Second, the white volunteers are connected to influential organizations in the city. These organizations, such as the refugee center and an educational advocacy group, were able to gather the observations of the white helpers who were working closely with the Somali Bantu families. The organizations, based on the input of the white helpers, were then able to help change public school policy, affording the Somali Bantu more support within the school system. This is an exercise in influence and shows an access to resources that is not present with the Black Southview residents. Most of the resources that the white helpers provide have centered on education as a tool for positive integration and as a way to step up from urban poverty. This theme gets highlighted by taking a closer look at the “gang of three,” a trio of women who have been involved in the community for a decade.

5.11 THE “GANG OF THREE”: A CLOSER LOOK AT THE WHITE “HELPERS”

In the fall of 2004, Sandy, a petite white woman with brownish-blond hair, found herself in the basement of a local Unitarian church stuffing backpacks for Somali Bantu children who were refugees and would be starting school in a couple of days. Soon, Sandy was approached by “Cindy,” the Executive Director of the local Refugee Center, which was working with a faith-based charity, the organization that was responsible for the original refugee resettlements. The refugee center also connected the Unitarian church to the Somalia Bantu. In the basement of the church, Cindy asked Sandy what she did when she was not packing backpacks, and Sandy informed her that she was a lawyer specializing in education law. Cindy saw an opportunity and enlisted Sandy. She wanted to use Sandy’s legal skills to help the Refugee Center with the school system, which was not fully prepared for the Somali Bantu children. It was at that point that Sandy began to formally represent some of the families legally, while at the same time she was “adopting” families, interacting personally with them, sharing advice on housing, education and health choices, and even sharing information on rental cars.

The backpacking event was 10 years ago. The connections that Sandy made in the Unitarian church that day kept her involved with the Bantu families for more than a decade. Sandy did not work alone. She connected that day to two other women. The three women formed a special bond and became a triumvirate of support for the Somali Bantu. They affectionately call themselves “the gang of three.” The “gang of three” would draw close to the refugee families and their children. Because of their age, and the knowledge they were sharing on how to settle into America, the Somali Bantu often refer to the women as “mother” or “grandma.” These women come from different professions but are alike in their commitment to assisting the Somali Bantu in Southview to attain a better life here in the United States.

In addition to Sandy, there is “Alice.” Tall and soft-spoken, Alice was a social worker in Brooklyn. She stopped working when her mother became ill. After her mother died, Alice turned her attention to volunteering with her Unitarian church, which included helping the Somali Bantu. She first met Sandy in 2004, at the same church that organized the drive for filling backpacks with school supplies and food for the newly arrived Somali Bantu families.

There is also Tess. She is of Greek-European heritage and is not part of the Unitarian Church, although she had met Alice through that same community. Tess became a volunteer because of Cindy, whom she worked in the past on some international development efforts. Tess began volunteering with the refugees in the summer of 2004 after Cindy urged her to come meet the local group of Somali Bantu.

These three women established an early bond with the Somali Bantu and their actions helped to build what they believe is a special trust relationship over that of other volunteers. As Sandy describes it, “I’ve done some formal legal representation for some of the Bantu families, but I’ve also gone on to be a volunteer in this corporation of Tess, Alice and Sandy to adopt families, to work directly with families, and looking at what are the community-wide issues. I think that’s what intrigued me to do both—to sit on the floor and hold babies, to play games with the children, but at the same time to also see what’s going on in their lives in the community to see how the community is impacted by what’s going on in the schools.”

Very early, Sandy became attached to the Somali Bantu community. To understand them better, she even went to visit Tanzania to observe Bantu cultural practices. And, in this Northeastern city, she did not just want to volunteer, she wanted to create real change. A well-respected attorney with a local education law center, she believes public education is a civil right. When she learned Somali Bantu students were being excluded from the full range of public

education programs and services and unfairly segregated in the city's public schools, she worked with the Somali Bantu community members to file a federal civil rights complaint. The suit pushed for full access to quality educational programs, translations and interpreters for students and parents. As a result of this complaint, the district made substantial changes to its curriculum and support services, and hired an ombudsperson to advocate for students and families. Once the Bantu community connected to Sandy, she was able to use her professional skills as an attorney and education advocate to file complaints and help change school policy.

The "gang of three" was involved in more intimate volunteering, too. In those early days, they taught basic nutrition, showed the families how to operate machinery like washers and dryers, and explained what a toothbrush was. Their day-to-day involvement was designed to foster self-sufficiency and decision-making and it enabled them to build trust. Part of the trust was built on helping families with disabled children get the services they needed and learn to cope with feeling overwhelmed. The three women were available for frequent phone calls, linked the Somali Bantu to social service resources, and showed up to "translate culture" around school and community issues. As Tess stated, "In a sense we helped them move from being a people who expected us to transport them to the laundromat to being a people who would help themselves solve problems, whether it was by bringing in resources or connecting them to existing resources, or sort of being the teddy bear in the room empowering them."

The "gang of three" noted that working with the Somali Bantu has resulted in burnout for some volunteers. Others have limited their role to "playing with babies" or teaching English. Some volunteers have taken a superior attitude with the refugees, having an air of "I'm giving you something," "I'm this," or "I know more than you know." The success of the three in

building trust and maintaining longevity seems to be partially due to their strategy of working together to support each other, as well as the refugees.

Mutual respect played a large role in building the trusting relationships. As Sandy states, “One of the hard lessons was we gave them choices, you make choices, and this is your choice; we’re just helping define the options. I don’t think they saw us as bullying them, like ‘oh, you need to make this decision’ ... we weren’t asserting our values.”

But the perspectives of the three women did influence the Somali Bantu. The refugees would probably have settled into Southview Estates earlier as there was talk of creating a Somali Bantu “village” in the available housing in Southview. “We resisted that,” said Tess, “ ‘saying that you don’t need to go there.’ We believed they could be integrated into Lawrence and other communities, but that did not happen.” When the “gang of three” resisted Southview, so did the Somali Bantu. “That was probably our white view, which told the families that Southview was dangerous.” The three women also say they failed to understand the severity of the Bantu economic challenges and trauma of the isolation they were experiencing being placed in different locations. “I think they want to be in Southview,” says Tess. “They want to be in the same place. They want to be where there is shared responsibility. That’s their cultural model.”

Indeed, once the Somali Bantu began to visit Southview, they began to think they could settle in that community. In fact, on first visits, many of the Bantu thought the security gates were there to keep to them safe, Tess told me.

Tess saw their older age of the “gang of three” as a factor in their earning the respect of the refugees. She believes that the age factor, coupled with competence, was key. This sense of competence allowed the women to go further than providing clothing and rides to the store and to run errands. They got to know the adults first, husbands and wives, earned their trust, and then

gained access to the children. The three supported the Somali Bantu leadership in forming a community group vs. taking control of them. Sandy and Tess were frequently in the Southview home of Mr. H, in the early days, when the Somali Bantu were building their community association. They provided leads on jobs. There were some formal connections through the Refugee Center, but “I believe,” said Sandy “that the jobs came from ‘I know someone who knows someone’ and word of mouth.” The three women did show the families how to use Craig’s List to find housing, helped communicate needs at school, and in the case of Sandy, provided legal services. As relationships were more established, they periodically used their credit cards to book flights or rent cars for select families, receiving immediate repayment from the family in question. The three women were clear they did not want to be seen as a source of financial support.

The “gang of three” are unique in that they connected not just with the women, but with the men, breaking down a barrier with the men that not many white female volunteers had been able to do. They have spent time with the refugee families during some of their greatest crises. The refugee men have felt safe enough to share some of their most intimate and trauma-laden stories from Africa. The three women believe the men felt they were safe because the “gang of three” help them a great deal, love their children, empower them to make their own decisions, and take the time to explain complex situations, such as translation services, health care options, and child care assistance. In continuing to work with the families and following them into Southview Estates, the “gang of three” have integrated competence, connections, compassion, and creativity to help empower the Somali Bantu. They have successfully formed strong bonds of trust that continue to benefit this particular refugee community.

5.12 CONCLUSIONS

The Somali Bantu classify their neighbors into “wonderful” and “no good.” These classifications are used as mechanisms to cope in a community that is highly impoverished and segregated. As much as possible, they avoid the “no good” but engage relationships with the “wonderful” neighbors who can and do provide information and knowledge on how to navigate the social particularities of Southview. In the relationships with the “wonderful” neighbors there is friendly interaction that leads to cooperation on neighborhood projects to address violence. These positive relations with their neighbors put them into a beneficial network that allows them to navigate everyday life in this community. Coming into Southview Estates, the Somali Bantu were leaping into a “strange” society. They did not know the language. They dressed differently. It was isolated. Socially, because of crime and other issues of community efficacy, the shock of urban culture could make it a difficult place to settle. One of the pathways to integration – learning the ways of how everyday life is organized, appropriate behavior with neighbors – was accessed by the outreach and connection to the Southview community and its “wonderful” people. It is these people who gave the Bantu the information and knowledge and cultural proficiency to adjust and manage the social interaction in this community. Once they felt safe and understood the “code” of living here, they could concentrate on reconstructing their own religious and social traditions.

The Somali Bantu families of Southview value kinship, as a way to organize and anchor their lives. Both groups recognize that extended kinship networks are critical places to share resources, transmit knowledge, monitor each other’s behavior, and help themselves and one another negotiate the outside world. Much like other neighborhoods, their neighborhood integration includes the Somali Bantu families, friends, and neighbors who babysit for each

other, and swap other resources: haircutting, grocery shopping, traveling with friends to visit relatives in other cities. In a place where there are few jobs, and where violence can spike suddenly, they recognize that they can't make it alone. Relationships of mutual support within family and community enable the Somali Bantu to survive the harshness and lack of resources in this space (Stack 1973). The Bantu families' attachments and focus on extended kin are similar to those of many Black residents of Southview Estates – a practice they share in common. For many Black public housing residents reciprocal-helping arrangements, swapping favors, and kinships support are also crucial to “survive” the low wages, high utility costs, lack of public transportation and other economic challenges of ghetto living.

The Bantu also strive to gain cultural capital from their social network of helpers, the white, middle-class volunteers who live outside of this gated public-housing community. The Bantu use this network to seek opportunities for employment, access to community institutions, guidance and tutoring, and other resources, which are not available among family and relatives.

The processes of acculturation, integration, and assimilation are complex. The pathways to assimilation can be varied and bumpy. How newcomers to America are incorporated into the host society depends on a multitude of factors and social processes. The white helpers are a group that influences the Somali Bantu movement toward acculturation. Their networks open up access to jobs and economic well-being. What must keep in mind is that when the Bantu leave their jobs at the end of work day, they are leaving their connection to the larger world and coming home to a space that, in many ways, might reflect the opposite of their work environments. It is a space deeply segregated, impoverished, and with concentrated disadvantage. In this space, they are not trying to “melt” in with the prevailing issues of joblessness and violence. Instead, integration is the goal; not assimilation. They aim for a

collective and peaceful coexistence and collaboration, while maintaining their original cultural identity. Their kinship-like social relations with the more friendly Southview community members influence their level of integration, giving them the safety and sanction to reconstruct their original cultures. In Southview Estates, the processes of acculturation and integration intersect. At the crossroads are two parallel social networks that become paths toward assimilation, allowing a fuller participation in society. Together these pathways lead to gaining citizenship in the host country, improvement in their language, the skills to navigate life in a severely disadvantaged neighborhood, and finding a job. Once on the job, participation in the labor force can really spark the acculturation processes. The next chapter focuses more closely on how they obtain employment and how their role – even though limited – in the labor force makes the men feel a part of their new society.

6.0 JOBS: BUILDING ON WHAT THEY HAVE

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is built on a set of narratives that examine how the Somali Bantu rural, agrarian lifestyle in Somalia, survival in and exodus from a war-torn nation, and the harsh poverty of the refugee camps structured their limitations in their host nation. It examines how limited economic, cultural and social capital challenged, and continue to challenge, the Somali Bantu.

First of all, many were denied access to formal education in Somalia, and the majority arrived in America with marginal abilities to read or write in their national language much less in English. Second, once in the U.S., policies that push for self-sufficiency in less than a year and age-limits on access to high school education further hinder their preparation for higher-skill jobs. While they work full time, the wages in many service jobs do not pay livable wages. For Somali Bantu, who often have large families, their economics can easily become burdensome and unmanageable. There is also a deadline on government aid to help with rent, so the pressure to get a job is magnified as the Bantu scramble to provide a place for their families to live.

These factors limit their ability to finish high school, to participate in training programs to gain other marketable job skills, and limit the opportunity to find work that pays a livable wage. The consequences of this becomes like a chain reaction: it impacts the Somali Bantu

economics, which impacts where they are able to live, which impacts their levels of acculturation and assimilation and integration.

Despite such disadvantages, we must not see the Somali Bantu through only a deficit lens. The Somali Bantu male heads of household possess a human and cultural capital that's been nurtured by their exposure to generations of hardships. This capital has enabled them to survive enslavement, state-sponsored discrimination, and life in harsh refugee camps. What this has cultivated among them is resilience and a toughness that allow them to have hope against the odds. For some, this resilience is partnered with jobs skills and a sense of entrepreneurship – often developed in the refugee camps – that offers participation in the broader American economic and labor system. This resilience is a resource that allows them to work with dignity in low-wage, service positions in this Northeastern city. These jobs allow the men the opportunity to accrue social capital, their first steps toward acculturation, and put them in a space where they can begin to assimilate and integrate into society.

The workplace is a space where they find diverse friendships. It is an important means to an end: an experience where they feel that their paychecks, no matter how small, allow them to contribute to the family and their community. One Somali Bantu called his workplace his “school,” a place where he learns how to be a competent worker in an American service sector job. Even though their family and most of their friends on the job share the same class position as they do, they seem to have accepted that where they are is an opportunity, the beginning of something new. The men are not deflated or hopeless because their job choices might be limited. They feel good about being able to provide for their families and a positive sense of self is not directly tied to their job status. Their self-worth seems more directly tied to their abilities to provide for their families.

There are 20 fathers living in Southview. Each one of them works in service employment: factory worker, grocery aide, laundry aide, hotel cook, butcher, janitor. No one makes more than \$11.25 an hour. To get to work, each must travel at least two miles outside of the gates of Southview. All of the Somali Bantu are on the jobsite with at least one other Somali Bantu. Brothers work with brothers, fathers work with sons, nephews work with uncles, and cousins work with cousins. They share news of job openings and use word of mouth and their reputations as hard workers to help each other to get hired.

To try to better understand their trajectory of incorporation, the narratives in this chapter explore the question: What is the role of the forms of capital – cultural and human – in helping the Somali Bantu males navigate the low-wage service economy and begin the processes of assimilation and integration in this Northeastern city?

6.2 HAFIZ, 42, A FORMER FACTORY WORKER

I arrive at Hafiz's home in Southview Estates at about 9 a.m. It is a Saturday morning, one late winter, and he greets me at the door. I take my shoes off and he walks me through the house. Two women are sitting on the floor in a front room with five young children in diapers crawling about. In the kitchen, a small circle of kids, who are slightly older, is playing on the floor. Hafiz is wearing green flip-flops and blue sweatpants and a blue T-shirt. Hafiz speaks English, but prefers to talk in Kiziguwa. We speak in his basement and he calls on his sons to help translate. His son, Daud, 20, helps for about 10 minutes, and then he has to leave to prepare for work at the chocolate factory. His older brother, Abdikadir, 24, takes over.

Hafiz is 45. His story illustrates how the Somali Bantu are able to leverage their human capital and resilience to begin their incorporation into this city. He is a thin, small, brown-skinned man who grew up in the Jubba Valley, where he worked as a carpenter's apprentice building homes, furniture, and making bricks. In Jubba Valley, he went to a madrasa, where he memorized from the Koran and learned to recognize the Arabic alphabet. But, like many Bantu families, his parents did not have money to send him to carpentry school, so he learned by apprenticing. In the early 1990s, Hafiz was about 21 when the war came, disrupting village life and forcing families to flee. On the run, Hafiz told me of how he had to crawl through the bushes looking for food and feared being killed in the fighting. With much of his family, he ended up in a Kenya refugee camp. In the camp, to earn money, he delivered meat for a local butcher and constructed mud homes. He lived in the camps for 10 years before coming to the U.S. in 2004.

When Hafiz arrived in America in the middle of the night it was raining. Catholic Charities helped him with housing and quickly began the process of finding Hafiz a job. The combination of assistance from his new social networks and his history of working as a carpenter helped Hafiz get a job. Hafiz's English was poor, which meant he could be hard to place. However, in meeting with a white female social worker, he was able to communicate that he was good with his hands and had worked in carpentry. After a few weeks, the social worker was able to match him with a small company on the South Side of the city that makes fashion accessories from recycled materials.

In settling into his work life, Hafiz displayed the same kind of resilience he'd shown in surviving in Somalia and in the camps. The social workers assigned to Hafiz showed him only once how to manage public transportation and then, the next day, sent him out on his own to get to his job. That first morning, on his way to work, he took the wrong bus and ended up going in

circles. He was lost all day until a stranger gave him better directions so that he could transfer to the South Side for work. After Hafiz's son taught him to drive, he'd wake up at 6 a.m., get dressed, and drive across town. He'd punch in at 7 a.m. and punch out at 3:30 p.m. The work required that he stand all day. It was difficult work, he says, but "I'm a hard worker and I understand fast. I used to be a carpenter, I know what work is."

He was the first Somali Bantu at the plant, but he told others, and a few more came. Not long on the job, Hafiz began the process of integrating into the factory work. At the small company, Hafiz worked with Vietnamese, Black Americans, men and women. They struggled to understand each other, but they developed a "sign talk," he told me. As they began speaking with each other with their hands and facial expressions to get the job done. He said his white American supervisor didn't understand him, but over the years they got to know each other. The supervisor called Hafiz a hard worker and he quickly became trained in all aspects of production at the different stations. He told Hafiz that he deserved to go to a higher pay. Hafiz received steady increases during his employment. He began at \$7.25, moved up to \$8.25 to \$10.25 and then to \$11.25. It was not much money, but by living in Southview, Hafiz was able to help his family and negotiate the high costs of living.

Leveraging this previous skills and assimilating so soon into his workplace and its health system became extremely fortunate for Hafiz and his family. In 2009, just a few short years after arriving in the United States, he would soon become ill, developing diabetes and having to undergo heart bypass surgeries. He is no longer able to work. Hafiz's wife was not working and when his income was severely reduced, life became more uncertain. Hafiz went from earning \$450 a week to having to live almost entirely on government aid. Hafiz feared he would not be able to care for his family – a wife and five children who lived at home. He gets \$540 a month in

Social Security and almost half of that goes to his public housing rent: he pays \$270 a month, which includes all utilities, for the family's four-bedroom home. He gets \$700 a month in food stamps. The aid is helpful, but it means Hafiz must still struggle with how to provide clothing, school supplies and other basic necessities for his children and wife. To survive the crisis, he gets help from his oldest son, Abdikadir, who lives outside the home and works at the local chocolate factory, where he makes \$8 an hour, but continues to help the family with expenses. Daud, the second eldest son, still lives at home. He works at the chocolate factory, too, and helps his father pay car insurance, contributes toward the rent, and other bills. What really aided the family, though, is the fact that Hafiz's job provided comprehensive medical insurance, which was useful, because it covers the majority of Hafiz's health and medicine costs. In fact, the insurance was critical. Within the first year of resettlement, many Somali Bantu join the working poor and often their service and low-wage positions include limited or no health insurance. If they get sick, they become especially vulnerable to crippling economic hardships.

Hafiz's experiences reinforce just how fragile the lives of Somali Bantu are. However, the labor skills and sense of resilience he bought from Somalia enabled him to land a job with decent benefits and Hafiz was able to use those health benefits to provide economic relief to aid his family against additional financial hardships. With limited opportunity and the high costs of living, if he did not have access to health insurance his ability to take care of his health needs and provide for his family would have been made more vulnerable.

Hafiz has been out of work for five years. However, just before I leave the home, he asks his son to bring in a plastic bag full of the items he made while at work at the South Side factory. He gingerly pulls each item from the bag and handles each of the bright shiny purses with care and shows them off. Even after five years away, he still smiles at his handy work.

6.3 DABIR, 28, THE HOTEL COOK

Dabir has a similar story of how he gained little formal education in Somalia or Kenya, but amassed skills as a cook in the refugee camp and used those skills, his human capital, to take his first steps into the American labor force. His job helped him to build an economic foundation that allows for a measure of workforce assimilation.

He lives in a two-story, red-brick corner home in Southview. I visit him on a Saturday morning in late summer. I ride the bus over and get off at the senior high-rise and walk up a block to his home. It is about 11 a.m. when I arrive and his small children are outside, in the back of the house, riding their bikes across one of the dusty, worn-grass fields that blanket Southview.

I knock. A youthful-looking 28-year-old, Dabir invites me into the living room. He seems to flow effortlessly between behaviors that mark his acculturation while holding onto his ethnic culture. The home is draped in brightly colored and patterned cloth. It hangs from the ceiling and at the windows. A large-size flat-screen TV sits in the corner. There is a comfortable sofa. Dabir is home watching news on CNN. In the background, Arabic music purrs from a nearby radio. How he consumes media, both American and Arabic suggests Dabir is both modifying his behavior and holding on to a culture that is familiar. He is dressed in Black jeans and a Black shirt and a vest. He is quick to laugh and smile. He is off today from his job as a cook in a downtown hotel. He will spend the day relaxing, watching the news channels. We drink, from a cup, *ugali*, a warm, sweet porridge his wife has made.

I sit next to Dabir on the big couch in his living room. He begins the conversation by offering reflections on life in Somalia, where he grew up in the early 1990s in a small village in the Jubba valley. He lived in a little home made of mud and wood. There was a garden of maize and fields of mangoes. He lived with his parents, sister and seven other people in a small

collection of homes. It was spare, he remembers, but it was a place where everyone worked together farming, fishing, and cooking to care for each other. He was about seven or eight years old, but he remembers when the war came and how quickly thousands of people were displaced. The Somali Bantu were unprotected by government forces and were the most vulnerable to attack. Around 1994, Dabir's parents were murdered when rebels came to plunder their village.

To escape the persecution, Dabir and his sister, now orphaned, left Somalia and began the long walk to Kenya. It was a grueling journey across miles of dry, brown land and all the while they were under threat from hunger and animal attack. "Some of the people they died," he said. "Some people can't walk, the lion get you. If the lion hungry and you there, you the food." He and his sister walked for about a month to get to Kenya.

In Kenya, unlike the Jubba valley, the refugee camp was dusty and crowded and cramped. Dabir lived there for close to 11 years, but he did not always stay in the camp. Living in Kenya would provide Dabir with work skills that would help him to more easily assimilate into the American labor system. As a young boy in the refugee camps, to provide for himself and his family, Dabir began working small jobs for local families and Kenya military officials – collecting wood, running errands, cleaning in local shops, learning to cook. He was so reliable, he was asked to travel with the Kenyan security detail. Dabir believed his jobs were important as they provided food and help to his family. However, his work schedule and travel prevented Dabir from regularly attending school in the camp, and without more formal education, he would not be able to acquire the skills or knowledge that would prepare him for better jobs.

Nevertheless, he expressed pride in gaining his work skills: "Now, when I was [either 10 or 11], I was working with small jobs, help somebody with a little shop. Then when I grow up, I was helping somebody like the police. I was cooking for them. When we were going to Kenya,

Nairobi, I was working with the judge and some people like the police. They was like ‘help, help, help.’ And then they give me job. We was cooking food: *ugali* (porridge), *sukoma* (greens), *chapatti* (flatbread), *mandazi* (fried bread).”

In 2004, the year he turned 18, Dabir arrived in this Northeastern city with his sister and brother-in-law. Just like with Hafiz, Catholic Charities helped the family find a home and Dabir went to a local high school for about a year. Soon, he would be turning 20 and was told he was too old to stay in the classes. He needed to find a job. As a working adult, Dabir soon began to face additional pressures. The government now provided him with a deadline to become as economically self-sufficient as possible. This meant he had to work and face a lessening of government support.

When we came, we came like refugee, right. They told us, we are here to help refugee for a couple of years. Not for a whole lot of years. So they help us to find a house. So when we get a job, you don’t go there no more for help. You have to stand up by yourself. The welfare people give you food stamps. If you get a job, they will not help you no more, because you getting money from your job. Welfare, if you work, they don’t give you cash, they only give food stamps. When I was coming [to America], I came with my sister. When I married, I had a kid. The welfare helped me with Medicaid. Food stamps for three kids. But they don’t help me with the whole bill, I have to stand it myself. For five or six years, I never got welfare. They will ask you, are you work, yes: then you don’t need me. You have to stand by yourself. I stand by myself. I pay my cell phone, I pay my insurance. Nobody help me now. I help myself.

Dabir’s testimony reveals the fiscal stresses that Somali Bantu face shortly after their arrival in this Northeastern city. Many of them, as seen by the circumstances of Dabir and others, must rely on government assistance to thrive here. Because of his labor skills, Dabir found a job

as a cook at a downtown hotel. He's been there for 11 years. He told the management he had experience as a military cook in Kenya and with cooking some American foods in a restaurant while in the city of Nairobi. The management gave him a chance. Dabir found the job through Janine, a white caseworker with Catholic Charities. Janine came to his home one day, shortly after he arrived in the city, and he was cooking.

So, she said "Oh, Dabir, do you know how to cook? Where did you learn this?" I say, I know because I was cooking in the military and I don't want to forget this. Yes, in Africa, when you cook, you are boss.

You know what, she said, if you know how to cook this African food, I will take you to the hotel. What kind of job do you like to do? I say I like to cook because [in Kenya] I was cooking.

Janine told a friend, Marybeth, another white caseworker. Marybeth had a white friend who worked in the hotel and said the company needed kitchen help. Dabir goes to the hotel with Marybeth and the friend. He gets an interview. After a three- or four-day wait, he is called and offered the job. Dabir gets training and has been cooking at the hotel since. It is his first job in America. Dabir's been welcomed and appreciated at the hotel. When he briefly moved to Charlotte, N.C. – to be with Fahima, who became his wife – the hotel chain transferred his job there. When he returned to this Northeastern city, he was reinstated to his former position.

Because of his high level of integration, Dabir enjoys his job and talks about the easy social exchanges and camaraderie he finds there. It's a place where he finds a broad range of friendships. It is a place where, he says, "Everybody, they like me. Black and white. They like me and we joke. If you see Black people, they are my friend. If I see white people, they are my friend. Everybody. I like everybody."

His everyday interactions at the hotel mean he is able to practice his English, and feel a sense of belonging to the wider American community.

I like [my coworkers] because they like me. We cook, we make conversation for everybody..When I was coming in America, my English was not much good, it was like a little bit. I go to school, but on the job I learn a little bit more because the people they don't speak my language. So I have to use the English. So I learn from the job. It's a good thing. Because if you ask somebody something you don't know, you learn. If they say go in the cooler and get the grapes. What is a grapes? Go in the cooler. This is grapes. Then I learn, you know. Next day they say go in the cooler and get grapes, I know what they're talking about. Go get apple, oh, I know apple. They say, we need meatloaf. Oh, I know meatloaf. Š

Dabir, on the job, began to accrue social capital in his relations with his coworkers. He actually became a student. The lead chef, a slim white guy, told him to write his new words in a book. So, Dabir purchased a small spiral notebook, scribbling his words down and practicing them out loud on the job. They also told him, “you have to talk to learn.” Most days, Dabir has to be at the hotel by 1 p.m. He says he gets there earlier to relax, change into this uniform, and joke around with his co-workers before his shift begins. He works five days a week, but often volunteers for overtime. Dabir's job is also providing financial resources and acculturation to American work practices. As a cook, Dabir started out making \$9 an hour. He is now making \$11.25 an hour or \$450 a week, before taxes. Though his salary is above minimum wage at this service job, he feels it is a good position, where he can find respect and speak up for himself.

The job in America is good. If you stay good [responsible, conscientious], it is good. But if you are a trouble-maker, it no good. If you working good, coming on time. Whatever the boss say, you do it. Whatever the boss say don't do, you don't do it. If the boss say do this, you have to

respect the boss, but sometimes the boss acts crazy and they give you extra job and asks you to do something and you have to say this not my job. For example, I'm a cook, but they give me dishwasher. Is that my job? No, it's not. However, even if I'm a cook, I'm still going to wash dishes. But if boss says do this, I have to say that's not my job, that is not right. You have to say respect me and don't give me extra job.

In addition, Dabir's employment introduces him to people from all over: the different nationalities, cultures, and accents of people on the job give him a broad sense of a pluralistic America, one that is beyond simply being Black and white. When he first arrived in America, his perspective was that any "Black" person he saw was a Black American and that any "white" person he saw was "white American."

I work with different-country people: white people, different country; Black people, different country. Before, I think everyone is from America, until they talk and because of the accent. They will say, I'm from Jamaica, I'm from Australia, I'm from Canada. I'm Somalia. Where you from? I'm from Burundi. Where you from? Kenya. But when I see them, I say they are America. We have a lot of people who are working at hotel, you don't know where they came from until you tell them where you from? When I first came, I met one of my friends, he is from Kenya. I don't know he is from Kenya, he is Black and I say he is America, you see. He asked me where you from? He asked me because I speak broken English. He hear it. I say I'm from Somalia. He say, oh, you my neighbor because I'm from Kenya. So when I see white people they talking. They say they are not born here, but you don't know they are not from here because of their English. They ask me, where you from: I'm from Africa. Where you from, Canada? Oh, you not from Canada because you are white. when I was in Africa, I was thinking that white people

are only America. I didn't know that in New Zealand they are white, in Australia they are white. I learn that on my job. I go to school on my job.

Dabir is a father of six children. His children are 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4; he has four daughters and two sons (and a seventh baby on the way). All of the fathers have large families. Immigrant high fertility can contribute to inequality as large families strain economic resources and create less income for investments in better health and education outcomes (Saunders, 1995). Nevertheless, even with his limited income, Dabir is a generous man, who uses his job to care not only for himself and his family, but also for his community. He gets \$200 in food stamps for his kids, and Medicare. He pays for car insurance and a car loan. His subsidized house payment in Southview is \$600, which includes all utilities. For a working-class husband and father, he has three second-hand cars. He uses one car to get to work. Another for his wife, and then he has a van, which he says is for the community. He saved to make a down payment on each car, but still has three payments that equal \$400 a month on the cars.

That Dabir has three vehicles only emphasizes his commitment to his family (he wants his wife to take the children to their appointments which means he does not have to miss time off from work to do it). But it also emphasizes his desire to aid his community and shows the deep ties of kinship. He purchased a third vehicle – the van – to transport the children of other Somali families so that they could participate in cultural and community events. When I leave the home from the interview, he shows me the brown van. It looks large enough to seat 12 passengers. “I buy for the community, if there are a lot [of people], everybody can go in this car.” In the van, he can take the whole family to Wal-mart, or to the mall. He lets the community use the van to get people to the mosque, weddings, and cultural celebrations.

Dabir’s story is important because it provides a glimpse of how the Somali Bantu

fathers use the job skills they gained in Kenya to find their way into the American labor system. His limited education and lack of technology skills limited his choices; but his work as a cook in Kenya gave him a skill that made him employable in America. Their jobs, even though they are low wage benefit the Somali Bantu. The jobs expose them to social networks and opportunities for acculturation that help the Somali Bantu to assimilate into society. Furthermore, it underscores the importance of jobs to provide the financial capital that offers a sense of security to family and extended family. Dabir uses his service-sector income to help sustain his family and to provide for the larger community.

6.4 TAHIR, 24, THE GROCERY STORE ATTENDANT

The two earlier narratives show how the accrual of human capital – gaining specific labor skills such as cooking or carpentry – offered Hafiz and Dabir a chance to get a foothold into the American labor system. They each reflect with pride on the skills they learned in Somalia and Kenya. However, the Somali Bantu men who are younger are able to draw on emerging levels of cultural capital. The younger Somali Bantu were able to complete high school in the United States and acquire an English-language proficiency and knowledge of American culture that are critical skills to helping them venture into the American labor market.

This is what happened for Tahir. Though he is only four years younger than Dabir, he was able to complete high school in this Northeastern city, gaining critical education credentials and fluency in the English language. This cultural capital, combined with his ability to do hard work, helped him to find a job, offering the financial stability to help provide for his family.

Tahir was 13 when he came to this Northeastern city in the United States in 2004. He went to a local middle school and His family lived in Eastville, a working-class neighborhood populated with businesses, different races. He went to Stanley High for two years before it closed and then went to Armstrong, where he graduated high school. Both of the schools were two of this Northeastern city's top performing public schools.

It is mid-March, 2014. It's about 8:15 a.m. when I catch the No. 15 bus and take the 10-minute ride to Southview to visit with Tahir. This is my first visit to his home. I don't know quite where to go, but I can identify his home because it stands out among the row of red-brick dwellings because of the brightly colored red and white cloth that is at the windows. I knock lightly on the door. His wife, Khadisha, answers. Her hair is covered in a scarf and she wears a long skirt. "My husband is upstairs," she tells me. She is a recent high school graduate and they have been married since 2011. Their 1-year-old son is asleep this morning, so I don't get to see him. Khadisha offers me shi-shi (hot tea), but I decline. Shortly, Tahir scurries downstairs.

It is Saint Patrick's Day and Tahir's dress shows his acculturation to the holiday. He has on kelly green pants and a Black sweatshirt. On his wrist, he wears a shiny oversized silver watch and bracelet. He has on brown dock-siders shoes. I sit with him and we briefly and generally chat about his day's schedule, his son, and life in Southview. Tahir has lived in Southview Estates about two months. He came here from Harpsburg, a more middle-income suburban community, where he lived for about five years. His bills in Harpsburg – between rent on his apartment and utilities – would average more than \$800 a month. It exhausted his finances. Like all of the Somali Bantu families in Southviews, Tahir and his wife moved to the public housing space because they were overwhelmed by the economics of living on low wages.

“I had no money for diapers. It was too much.” “My financial system was too much. I was trying to go back to school” (he was studying to be an electrician at a local community college and he now he has aspirations of wanting to transfer to a small private college in downtown). I can’t ever put gas in my car. Rent is too high. My stepfather, a great man, he helped me. He told me, you have a wife and a child. You are stressed out, working all the time. I couldn’t pay my medical bills. You can’t pay your bills and the rent is too high. In Southview Estates you can save money.”

Tahir’s testimony underscores the Bantu economic struggle. As an economic strategy, the Bantu families move to Southview Estates. It lowers their living expenses. “Living here has helped my financial system. I pay \$605 for everything [including utility]. Now I can afford my rent, I have gas in my car, I can buy diapers, I can buy some things that my wife wants.”

On the morning when I’m accompanying him to work, we leave the house about 9 a.m. We get into his silver SUV, and drive 20 minutes across town to his job. Tahir works at a large supermarket in Park Place, a busy, middle-income area. He has worked here for three years as a cook. When he enters in the morning, the place is already abuzz. A young Asian cashier waves to him. His colleagues in the produce section are spraying vegetables with cool water. Prep cooks are readying chicken and deli meat. “Working as a cook, it’s a lot,” he says. “At the minute you want to close, somebody is there wanting something to eat.” Soon after arriving, Tahir runs back to clock-in and change into his white apron and chef’s hat. He soon takes his place, behind the counter, ready to begin his day. He works sometimes six days a week – and most days from 10 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. He always tries to get to work a half-hour early. He averages 40 hours every week. He earns \$11 an hour, or \$440 a week, before taxes. When he began as a porter-server, he earned minimum wage; and when he became a cook, he was paid \$8.25 an hour. Tahir is an

imam, a religious leader in his community. Often, his workplace will allow him Friday afternoon off to participate in the traditional prayer time for Muslims.

His workplace is located in a vibrant middle-class, racially diverse neighborhood, where there are jobs, several bus lines, small restaurants, walking-traffic, banks, and hospitals. The story of how Tahir came to this cosmopolitan space is an illustration how the Somali Bantu use the knowledge and language skills they gain in the receiving country. Deploying these skills opens them up to diverse social networks to find jobs and further aid the process of incorporation into the receiving society. How did Tahir get to this workplace? His stepfather told him about the job. His stepfather was working at supermarket's in a southern suburb. Tahir would go to that store to drop his stepfather off at work or to translate on job matters. The manager of the store would see Tahir. "You speak good English," he told the young man. His stepdad saw this as an opening, and asked Tahir to apply for a job. The same day that Tahir finished the application, the store manager told him he was hired. Within a year, Tahir and his stepfather were transferred to the Park Place store, which is a much shorter commute. It's like a little clan at the store: his mom is a server; his stepfather is a porter/dishwasher; his uncle is a dishwasher; his father's cousin (Tahir calls him uncle) is a prep cook.

Tahir is one of the few in his family to speak fluent English. Yet, how others in his family, who are less proficient in English, passed the language test to work at the supermarket is evidence of how Somali Bantu families cooperate and benefit from the significance of weak ties.

"My parents can't speak it [English]. Can't write it. I explained this to my boss. I went to the Human Resources offices and told them, they [meaning his family and Somali Bantu people] can do this job. I can teach them to understand English [and to use the computer so that they can do the job]. It was a process, but they finally told us they would hire the Somali Bantu.

Here's what occurred. Tahir was told to bring as many family members as he could to the grocery store offices. He had to find a time to bring everybody to the same appointment, because the store gives the test, which is taken on the computer, on one specific day. His dad, his uncle, his mother, stepmom, and stepfather's cousin all came to take the test. They were aided by Renee, a white woman who works in human resources. Tahir talked to her about the recruitment of Somali Bantu. "She gave us the questions to the test," Tahir told me, "and we studied them and told the Bantu what the answers would be so that they could pass the assessment. They were hired. [Renee] said they were looking for hard workers. I told her, I'm easy to get along with. You smile at me and I'll smile at you back."

Much like Dabir used his economic capital to purchase cars to aid his family and his community, Tahir is using his cultural capital, his language ability, to secure employment not only for himself, but also to get jobs for his family members. His English fluency has allowed him to build bridges between himself, his community, and the older generation.

6.5 MR. H, 40, DISHWASHER/JANITOR

Settlement into the American workspace for Mr. H was a bit more bumpy. He worked in Somalia as a brick-maker, crafting small homes of mud and wood. He had some carpentry know-how but was never able to match his skills from his home nation with a similar skilled position in the host nation. Consequently, though he worked hard, he seemed to struggle with finding a work environment where he was able to form friendships outside of his Somali Bantu circle. When this

did not happen, he also was slower to gain new language skills. Overall, his integration into the U.S. labor force did seem as complete and satisfying as it did for others.

In 2004, Mr. H came to this Northeastern city. Since then, he has worked as a janitor, a cleaner in a chicken factory, a laundry man, an express-mail packager, and, finally, as a dishwasher/janitor in a grocery. He has never made more than \$10 an hour.

By spending time with Mr. H in Southview, I observed that part of his daily life revolves around the close and reciprocal relations that he has with other Somali Bantu males as they share resources to find jobs, to get to their jobs, and to cope with low wages. Mr. H and several of his Somali Bantu neighbors all work together, at a grocery chain store about a 40-minute drive away. I am there one day to visit with Mr. H when a used Ford pulls up to the parking space in front of his home. In the car, two Somali Bantu men have driven from their homes around the corner to pick up their friend, Mr. H, who comes to the car in blue jeans, a large green jacket and Black boots. At the car, the men exchange a few greetings, and Mr. H takes a seat in the rear. For more than a month, the Somali Bantu men have come to pick up their co-worker Mr. H, taking him to work and not charging him a dime. That is not the African way, they say. Mr. H's car is in the shop, but the men know that if Mr. H's car were working, they know they could depend on him to give them rides to work. It is an exchange of support that gives the newcomers to Southview Estates the help to survive living here.

While talking to Mr. H one day during his break, I ask about how he found the job at the grocery?

“*They* told me,” he said. “*They*” are other Somali Bantu workers – his neighbors.

“*They*” told Mr. H to go to a local immigrant resettlement nonprofit group headquartered in a mostly Black neighborhood across town.

“I went there. To the chapel,” Mr. H said.

The “chapel” is a large mostly Black Catholic church, which is active in the immigrant African community. When he got there, the nonprofit helped Mr. H to apply online for the job. He waited for an email reply and was told to come in for an interview. Another Somali Bantu, Muya, drove him to the job site and translated for Mr. H during the interview. Muya has lived in this city for about 10 years and graduated high school here. His English is very good and many newer Somali Bantu trust his advice to help them get settled.

In his job as dishwasher/janitor at the grocer, Mr. H works about 28 hours a week. He earns \$8.25 an hour. His schedule varies. If he works 5 days, he’ll make 32-35 hours; if he works 4 days, he’ll earn 28 hours. He works mostly from 2 to 9 p.m. He cannot work full time he says, because if he does, he’ll lose his welfare assistance. His home rent will be higher and he can’t afford to increase costs.

Mr. H said he enjoys his work at the grocery because it “makes it better to have someone to talk to” and “it’s not hard with friendship.” He works there with other Somali Bantu and doesn’t feel alienated because he can chat in his native tongue and share news of home and of his community. He also said he likes working at the grocery because it is indoors and easy work. He likes it because there is no manager yelling, nobody being mean. “Everything is just perfect.”

This wasn’t always the case. As he moved from job to job, Mr. H seems to have struggled with incorporation into the American labor force. He has faced supervisors who yelled at him, been at job sites that were too far away to afford the commuting costs, and felt shunned and alienated from co-workers because of his limited language skills. He seems to thrive among ethnic niches, where he’s able to have more friendly interaction and support. In his case, we see how language barriers present challenges with building long-term and durable thin networks.

6.6 CONCLUSIONS

In summary, the narratives reveal that for the Somali Bantu fathers are no straight roads to assimilation and integration. Rather, a tangled patchwork of circumstances connected to their personal history, previous job skills, and where they find jobs once in America lead some to “success,” but others to disappointment. It’s clear that a sense of having a “skill” matters. But it seems important for the Bantu, and those who are helping them, to identify their skills – as a carpenter, an entrepreneur – as a way to find jobs. Acknowledging their human capital seemed to lead each to jobs where the men met a diverse set of co-workers who were welcoming. This created the favorable conditions where the Somali Bantu were encouraged to learn the language to better perform their jobs and introduced the men to information such as how to advocate about work duties, manage time, and being seen as part of the team. When the men were connected to a “skill,” it made the men more motivated and this higher motivation was reflected in their job performance. At any rate, the work spaces in these cases certainly seemed to open the door for acculturation (language and other workplace behaviors) and integration, being in a place where they did not seem devalued because of their ethnicity or refugee status.

In contrast, Mr. H was connected to work, too, but his experiences seemed more unsatisfactory. His lack of language proficiency and lack of identification with a set of work skills or the lack of human capital that seemed valuable for the American workplace left him rambling through a string of janitorial positions. He seemed to struggle, too, with building work relationships outside of his Somali Bantu friendships.

Job attainment matters for the Somali Bantu fathers. Not only do the jobs give them access to the financial capital to help take care of their large families, but the jobs also become important spaces for the men to begin the process of adapting to their new society. It is important to note the characteristics that migrants bring with them from their home countries, such as education level and language skills (Portes & Zhou, 1993; Rumbaut, 1997; C. Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). The fathers, because of their past of being discriminated against, do not have high education skills. When they came to the United States, most could not read or write their native language much less English. They do, however, possess resilience and an optimism that motivate them to high performance once they find jobs in America.

But it is also important to note the context of the host nations into which they are being received. This context includes understanding the local labor market, race and ethnic relations, government policies and programs (Bloemraad, 2008; Gozdziaik & Martin, 2005). In this Northeastern city, for example, the disappearance of industrial employment and its higher wage positions from the local economy and a U.S. policy that prioritizes economic self-sufficiency (often at the expense of acquiring more education or higher skills training) mean that the Bantu fathers – because of their limited education and lack of technology skills – could only find low wage jobs in the service sector.

From the interviews with the Somali Bantu fathers and husbands, we can note that in Somalia, the men were agrarian. They lived in the Jubba Valley, a lush, agricultural region, and worked caring for goats, cattle, in carpentry, managing small farms, fishing, cooking, or manufacturing bricks to make homes. In the Kenya refugee camps, they drew upon their agricultural skills and community cooperation to survive. In the Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya, Somali Bantus made up about 10 percent of the 130,000 refugees in that camp, yet they held

more than 90 percent of the jobs connected to heavy labor, construction, cooking, and other manual labor tasks (Sekhon 2008). As a community, the Somali Bantu gained a reputation for being both industrious and adaptable.

In Somalia, for those who could afford it, they sent their children into the cities to be educated. Locally, the few who went to school went, for a few years to madrasas, educational institutions of varying quality, where they learned Arabic to understand the Koran, the Muslim holy book. They spoke mostly Kiziguwa, the language of their fathers, and not the official language of the state, which further excluded their participation with the larger society.

In the Kakuma camp, where they went in preparation for resettlement to America, the Somali Bantu had the chance to go to school to learn English, math and other subjects. According to Mr. A, many felt their primary obligation was to support family. Because of scarce jobs and resources, many of them hustled all day to find ways to earn money to support their families and did not have time to attend school. The struggle to earn money was exhaustive. Some of the young Somali Bantu males found jobs as cooks with military units, or rented bicycles and worked as delivery boys with bicycle taxis, delivering wood, food, even people, which left little time to seek an education. These structures in their homeland – the lack of education, and low levels of higher job skills negatively impacted the refugees' lives – severely limited the employment available to them on resettlement into America. These elements shaped the knowledge and cultural capital of the fathers. The fathers have the knowledge and cultural background to pass along information and skills on how to survive in the agrarian context of life in Somalia or how to survive the rigors in the refugee camps. But they have low levels of local knowledge and low levels of education and skills training in America. These low levels of knowledge limit opportunities to participate at higher levels in American society. By only being

able to access U.S. employment at the lowest levels, the Bantu fathers are not able to directly link to the employment, education, and networks that can connect them to the larger culture.

In their host nation, most jobs available to the Bantu are low paying and service-oriented and they do not provide a livable wage. Higher wage jobs require education and credentials, and by looking at the case of Sabeeh, a 30-year-old Somali Bantu father who lives in Southview, we can understand how challenging it can be for the Bantu to receive this education.

The restrictions in regard to education are evident in the life trajectory of Sabeeh. He has frequently moved from low-wage job to low-wage job. He has worked in laundry service, as a baggage handler, as a dishwasher. He now is a part-time food-service worker at a local grocery market. He makes \$10 an hour, the most he has ever made. He believes if he had better education, he might have better opportunities.

Sabeeh and I talked one evening in his home and he told me he went to school in the Kenya refugee camp, advancing to level six and studying English, Swahili, Arabic, agricultural science, math and what he called “gee-O-graph,” or geography. The preparations for the process of coming to America meant he never got to secondary school in Kenya. He was 19 when he came to America, and he looked forward to finishing high school. Caseworkers told him he was too old to go to high school, that he could be no older than 18. If you go to college, they said, you pay for yourself. *“I’m a refugee, I don’t get the money to pay for school,” he said. He was afraid of debt and didn’t quite understand what it was. “I’m not going to get into a trap I don’t know about. So, I just focus on getting a job and been working up to now.”* For two or three months, he took ESL classes. A caseworker told him it was required if he wanted to receive government assistance with the rent and bills. The regulations on the age required to exit high

school stunted the ability of the Somali Bantu to master language and other skills, severely truncating their opportunities to qualify for employment beyond service level.

One matter that was beneficial. As refugees, they came into their new communities connected to a network of U.S.-based charities and faith-based groups that were organized to assist the newcomers with employment. These networks provided a link to weak ties that crossed racial and class boundaries, putting the refugees into contact with professional, middle-class, white people who enabled the Bantu refugees to get jobs.

Another key point: the Bantu father's social identity is unattached to negative social stereotypes about Black males and low wage laborers. This is in contrast to what Elliot Liebow (1967) found when his study looked at the unwritten codes and behaviors of impoverished Black men in urban spaces. He argued that if the Black men worked low wage jobs they were characterized and categorized as low class.

Instead, the Bantu men in Southview Estates seem to derive a different social identity from "working." They see themselves in a category of supportive father, husband, and provider. It is not that they do not know that low-wage service is hard, grinding work, but in their closed ethnic networks, they reaffirm that even low-wage employment is a step toward contributing and participating in the fuller society and a step that allows them to help their family. Because their social identity as low class is not reinforced among the Somali Bantu first-generation males, gaining employment, even if as a laundry worker or cook, becomes an accomplishment. Their pride in their jobs is counter to the theme that low wage equals low status.

7.0 THE SONS: NAVIGATING SUCCESS AND STRUGGLE

7.1 INTRODUCTION

While doing fieldwork in the summer of 2013, I found myself more closely observing the sons of the fathers whose lives I had immersed myself in. For several months, I was able to have substantive conversations with two of the young men, talking about their hopes for the future and their life in America. I grew particularly close to Amir, the eldest son of Mr. H, one of my informants. Amir was charismatic and it was easy to get to know him. I also came to know Mabad, a recent graduate of one of the highest performing public schools in the city. When I was seeking young men to interview, almost all the young Bantu sons I met suggested I should talk with Mabad. They seemed awed by his accomplishments. To them, Mabad seemed heroic. He had achieved high honors in high school, they told me, and had won college scholarships to study engineering. Mabad was tough to reach: he was busy working, teaching Arabic classes, managing family responsibility. At our first meeting, I went to his home. He was pleasant and chatty and had a lot to say about family, culture, faith, and the enduring issues of education and opportunity that were swirling about his life. One day, Mabad and I talked about his hopes for life in Southview Estates: “Maybe one day all of my family members could live in this

neighborhood. It would be like back home and one another walking on the street at night without having any type of fear. It will probably take some time, but I do notice a lot of people, my family members are moving to this neighborhood, which is good.”

Mabad and Amir are already connected to a group of young men who live in Southview – a close network of friends and relatives – who often came over to Mr. H’s house to watch movies with Amir, play soccer or visit other Somali Bantu teens. In spending time with the young men, at soccer games, at community celebrations, or just watching television, I was able to get a glimpse into how they navigate successes and challenges through one of this city’s most impoverished public housing communities and life in general. I heard them express themselves regarding family, identity, and their aspirations for the future. One day, during one of our chats, Amir declares: “I am never going to say I’m American. I will always be Somali first.” Amir’s declaration resonates with the voices of other Somali Bantu teen males. They all tussle with how to maintain their cultural identity, while trying to build more integrated lives in America.

As I observed and interacted more closely with the young men, I was able to visit their homes, take them on job interviews, and watch them at various cultural festivals and weddings. Being with them, I entered into a thicket of contrasts regarding opportunity and inequality. They are second-generation sons of refugees. They speak flawless English, and engage the language of hip-hop, yet they speak to their parents in Kiziguwa, the language of their homeland, as many of them were born in Somalia or one of the Kenya refugee camps. They are challenged by family responsibility to their parents and younger siblings and finding a way to afford and stay in higher education. Two became young, unwed fathers. Like many other young Black men growing up in impoverished urban neighborhoods, they all struggle to find employment beyond service-level, dead-end positions as a way to a better life.

In this chapter, I try to more closely examine the dichotomies of their life. In particular, they stand between two cultures: Somalia and America; childhood and manhood. What is their agency to choose where they belong? This chapter describes how they grapple with self-identity (are they American or Somali Bantu or both), how do they find and link to helping networks for jobs and education beyond high school, what role does the circumstance of class have in their lives? What are the structural disadvantages that play out in their lives? Though I briefly introduce the network of friends, and summarize what might be common challenges, I focus more closely on the lives of Amir and Mabad. I believe their stories reveal the challenges and contrasting strategies that the Somali Bantu sons use to accumulate enough resources to have a sustainable livelihood given the opportunities presented before them.

The young men I interview are composed of a core peer group of seven. When I begin my formal observation of their lives most are in high school or freshmen in a local community college. They are a varied group, who are all linked by their association with Amir. It is through Amir that I get to know them. The young men seem bound by the ties of culture, kinship, and intergenerational cohabitation. The young men I interact with never talk about drugs. I have never seen one of them smoke. As Muslims, they adhere to the stricture to not eat pork.

However, while there is some cultural assimilation, they seem to reach for a separate space in Southview. On the weekdays, they hang out in each other's houses watching movies. When they go to the public areas of the housing project, they usually go as a group, avoiding the Black American youths there, because, when basketball games get too heated, tensions can easily ignite. On the courts, they also easily feel the animosity of being "outsiders" because of their ethnic difference. "When we go," Amir told me, "and there are Black guys there, they don't want to share the court. Or if we play, they try to pick fights by bumping into us. They call us

Africans.” So, many days now, the young men avoid the courts because confrontations can explode. Mostly, they play soccer late night and across town, where they have access to a school’s indoor field because a Somali Bantu father works at the school as a janitor. I have never seen them speak harshly to their parents (or even each other – though they tease each other about hair, accents, dress, soccer skills, and skin complexion); they attend school regularly. While there’s a noticeable police presence in the neighborhood, none has had run-ins with the law.

Six of the seven young men are living in Southview Estates with their parents and other siblings. The other lives in a neighborhood about 20 minutes away. When I first began my formal observation, they ranged in age from 14 to 20 and they seem to have a pathway to advancing through society because of connections to social workers, school teachers, and education: many of them were solid, active students in their public and charter schools or were in their beginning semesters of community college. They are a varied group of young men. Their school and out-of-school activities paint them as average teens: They participate in Bantu community events, play school sports, flirt with dating, follow their faith, and relish time just to hang out. Their short biographies reveal they have a sense of hope, which seems to be a component of who they are. They feel they have a future, despite life in the public housing community and refugee fathers. Some are making their first foray into the service-sector economy and seem to understand the realities of low income and express a desire to do better. Despite the depressed conditions of Southview, they have a view of life beyond the projects and slum. Here they are in summer 2013, when I was first able to sit with them in group-discussion.

Summer of 2013

Mabad is 20. He was an exceptional student. He had scholarships to several colleges, but enrolled at a local community college, taking classes in physical science. For a few month now, he's had a job going door-to-door selling vacuums. Between work and helping family, he soon stopped going to campus, and he is taking a few online classes at community college. He occasionally plays soccer with the group, but spends much of his time romancing a young woman on Facebook and through text messages (he writes her poems) and studying the Koran. He wonders how to help his people. "I first wanted to be an aerospace engineer and then it was like how will I help my people or society, if I'm here making this big buck, other than me bringing all this money, how will it help my people, how will that help the people that suffer."

Aaleem is 20. At Somali Bantu cultural celebrations, Aaleem is frequently chosen as the youth speaker. He is poised and articulate and wears dark-rimmed glasses. He was a good student at a high-performing public high school and is now at community college. He is taking engineering classes, but he is undecided about his future. "It is very hard to choose actually like one thing when you know in life you can be whatever you want. So, I'm kind of like, first [I wanted to be] an engineer and nurse and now it's being a doctor. I want to do all those things."

Amir, 18, is Mabad's cousin. He is a freshman in community college studying criminal justice. Charismatic and articulate, the other guys seem to follow his lead. If he wants to play soccer, they play soccer. If he wants to go watch movies, they will gather at his home to watch TV. He is small for his age and works part-time at a corner market. It is a job he hates. He told me he transferred into a charter school because in public school he was "was tired of hearing teachers say 'if you want to learn or don't want to learn, that's on you.' And, it was a place where

too many African American kids doubt each other. Some of the Somali kids were doing the same thing: sagging pants, smoking weed, getting in fights. I wanted to do better.”

Nafi is 18. He is quiet. He has not done very well in high school and was moved to an alternative education program. Still, he dreams of graduating and being an actor, finding fame. After he graduates, Nafi told me: “I want to take it step by step. I don’t want to get lost.” He said he wants to start at the community college because he knows other Bantu young men who have started college there.

Rahim is 17. He is Mabad’s brother and Amir’s cousin. He is an exceptional student at a well-regarded high school. He has a serious nature and prefers to be alone. He talks quickly and is proud of his academic achievement. The other boys admire him for his academic success and personal motivation. He is the first Somali Bantu male who will be starting at a four-year college. “My ambition,” he tells me, “is to prove I can be successful. I think I can make a difference. I think I can move forward. I am following my religion and being strong.”

Mutaal is 16, a sophomore and good student at a well-regarded public high school. He lives outside of Southview. He plays soccer for his school. He works part-time at a small store owned by a Muslim friend. “Mr. Arvin,” as he calls me, “I want to get a soccer scholarship and go to college and study engineering.”

Abbas is 14. He is Amir’s younger brother and cousin to Mabad and Rahim. He is a freshman in high school. Tall and thin, he has a reserved manner and favors colorful tennis shoes and likes to watch martial arts films on television. He plays soccer. He does not work. Participates in an academic enrichment program held in the summer at an elite private academy. “I’m not sure,” he told me, “what I want to do with my life yet. But I do want to get somewhere where I can enjoy my job and help my parents.”

For the next year, I was able to track Amir and Mabad and more of their lives are highlighted later in this chapter. I was not able to follow the others as closely. However, in checking in with them, I noticed new realities had set in. As they get older, they seem to be detached from many of the helping networks of white volunteers that enabled their parents to find their footing in America. As they age out of high school, also gone are the helping structures – the teachers and counselors – who gave them encouragement and guidance to be good students and to aspire for more in America. A few of the elder sons are starting their own families.

Fall of 2014

Mabad is married. He is no longer taking online college classes and works at a local candy factory. He wants a better job. On Saturday mornings, he spends time teaching the Koran and Arabic lessons to his younger siblings and cousins. He lives with his parents.

Aaleem has left community college. He says it is temporary. He says he needed to find a job to help with the family. His mother had another baby and his father was injured and can't work steadily. Aaleem babysits his younger siblings in the day and works the late-shift part-time at a 24-hour convenience store.

Amir has left community college. He is also an unmarried father, having had a son born to a Black American girl who lives in Southview. He and the girl are no longer a couple. Amir has had at least three jobs and is working the night shift as a clerk for a cable company.

Nafi has dropped out of high school. He has a child, a son, whose mother is biracial and lives in Southview Estates.

Rahim is in a college, about 50 minutes away from the city. He lives in the dorm. The

university tutoring group gave him a celebration send-off and the whole Somali Bantu community looks to him as a model of what is possible. In the months before he left, he worked as a cashier in a local grocery store.

Mutaal remains happy-go-lucky. He continues to play soccer for his high school, maintains a B average, and is applying to colleges. He says he is interested in being a doctor, a teacher, or a police officer. “How do you choose one thing, when in life you can do whatever you want?” he questions me. He works part-time at a small store owned by a Muslim friend.

Abbas is still quiet and introspective. He has withdrawn from the summer enrichment program and his interest in school seems to be waning. He is a high school sophomore.

It is evident that, unlike their parents, these young men grew up in America; they are not refugees so they have limited services compared to their parents. However, similar, to their parents, their prospects are marginalized given their lack of economic resources; and while education is accessible and significant, their need to help their various families presents challenges to finishing college. Their fathers often speak of how much they want their sons to rise in American society (to be teachers, police officers, engineers). But the fathers do not know how to fill out college applications, are not aware of deadlines, cannot negotiate the complicated financial aid forms and generally unable to navigate the education system to get their sons prepped for higher education. And, more so, the fathers’ expectations for the adult sons to contribute financial and social support to their large families complicate the young men’s journeys. On the other hand, the fathers do pass along a sense of resilience and optimism.

Often during our conversations, I heard this resilience being expressed as “hard work.” The young men used the term “hard work” to describe how they might find a way to escape Southview Estates but they seemed to believe the strong ties and connections to family were the

more important factor to moving forward. I always heard, in particular from Mabad, that family was how you got help. From our initial meeting, I sensed that the young men desired to move forward, beyond the jobs and limitations their fathers may experience, but they are not sure how to do that. Once they leave high school, there is no sustained tutoring or guidance such as a group from a local university provides to so many of the younger Somali Bantu kids. Many of their parents did not go to school – much less college – in Somalia. They lack a deeper sense of the structure and process of how to get into – and through – an American college. What their fathers do pass along is the expectation to “never give up” and a sense of connection to family and community.

A closer look at the young men reveals that they have agency, too. They are individuals who make choices, influenced by family, teachers, personal perspectives on religion, and personal optimism. As individuals, they have the capacity for action: “individuals are not passive receivers of structural forces, rather they interpret and respond to those forces in creative ways. In asserting the autonomy of the individual at this cultural level, however, we must not lose sight of structural forms of class domination from which there is no escape” (McLeod, 1987). This is important, because the Somali Bantu sons live in a low-income space where there is an absence of models of men who work at higher-skilled level jobs. Their fathers can teach them to work hard, but it can be tough for the fathers to introduce their sons to job networks that they themselves do not have access to. Their income levels limit their opportunities to live elsewhere, attend different schools, and build social networks with middle-income Americans.

Structures of class/education hamper their mobility: most of the young men, aided by the white helpers in their lives, were able to enroll in high-achieving public high schools or reputable charter school programs. The structure of supportive teachers enabled them to do academically

well and to graduate in preparation for community college. Once in community college, the autonomy of college left them on their own. The daily, structured support of the tutoring group disappears. They seem set adrift because there was no college club, study group to specifically address their needs of how to balance family and study expectations.

Also to be considered is the fact that after high school, the job prospects are dim for everyone. The young Bantu men face a double burden because they are still needed at home—hence while college will have larger payoffs once completed, the demands from their community with regards to labor, money, language, and religious training over burden these boys. Many of the Somali Bantu marry young and begin families early. Having to negotiate university and family responsibilities at the same time is a new challenge and there are few models on how to successfully negotiate their way through the complexity. To finish high school is a significant step and to enroll in higher education, even if it is community college, is a measure of success for the sons. But in America, not being able to attend or finish college can limit/constrain one's ability to receive the necessary skills to have better occupational choices. As a result, in low-income communities, for the young men, the interaction between culture and structure both control their aspirations and can cause tension in their lives. Class-based realities/mechanisms set limits on mobility, but so too could cultural innovations. It takes both micro and macro processes, working simultaneously to constrain lower-class individuals (McLeod, 1987). In other words, the young men have to overcome economic hurdles, limited formal education, and job networks that connect them to low-income service positions, as well as family and kinship interactions that ask the sons to respect family wishes to stay close to home and to contribute to the household and family needs, which often become obstacles to seeking higher education.

For the Somali Bantu sons, the family is a chief socializing influence and plays a central role in the process of social reproduction. In this case, we can look more closely at the life of Mabad and Amir, which helps us understand how commitment to family and responsibility to family impact the lives of the Bantu sons. Also, a father's cultural values and expectations, his history of surviving, and his occupational position are factors that matter for the sons. The narratives flow from oldest to youngest because, as the sons age, I think we can see the trajectory of how they disconnect from resources that might have been influential earlier in their lives.

7.2 MABAD, 20, ELDER SON, FACTORY WORKER, COLLEGE DROPOUT

It is a sunny, Saturday afternoon in March and Mabad sits surrounded by family on the first floor of their red-brick home. Mabad is in his family's living room giving lessons in Arabic and on the Koran to 14 children. There are 8 girls, whose heads are covered in scarves, and 6 boys. Most of them are Mabad's brothers and sisters, or his cousins. They all live in Southview Estates. The children break their lessons to come say hello and to shake my hand. Mabad says that teaching the children to read and understand the Koran is a window to strengthening their faith, a way to hold onto their culture. Mabad is using faith as identity. It is his attempt to not be assimilated into the larger African American culture, to establish a social distinction and stitch a form of cohesion among the Somali kids. The children's female teacher, one of Mabad's younger sisters, reminds them of this when they get unruly: "you guys are like brothers and sisters. I don't want to hear you talking bad to each other."

In giving the lessons, it is Mabad's attempt to preserve their traditions for the next generation. This, he believes, gives him a sense of identity and recognition and tie-in with the homeland. Mabad lives in the home with his mother and father, a proud Somali Bantu gentleman who believes the ways of the homeland should be adhered to. He does not want to see his family lose its connection to Islam. Mabad is his eldest son and he expects him to teach the lessons. Also, Mabad was born in Somalia, he remembers learning the Koran and his family's devotion to faith when he was in the refugee camp.

As an elder son, it is also a way that Mabad is able to respond to the family's economic challenges. Mabad's father works at the candy factory. His mother works occasionally for a large delivery company. The Somali Bantu families just could not afford to pay for the weekly Arabic lessons offered at a local mosque that cost \$300 a child. There are eight children in Mbwera's family and cost is just not something his family or many of the Somali Bantu families can afford. "I'm available (he says with pride) Saturday and Sunday. I'd rather be here with the kids. They are learning and the review gives me practice." He has been teaching the class for about 3 weeks.

Mabad is small but muscular, and wears a neatly trimmed goatee. He talks quickly and is a busy fellow. He takes an online class through community college. He is engaged and his wedding is in July. Early marriage and beginning a family early are common practices for the Somali Bantu. He works in the candy factory for five nights a week and is saving for his wedding. When he is not working or running errands for his parents, he is home teaching the classes, or spending time reading, or watching his younger siblings. Back home in Somalia, he told me, Somali Bantu were together and felt safe. "I would not want my brother or sister to keep far away. Together we feel safe. Back home, it was more of a village. We did more outside and the only time we came into the house was to sleep. There was a sense of safety-ness."

Mabad is adjusting to life in Southview Estates. He has lived here for about two years and he was fearful when the family first moved in. “There were gunshots all the time. To be honest, I did not want to see my family involved up here.” However, over the years, as more Somali Bantu families have moved to Southview Estates, he sees his kinfolk and extended kin all the time and it gives him “some sense of peace. I don’t hear gunshots or anything. On days, it seems like all my family is living here, just like back home, walking around without fear.”

Mabad had a 3.4 GPA at a public high school reputable for its high performing students and college acceptance rates. In school, he says, he was quiet and super nice. Every time, he brought his report card home, his parents gave him \$20. “I was getting those rewards and I was working hard in school. That kept me going.” But there was tension in his parents’ expectations. There is support for high academic achievement in the home. It influenced Mabad to have high aspirations and he was able to receive scholarships to the University of Michigan and Penn State. Yet, his parents thought those schools were too far away. So after high school graduation, they encouraged him to attend the local community college – about a 10-minute drive from where he lives. The educational attainment of his parents is very low. They don’t quite understand the different opportunities and social networks that can be gained from attending community college verses attending a four-year school. Mabad is a young man and their first goal is to protect him. To have him go that far away alone would leave him unprotected. In the tradition that they come out of, they would want him nearby.

One of the ways Mabad was able to achieve was by modeling his older sister, Ameera. Mabad says it is important to have “an idol,” someone the Somali Bantu can look up to. He thought of Ameera as a role model for how to persevere. He remembers she came home and did the cooking and then did her homework, or she finished babysitting and then did her homework

late at night. She was very successful academically and after she graduated, she attended a nursing program at community college and got a job as a nutritionist with a local hospital. While in high school, he also received encouragement and tutoring from the local university students and a white teacher at school helped him with the financial aid form for college. When he went off to community college he felt practically alone. There were a few Bantu on campus, but because they worked and went to school, they rarely saw each other. Because they had to work, they didn't have time to connect to campus activities. He was often the only Bantu in his classes.

Despite his challenges and uncertainties, Mabad maintains an optimism that he will achieve better. "I'm 100 percent sure I want to be a nurse," he says. But in the next breath he also says he wants to be an aerospace engineer. A lawyer. A doctor or a translator. Yet, he also recognizes the economic and social barriers that make reaching for higher education challenging for Somali Bantu in America.

"I want a better life. At this point, my parents are taking a step up. They believe in self-educating yourself. They [tell me] you are lucky to find anyone in [this city] to ask for help. Teachers have helped with the [financial aid forms]. My parents understand education in Arabic/Islam. But there are education challenges. My parents don't always understand the American system. My father never went to school. [My father] knows religion. He knows how to work. My parents have gone through a lot to help us. They pay the bills so we can have peace of mind and focus in school."

Parental authority and cultural expectation, particularly for elder children, do seem to clash with the hopes for intergenerational mobility. Elder children must often live up to family responsibility and making an economic contribution to the family has meant that Mabad has worked for a long time. This responsibility can be time consuming and challenges the young

Somali Bantus' efforts to stay in school. He works in the candy factory, with his cousin and other Somali Bantu. He works the night shift from 12 p.m. to 8 a.m. Earning \$8.40 an hour. Before that he's worked as a salesperson for a vacuum company, going door-to-door hawking the product. He only survived this job for a few weeks, walking around in the winter hoping to sell vacuums was not his ideal job. He hated it. He also worked at FedEx as a baggage handler; he started there at \$9 and left earning \$11 an hour. But he said that job was too far. It took 40 minutes to get to work. The hours, he told me, were not dependable and you wasted too much gas to get there. Also, they were not very accommodating to his college time. "I quitted that place. In college, I had an exam. I told my boss I needed to go home early and I need to study. He told me, we have a lot of work and I can't afford to let you go." The low-wage work is especially challenging for the Somali Bantu sons as it puts them into workplaces and social networks that don't always accommodate their school aspirations.

Mabad's best jobs came two summers ago, when he worked at a local conservatory. It was a job that wasn't service oriented and had higher social status. It was also a place where he learned agricultural science, leadership roles (he taught younger kids about plants). "I felt good about that," he said.

Mabad does not have a car. When he needs to get around, he uses his father's eight-seater SUV. But he pays for his own phone and the phone of his fiancée, who is still in high school. He pays for the internet at the house so that his siblings can use it for their homework. "I must take care of that, we need to use the website." He's also saving for his wedding. And said he's saving to go back to campus.

In summary, we can see that Mabad is reluctant to modify Somali Bantu cultural practices that he believes are important. He holds to his faith tradition, he teaches Arabic. In the

home and with his family, he speaks his native language. He clusters mostly with his family and the other Bantu people he works with at the factory. He is not particularly active in the larger community and he maintains a relationship with a Somali girl.

As a young adult, Mabad has few to no "weak ties" that he draws from. Mabad receives no help from other mosques with his Arabic training. He has relied chiefly on Somali Bantu connections to find jobs.

In Mabad, we can see that his age – becoming older and having distance from early support structures – and family dynamics influence his level of education. In turn, these factors complicate integration and assimilation into the larger society.

Next, with Amir's story, though he shows a higher level of integration, his story also reveals how the younger generation, as they age, have very few connections beyond their community. It shows that the cultural capital the young men draw from their fathers is complicated. The fathers want their sons to rise above service employment, but their cultural expectations for their elder sons to aid the family is a barrier to the sons making time for advanced education and keeps the young men attached to low-wage employment. For the two young men, reliance on their ethnic network means minimum interaction with the dominant culture and more separation from other job networks. This loyalty to family and entry into low-wage jobs becomes an impediment that does not allow for the young men to easily enter larger networks and accrue diverse social capital that lead to second-generation advancement.

Furthermore, Amir's story emphasizes as well that the sons are caught between the demands of their families vs. trying to be self-sufficient. The type of help they need is situated in two different spaces—post-secondary education and finding a job that pays a livable wage. In this sense, they are experiencing what most Americans are experiencing—that without

education, access to gainful employment is limited. Finally, the lack of a presence of a college-educated role model and what is expected of them from the community limit their mobility. Unlike other immigrant groups, they lack economic resources, so their labor is needed to keep the entire family unit afloat.

7.3 AMIR, 19, AN ASPIRING POLICE OFFICER

Nineteen-year-old Amir is the eldest son of Mr. H and, his wife, Kasha. He is a slim, dark-skinned young man with a soft face and thick eyebrows. Like many of his Somali Bantu friends, Amir was also born in Somalia and came to the United States when he was 9 years old. He and the other guys often compare life in America to what they recall of growing up in various parts of Africa. In Somalia, he says, children did not go to formal school, but they learned by helping the family. *“You had chores.”* He helped his mother get water. Daily, he would go to the public fountain and fill up buckets. His family had a garden and it was his responsibility to water the garden. During the day, he helped his father, who was a homebuilder, make bricks, and he would also go into the jungle with his father to collect the wood to make houses. *“The kids had no choice but to accept responsibility and grow up. In America, kids are given a choice of when to grow up. But in Africa, you have to take care of yourself. I had to learn early to get things and be responsible. I can’t just depend on them (our parents). My mom told me, there are things you have to do for yourself.”*

He also remembered the festive culture was a social glue that bonded Somali Bantu to their history and sense of shared community. He feels that the absence of that culture in America

weakens the Somali Bantu identity. *I remember in Africa, doing a lot more dancing. It was twice a month and it was a traditional cultural thing. The dancing was one of the things that kept us united. But now we are separated. It's hard but we don't have the space or time to do the dancing. In Africa, it was nice. People would dance for the whole night.*

There would be singing, too, he says, and now, in America, some of the parents struggle because *"They don't remember the cultural songs."*

When I was younger, I loved songs. I never missed a day of singing and dancing. I used to sing along and all that stuff. The only time that people dance now is during Eid (a major Islamic holiday), when people gather and dance. Cultural is important. It is who we are. It [Somali culture] is really tough [to maintain in America]. Youngsters are really into rap music, but they don't know what that music is talking about.

For example, in Africa, Amir told me, Somali Bantu youth looked up to imams, Muslim religious leaders, as role models. Most Somali Bantu are Sunni Muslims and Islam is vitally important to the Somali Bantu sense of religious and national identity. But how much to modify their religious identity is an issue that can come into conflict with the ubiquitous music of urban hip-hop and how it is influencing their lives.

We're looking to famous rappers – Tupac, Biggie, Jay Z, Beyonce. The generation would rather look to them than look up to religious men. We don't know what they are singing about. When I am around friends, I listen to rap. I listen to it a part of the time. When done, I go back to reading the Koran. Then they [his Somali Bantu friends] say, "I'm becoming too religious." So, now, we're basically following African American as a religion. We wear clothes like the African Americans. We wear fashion like they do. Polos, Jordan. We're basically trying to follow their culture. We follow rap music, we don't follow the prophet. They want to have a rich and famous life. Some in my family thinks this. We don't really know what rap is about. But it can tell a message. It doesn't have to be about money, clothes, females. I don't believe we should adopt the gangster. The youngsters adopt to the American way. We forget our language. Once, we made

fun of the African American because they don't know their African language and background. We would get upset when our people speak in English. Now, we are trying to learn our language over again. We forget our language. We think rap and singing is only one way out.

What this conversation shows is that the process of acculturation is challenging for Amir and the other young Somali Bantu males. As they get older, they have to make decisions on which behaviors and practices to adapt. When do they use their native tongue? When do they use English? What does it mean to listen to rap music? There is a tension in deciding how to keep the old culture and how to engage in the new.

Amir stays connected to the home culture and memories because he lives with his grandmother. At 80 years old, she is one of the oldest Somali Bantu living in this city. She still sings the songs, speaks the language, and tells the stories of the homeland. The grandmother's lessons transmit values through language and faith that help provide Amir a spiritual and cultural attachment to his community (Finnan, Cooperstein, 1983; Connor 2014) so that he does not feel so alienated from family traditions.

I see this connection one morning when I arrive at Amir's home at about 9:30 a.m. to accompany him to community college. Amir is asleep when I arrive. I share a breakfast with Kasha, Amir's mom, and Kadisha, his grandmother. Kasha's friend, Halima, is also there. Kasha welcomes me and serves the boiled yam, which she calls the "African potato." They sit on the floor, without shoes, in the second room of the home. All the walls in the home are covered with colorful fabric. Also on the walls are signs that the family values educational achievement: Hanging nearby is a perfect-attendance certificate for Kasha's daughter and an outstanding effort award to recognize the same daughter's improvement in her grades. There is also another daughter's aspirational "about me" poster, where she describes wanting to be a doctor. For 30

minutes, I sit with the women. They converse in Swahili, Kiziguwa, and English. I share images and video from my cell phone of a recent Somali Bantu cultural celebration. They laugh and smile at the recognition of families and their own children.

At about 10 a.m., Amir wakes up. He greets the women by giving them a quick handshake with a tap on top of their closed fists and then he bows slightly. He is bare-chested and wrapped around his waist is a cloth that reaches almost to the floor. He is barefoot. This is the first time I have seen him in this kind of clothing. He takes his shower and changes his clothing. He now resembles any hip-hop teen. He has on Black sweat pants, a Black T-shirt with an emblem of Mickey Mouse, a red Adidas sweat jacket, and matching Black and red Adidas tennis shoes.

When I first met Amir, he was struggling socially and academically in public high school, where he was teased because he was Somali Bantu and called one of the “mud people.”⁷ He was “cool,” though. He wore his stylish tennis shoes, baggy khakis, dark sunglasses, and talked about fashion. He did not like to study and preferred hanging with his friends and flirting with the Somali girls, but also the African American girls in the school and neighborhood. The family’s social workers and white volunteers in the community recommended a change. They helped the family fill out the correct forms and Amir was able to transfer to a smaller charter school in downtown. He did well at the school. He said his teachers were supportive and he was not bullied about being African. His grades improved and he looked forward to graduating and beginning college.

⁷ Mud people is a derogative term some students used in the high school to taunt the Somali Bantu students.

Amir decided to attend the local community college. He is studying criminal justice and drives over to classes on Tuesday and Thursday morning in his parents old, worn minivan. The campus is only about a 10-minute drive from the housing projects. He carries only his textbook, a notebook, and a pen. He does not use a backpack. Right after class, he leaves. He does not belong to any campus activity or club. He's not involved in student activities at the community college. "I'm not really interested," he tells me. Last semester, he said, he hung out with other Somali Bantu students on campus, but this semester, he does not see them so much.

Amir is in his second semester and he has had to drop two classes to make time to work. So, he is only taking one class this semester, a class in criminal justice taught by an older, white retired police officer who wears a suit and tie to class. Amir calls the class boring, though he aspires to be an officer to save kids. He thinks that being a police officer is a respectable position. He thinks if he can become an officer it will also send a message to other young Somali Bantu males that they can rise to participate in society. Often, when we talk, it is clear that Amir has thought about his future, and the difference that being a police officer might make for himself and his community, especially in quelling some of the tension between Somali Bantu teens and Black American teens. *My goals are to keep justice between us and African Americans and African Muslims. Maybe make our own [community] organization to keep kids busy and keep kids out of the street. A lot of kids are wasting time. We could have a basketball or soccer team to keep kids busy, or an organization to do homework. When kids come home, they run to the street and have 3 and 4 hours of doing nothing.* He wants to unite everyone, and put himself in a position to reconcile the two cultures he's experiencing in Southview.

He wants it to be known that you don't have to be a gangsta. "You don't have to kill. Education is a key to success," he tells me. "Education will get you respect, especially among

the elderly.” What he does not say is what level of education is needed to become this success or how he reconciles his busy work schedule, which does little to accommodate him having classes.

Amir is chatty and is thinking about wanting to do better. He wants to make it out of Southview Estates, but seems conflicted in how to do so. He supports education, “as a way to get up outta here,” but having to work complicates his path to completion. He criticizes Somali Bantu parents for not being more involved in supporting formal education, but shrinks from his father when he chastises Amir for not doing better in school. Before coming to Southview Estates, Amir said he liked the other neighborhoods where his family was living. They were more integrated and cosmopolitan. But he does not believe that living in Southview Estates has to be a “trap.”

My friends blame it on the environment. The place THAT you are. But I've seen kids make it out. If you work hard, society is not forcing you. You have your own life and your own will. If you choose to live by the gun, you will die by the gun.

Amir seems to recognize that agency and personal choices make a difference. But he also recognizes the structural hurdle that must be overcome when parents lack educational attainment and lack the know-how to help their children.

When I asked him about how to escape urban poverty, he alluded to the role of parents in being able to help their children?

Somali Bantu [adults], if they focused on kids and getting them accepted to university [is a way to move up]. We are losing education because our parents don't [know how to get us through]. In Nebraska, in middle school, I get to meet the mayor because I am most outstanding ESL student. I try to pass this on. When my sisters get good grades, I reward them. A = \$5; B = \$2; I think it is motivating my sisters to show me their progress. Parents are doing something wrong when they down [berate] their kids in front of others. [He is reacting to an incident where

his father, Mr. H, berated him and told him he should be more like another young Somali Bantu man who was faring better in school.]

My father can be angry, but I love my mom too death. She told me, don't take anger out on school. 'I can't hold your hand, my time is done. I didn't have the opportunity you have and I don't want you to waste it.' My mom encouraged me to focus on school my senior year. My mom told me her heart was broken when I was failing.

Despite becoming a better student and having attended a few semesters of community college, Amir's early history of employment is all connected to low-wage service jobs. He became connected to the majority of the positions because Somali Bantu friends were already working in these positions. He's been a fast-food worker, package hauler at FedEx, a worker in a candy factory, a clerk for a cable company. He is restless. He has a longing for something different, but his network and support to get to something better is limited. He knows there is something better than what he is doing. He just does not know how to get there. In the summer of 2013, he was working in a restaurant at a local technology college. He worked there six months and quit. He says the Mexican supervisor there did not treat him (or other Blacks) well. Amir thought it was a racist thing. "She would talk stuff, she didn't like Black people."

Amir would continue his search for a better job. A year later, I am with Amir one evening in the red Ford Windstar sport SUV his father gave him. The car is cluttered with old newspapers, water bottles, and notebooks. Every time we stop for a red light, Amir sends a text message to someone. He is on his way to an interview downtown for a job in a chocolate factory. It's a position he heard about from another Somali Bantu friend. There are about a dozen Somali Bantu men and women who work at the factory. In the Somali community, once someone gets a job, the word spreads of openings. Amir does not go to the interview alone. He calls a Somali Bantu female friend, Humdee, who lives about 20 minutes away and informs her of the job openings. She agrees to go with Amir and she, too, will apply for a job at the factory. Most of

the time, many of the Somali Bantu will share information about job opportunities through text messages and Facebook. Face-to-face and everyday interactions were another form of getting the word out. Their fathers were the common connections. A father would tell his sons, who would tell a friend and they would go check it out. As soon as a son got hired for a position they would spread the word about other openings.

At the interview center downtown (about 1:30 p.m.), Amir takes the test (which includes math, some English, and filling out a work history). On his way home, the factory calls to tell him he has the job and asks if he can return to the building to take a drug test. He seems happy; the chocolate factory is in a neighborhood not far from Southview. He is assigned to the 4 p.m. to midnight shift. In another example of how kinship overrides other concerns, the factory had asked Amir to begin work the same night that he interviewed. But he asked if he could start a day later, he had made a commitment to his mom. "I have to go home and do something for my mom. I have to pick up chlorine for her to clean the floors and I need to stop by (a Muslim food restaurant) to pick up something for her." He said he will continue to go to school during the day.

Amir is fairly integrated into the community. He critiques what he considers the irresponsible hip-hop lifestyle of the public housing projects and urban culture, but expresses himself in hip-hop dress and uses hip-hop language with his friends. He also has relationships outside of the Somali Bantu network. On a summer road trip to Michigan with Amir's father, I first learn that Amir's Black American girlfriend is pregnant and expecting a baby in a few months. "Amir, he having a baby," said Mr. H, smiling. "She is American. We like her." Mr. H always calls Black Americans just "Americans."

Many of the Somali Bantu have married very young. Marriage is seen as a sign of strengthening the community and maintaining respect among each other. Dating and having sex

before marriage is frowned upon. For Amir and to be having a child and not be married is counter to Somali Bantu religious culture. Danita, the girlfriend, is a fair-skinned Black American girl who's a junior in high school. She lives in Southview Estates. She met Amir at one of the community's public bus stops. He was friendly and flirty. Their first date was to the movies and they've been a couple ever since. Most Somali Bantu homes are crowded and busy with friends and family and Danita easily folds in with Amir's family. She often shows up at cultural events with Amir's family. His little sisters cling to her and she seems to care for them, braiding their hair, and fixing their food. When I see her, she is dressed in long, patterned skirts, and has her hair wrapped in a turban. But, unlike other Somali Bantu females, she also wears lipstick and mascara on her eyes. She is seven months pregnant. She said the more conservative dress was not problematic to adapt to. "I had uncles who were Muslim, so I knew some of their ways. It was easy to dress and it was not difficult to be like this," she told me one evening. She is so close to the family that she sometimes spends the night. She is there now, because Amir's mom, Kasha, is away visiting family in Kentucky because a relative has died, and Danita is helping out.

One evening in July, Danita tells me the baby boy is due in September and that she is planning a baby shower for August 16. She also tells me that she and Amir are gift-registered at a local discount department store. Amir is not home, he is working nights in a call center for DirectTV. He is no longer with the candy factory.

Amir says that even though the baby is born as an American citizen, he will raise the baby with the identity of a Somali Bantu. He will insist upon that identity because that is who his father is. Most of the young men who are Amir's age, and who were born in Somalia or Kenya, have chosen not to seek American citizenship, in doing so they fear they are severing their

attachment to their culture and they also fear gaining citizenship will mean they can be drafted. Amir told me he was ready for the responsibility of raising a baby. *“When you have children, you have to direct them to a different path. No smoking, selling drugs. I know this from experience. I have gone into the houses of some of my friends and saw them give weed while the mothers watch and say nothing.”*

In the 10th grade, Amir had a Black American friend who skipped classes, talked tough to the teachers, and didn’t graduate. He failed. Now every day, Amir sees him in the neighborhood and it’s just a “hey” thing. They have gone their separate ways. It’s not the path he wants for his son. At the same time, Amir doesn’t know what’s next: “I will probably stay here [in Southview Estates] for a few years. I need to help my family and get a good job.”

Here, Amir is reflecting on the life circumstances – failing schools, low-wage jobs, and segregation – that seem to challenge people who live in impoverished communities and how he might steer this son away from it.

In summary, Amir, unlike Mabad, is more open to the process of acculturation. His home life reflects an adherence to cultural tradition and values. The way he greets his elders, the way he dresses when he’s home with family, the language he uses. But outside the home, while he acknowledges being a Muslim and respecting the tenets of the faith, Amir rarely goes to mosque. While his core friendships are Somali Bantu, he has had friendships with Black Americans and with White Americans. In fact, he has a long-term relationship with a Black American girl who lives in Southview Estates and is the father of her son. His family accepted this relationship and the young lady was a frequent visitor to Amir’s home. Outside the home, Amir also fits easily into the “visual” of urban teenager. He wears hip-hop clothing, listens to the music, and knows the local teen vernacular. His interactional style seems context specific. He is different with his

family, at work, in school. He is negotiating what it means to be Bantu versus what it means to be American. Anderson in “Cosmopolitan Canopy” (2011) describes two orientations that individuals use in moving through public space. Amir perhaps has a social orientation or a worldview that casts him as more “cosmopolitan” – meaning he is open to cross-racial progress and interaction. In his aspirations to be a police officer, he believes it is a position of authority and respect that will help him bring Somali Bantu and Black American youth into positive interactions in the neighborhood. In contrast, Mabad is more ethnocentric: his interactions seem more thoroughly focused on his family and Somali Bantu friends.

Similar to Mabad, the older Amir became, the more distance he had from “weak ties.” In high school, he credits his counselor and teachers with helping him achieve and focus. They were able to direct him toward a charter school and were helpful in his college application and admission to community college. However, once he began college, Amir was not attached to any student organizations or campus mentoring. He could not grasp the benefit of being connected to such programs and social networks and I’m not sure he understood how to navigate this way to becoming a member of the campus groups. It’s also possible that given his home responsibilities and push to find a job, he would not have had the time to engage the organizations.

In absence of other support systems, Amir relies more and more on his closed social network: his parents and Somali Bantu friends. His parents both encourage him to move forward and are proud of him in school and his high school graduation. But they do not understand how to get their son to complete higher education. His father believes that working is important. So, Amir works, using his friendships with other Somali Bantu to find jobs. But they are mostly dead-end, minimum-wage positions. His mom is proud of him, too. But when he is home during the day and not in classes at community college, Amir studies some, he is mostly running errands

for his mom (she does not drive) and/or watching television. Loyalty to family helps the Bantu to cope with economic challenges and as a group integrate into Southview Estates via shared community events. But again, there is tension between their expressed hope for their children and the know-how to help their sons gain social mobility. This lack of know-how complicates the process of a fuller assimilation as the father's class position and their social networks seem limited in how they are able to help the sons move forward. Amir seems to recognize and grow frustrated with this limitation. His frustration may be due to his cosmopolitan friendships. He's seen friends whose parents help – and do not help – their children move forward.

But it's complicated in his life, too. On one hand, he encourages his younger sisters to perform well academically by giving them cash and other rewards for good grades. But in his life, family loyalty trumps other tasks. The day he was employed at the candy factory, he delayed his start because of commitments to his mother. He does share with Mabad this concept of resilience. They call it "hard work." In the short time I've known him, Amir has worked at four different jobs. His own job experiences – as well as those of his father – have not stripped him of his hope that he can find a position that is beyond service class. Like their fathers, the sons are survivors. Their fathers are men who have been resourceful, industrious, and resilient. In the face of horrible odds, they kept going. The sons, as seen through Amir, embody this, too, as they keep trying to find work that is more fulfilling and rewarding. Amir is optimistic that he can overcome the class structure and move beyond dead-end employment. He keeps pushing for fuller assimilation. The sons seem to struggle not because they are jobless (like other young Black males in the neighborhood), but because the jobs they do have are low wage and service. It is interesting to note that none of the Somali Bantu sons identified race as a barrier to finding employment. Amir, on one of his jobs, described an unpleasant episode as racial prejudice. But

he did not see it as a larger problem. Most identified the class divide and their fathers' cultural capital as the chief impediment to landing more employment opportunities.

7.4 CONCLUSIONS

The Somali Bantu sons are challenged by their second-generation status, particularly by the tension between the demands of the family vs. the demands for “upward” economic mobility. The social ties within the family come with challenges. Also, as the Bantu sons become Americanized and grow up, their networks change—the help they received as children is gone—so social networks that were thin likely become even less significant as their needs change. Also, a father's job networks, the reliance on faith and tradition in their ethnic circle, and a young man's own agency, are factors that determine a son's attachment to particular resources.

There is no straight line to advancement for the sons. There is a path forward, however, as many of the sons complete high school and some enter college, a significant push forward for young men whose fathers were presented with such limited opportunities for formal education. While they desire to go to college, which is a pathway to the middle class for most Americans, the needs of the family and their various community members make this process very difficult. They are working between two sets of rules of adulthood—the Somali Bantu Notion and the American Notion. What are missing are the tools to achieve this dream.

At the same time, for the sons, while race and class are difficult obstacles (Alba and Nee, 2001; Portes and Zhou 1993); they can be overcome. The Somali Bantu sons bond over shared culture, history in Somalia, language, religious practice, as well as from the day-to-day reality of

living in the same neighborhood. This generates trust, kinship. They teach each other to drive and share information on jobs, but this information is constrained by the kinds of jobs they have as they can only refer friends and family to the same low-wage positions that they occupy. They are proud of their sons completing high school and going to community college. But I have not seen them share information on how to get into college. Despite the class restraints, the strong family and kinship ties help the young men to feel motivated to keep trying, to work hard, to never give up. This sense of obligation to family, to bringing honor to the family strengthens them and provides the resiliency to continue the search for something better (Rumbaut, 1994; Portes and Rumbaut, 2001). In their lives, starting college, finding a jobs are achievements that the families are proud of.

The low-educational attainment of their parents impacts the lives of the sons, too. Studies show that higher levels of parent educational attainment are strongly associated with positive outcomes for children in many areas, including educational achievement, and that children of more educated parents are also likely to have access to greater material, human, and social resources (Childtrends.org) And, in the American context, parents' educational levels matter for the next generation. "As parents' education increases, so does students' likelihood of enrolling in postsecondary education.

"Among 1992 high school graduates whose parents did not go to college, 59 percent had enrolled in some form of postsecondary education by 1994. The enrollment rate increased to 75 percent among those whose parents had some college experience, and to 93 percent among those whose parents had at least a bachelor's degree" (NCES 2001).

Without a doubt though, their class positions challenge the young men because "individuals and families do not face the strains of acculturation alone, but rather within the

framework of their own communities” (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001). In the case of the Somali Bantu sons, they face bifurcated labor (little skills or education to get higher level positions); their parents’ human capital (low education and income) influence their outcomes, and their modes of incorporation (connection to low income neighborhood, being cut off from mainstream) complicate the trajectory of their lives.

Despite the odds, the young Somali Bantu men find some level of success. In spite of living in an economically impoverished space, they have managed to find their way to strong schools, had early and sustained socialization with university tutors, and some were exposed to integrated neighborhoods when they first arrived. They are bilingual. They have not obtained the highest levels of the American promise, but not everyone advances to these positions in society. While they have early marriages, only a few have had childbirth outside of marriage. They are not connected to the drug lifestyle, gangs, or suffer severe high school drop out rates.

They have advanced beyond their fathers. And they express higher aspirations, wanting to be police officers to have authority and respect from others; to be engineers means being a part of their new world. To have a decent job means they can take care of their families and community. Even though Amir left community college, he knew he wanted to do something beyond factory work. He is now proud of himself. He has a job he feels good about. He works with a television service where he is able to use his language and writing skills to be a clerk. It is not a menial service position. He has been resilient in responding to some difficult challenges and has been able to move beyond the service positions that are only available to his father.

8.0 CONCLUSIONS

In concluding this study, I reflect again on the Education Day celebration that the Bantu celebrated several years ago. The Somali Bantu hosted the festival in the Southview Estates gym to celebrate educational achievement and attainment in their community. They honored and thanked the numerous supporters who have helped them along the way. Embodied in the celebration are many of the elements that show just how the Somali Bantu families began their engagement with the processes of assimilation and integration as they try to move forward to begin new lives in the United States. This celebration highlights their human capital – their sense of openness and resilience to make new friends – and their accrual of social capital – being linked to beneficial networks that provide information and guidance on how to advance in their new nation. It also represents how they cultivate cultural capital: the education festival sends the message that formal education and the support of formal education is an important resource for “making it” in America.

The goal of this research study was to add to the sparse but emerging research on Somali Bantu refugees who live in America. My two primary research questions were: How do Somali Bantu men, who live in an impoverished, segregated public housing community, access and maintain employment? And, despite challenges of race and class, what resources do they deploy to assimilate toward the larger society? In essence, I am asking: How do the Bantu survive in America as immigrants after seeking asylum?

It is not an easy journey for the Somali Bantu. Their agrarian way of life and faith traditions make them one of the most dissimilar groups to enter into American culture. Given this challenge, how do they adapt and find their way in a modern, post-industrial society? How do they find employment, gain proficiency in a new language, and identify as [Black] Americans? These are important questions that, when examined, can provide information on their acculturation process, their first step toward assimilation and integration into American society.

8.1 FINDING THEIR WAY

The experience unfolding at the Education Day Celebration offers clarity on their strategy for becoming acculturated. To help summarize how this strategy unfolds, this concluding discussion is organized into four sections. The first section reviews how they find jobs and what that means for their acculturative process. The second section reviews the factors that facilitate the process of integrating into an impoverished public housing community. The third section looks at the process of acculturation on their sons. And, the fourth section concludes the discussion by reflecting on policy recommendations and offering suggestions for future research.

The Somali Bantu refugees have experienced civil war, famine, torture, deprivation, and humiliation. In a time of war, they were men, women and children who had to run away from all of their possessions, witness the death of family members, migrate to Kenya, and live in the squalor of the massive refugee camps. They did not come to the United States voluntarily. Because they faced such grave persecution, in 2000, the United States agreed to grant Somali Bantus persecuted minority status and resettle 14,000 to America. Some 50 families ended up

settling in this Northeastern city. These sets of factors present challenges, but they also make the Bantu refugees unique compared to other immigrants. Hence, these factors provide a context for understanding them as a people, not only for their resiliency, but also that coming here provides some level of peace and stability that differs from their previous situations.

Their acculturative process in America would not be easy. As stated earlier in the dissertation, the Somali Bantu culture is very different from the dominant Judeo-Christian American culture. The greater the cultural differences, the greater the difficulties during the process of acculturation. This could be especially challenging as the Somali Bantu were expected to learn new behaviors as they attempt to conform to cultural values of places they inhabited while in the United States. Their entry into the United States was immediate. Their arrival to America was coupled with a culture shock that included winter weather, American race relations, and urban life, where many jobs for the poor and unskilled pay very low wages with little upward mobility.

But in wanting to adjust to American life, the Somali Bantu are not just searching for a job; they are searching for a space to build a long lasting home and community. They are seeking economic stability and possible economic mobility for their children. But they are also seeking a place of belonging, a place where they can come together, discard economic distress, find respect and support for their culture and traditions, and a place to receive and provide mutual care.

Over the years, as I sat in their homes and chatted with them, it became evident very quickly that to accomplish their goal of settling into America, the Somali Bantu fathers became interconnected to primarily two sets of networks. They have external relationships outside their neighborhood with a largely middle-class set of white female volunteers. These connections became important in helping the first-generation Somali Bantu men find employment, and in

laying the groundwork for academic success in the second generation. The Education Day becomes symbolic of this connection. As the Somali Bantu honor their white “helpers,” it demonstrates the Bantu participate in “bridging” relationships. In other words, the white relationships symbolize how the Somali Bantu cross boundaries of ethnicity, race, and class in forming beneficial networks. The white volunteers were some of the first Americans the Somali Bantu encountered. They helped the newcomers with finding housing, understanding public transportation, and navigating health care and social service agencies.

But because the Somali Bantu work in low-wage jobs, they needed to find housing that was affordable. Over time, a critical mass of families moved to Southview Estates. The public housing development is segregated and isolated from other neighborhoods and beset with challenges of crime and poverty. Nevertheless, in settling into Southview Estates, the Somali Bantu were open to community building, and the process of integrating into this space. In this space, they have found mutual respect, and were able to form friendly relationships with their neighbors and participate in the civic life of Southview Estates. In other words, the families have managed to embed themselves into this local community. Here their relationships with friendly Black American neighbors were important in helping the first-generation Somali Bantu men learn how to avoid violence, get information from the Housing Authority, form attachments to watch each other’s kids, and manage life in concentrated poverty.

These two pathways – integration and assimilation – provide a window into how the Somali Bantu are managing to find a foothold into American society. The pathways include structural as well as relational processes. The structural integration allows the Somali Bantu to participate in the economic, social and political institutions of the larger host society. We see this in how the white volunteers aid the Bantu with accessing resettlement services, housing,

seeking employment, participation with educational institutions. Though limited by language and formal education, all of the Somali Bantu fathers were able to find employment and begin a level of structural participation. Their structural integration begins when the white volunteers provide information and access to services and employment. In their community of Southview Estates, when they gain acceptance by the neighbors they call “wonderful,” these relationships provide a critical understanding of the local context, so that the Somali Bantu can avoid the people they call “no good” and be careful of violence, and begin to create a space where they can (re)create their traditions and customs.

It is important to note that assimilation and integration are processes. These begin with resettlement and are ongoing as the Somali Bantu connect with and participate in different spheres of society at different levels.

8.2 JOBS

Learning to participate in the American labor system is a new experience for the Somali Bantu. They were raised in environments where “labor” was primarily agricultural and geared toward family or community sustenance. Once they sought shelter in the refugee camps, several of the Somali Bantu men were able to enter into enterprise that gave them skills as cooks or grassroots entrepreneurs – they dug latrines, built mud homes, or ferried material or people on rented bikes. Often for immigrants in America, limited cultural capital, such as lack of formal education, can be barriers to getting jobs, particularly the higher-skilled, higher-level jobs.

This was challenging for the Bantu as well. However, their relationships with the white volunteers are the weak ties that Granovetter describes – external networks with infrequent interactions. These weak ties promote information sharing and networking that are critical to the Somali Bantu in finding their first employment. In America, the white volunteers were able to help the Bantu fathers utilize their human capital via largely low-wage unskilled labor. For those with an identifiable skill, they were able to use their proficiency as cooks or builders to find jobs as cooks, factory laborers, or construction workers. They felt good about their jobs and were able to experience longevity on the job, gaining new friends, new language skills, trust among their coworkers and superiors. These interactions on the job aided in them building respectful and trusting relationships external to their families and neighbors.

Part of this trust included connecting to employers who valued the hard work of the Somali Bantu and who would hire other Somali Bantu simply by word of mouth and reference from their Bantu family and friends with the expectation that they too would be good workers. This created a sort of “niche” employment and in many places tied the men into working with other Bantu. Moreover, the Bantu men – as a source of dependable cheap labor – were desired by many employers who experienced high turnover on their job sites. For example, one Bantu father worked brief periods in a chicken factory, in laundry service, and packaging services—before finding more steady and rewarding work in a big market store. Furthermore, a key a part of working in the United States requires some level of proficiency with the English language. The fathers get practice in the language on the job.

For the Somali Bantu, their workspaces become a significant pathway to acculturation, engendering the possibility of assimilation. First, the jobs allow the Bantu to engage in co-ethnic and multiethnic spaces, to participate in the larger world outside of the segregated, impoverished

space where they live. According to many of my participants, their workspaces are spaces of positive, genial intersection with those external to their community. In one factory, a Somali Bantu father and his multiethnic and multi-lingual coworkers fashioned a sign language so that they could better communicate with each other and complete a common goal.

Second, the workspaces become places where the men learn to better communicate in English. In fact, one of the interviewees even referred to the job as his school. These “schools” foster a pathway forward as the Somali Bantu feel they are a part of the American workplace community. One Somali Bantu worker described how his workplace introduced him to people and cultures from across the globe. For the fathers, the workplace experiences prepare them for living in a multicultural society. In addition, they were forced to adjust some behaviors on the jobs – dealing with rules and laws, working with women, altering some clothing habits, and having to navigate in a modern, technological and Western society. Accessing this world meant they had to learn to drive and use cell phones, accessing levels of technology that they did not have in Somalia.

As these worksites become spaces of acculturation, the Somali Bantu, who are Muslim men now living in a Western society that is majority Christian, had to make a huge adjustment: Often the men have to work on Friday, which is traditionally the Muslim day of worship.

On the other hand, while going to work facilitates movement into society, the U.S. refugee policy that asks the men to seek self-sufficiency in 60 days prioritizes getting a job – any job – at the expense of making time to seek higher skills training. In addition, low-wage, fulltime work coupled with raising family makes seeking any additional training difficult. This limits the jobs the men can access, virtually locking them into low-wage service positions. Once they are working, the scattered hours become a barrier to more formal educational opportunities.

Nevertheless, their employment had a positive influence on their lives. They were able to pay their bills, contribute to their communities, and develop a pride in participating in the American labor system.

8.3 COMMUNITY

While the relationships developed on the jobs are important for opening the door of the acculturation process. They are not the only relationships necessary for successful resettlement. Living in Southview Estates is affordable for them. In addition, the relationships developed in the process of settling into Southview Estates act as a strong tool for integration. Here they develop a set of relationships with kindly neighbors who help them to succeed in this urban context. In these relationships the Bantu develop a way to share information, knowledge, and the skills to take care of their families and keep them safe in this space. In this community, friendly neighbors advise on how to deal with “no good” neighbors, how to avoid and respond to violence, how to deal with the complicated administration of the Housing Authority. These relations provide access to information. For the Bantu fathers, this information helps them to understand the local community and its codes of behavior and how they can adapt to this new environment. These factors become an important dimension of integrating into the community.

Also, in the neighborhood of Southview Estates, the Somali Bantu build trusting and collaborative relationships. The Somali Bantu recognize their friendly neighbors as “kin,” calling them brother, sister, auntie. They are appreciative of their friendly neighbors because they help them watch over the children and keep them safe. Furthermore, the investment in mutual

“kinship-like” relations extends beyond keeping the children safe. In the reciprocity of the relationships, the Southview residents begin to care about the Somali Bantu families in general, asking what can be done when there is a death in the community, contributing to their community festivals, and observing their communal religious celebrations. These kinds of actions allow the Somali Bantu to feel a sense of belonging. For example, Vanita Less, the president of the Southview Estates community group, is an engaged leader. Her door is always open and she builds relationships with the Somali Bantu families, knowing many of them by name, inviting them to participate on the community board. She demonstrates collaborative relationship building and shows that she values their presence in the neighborhood and sees them as allies in addressing community problems.

While the Somali Bantu dress, customs, and ethnicity marked them as “strangers” when they first began arriving at Southview Estates, over time they were welcomed. What happened is they began to build a common knowledge of each other, understanding the context of oppression in each of their lives. This shared understanding – that both the Bantu and Black American residents struggled to “make it” in the United States – was a bonding experience. The relationships developed in Southview Estates help construct a “village” of interconnectedness among the Bantu and their neighbors, fostering a sense of belonging and identity as community members.

Moreover, the Bantu participate in the community’s volunteer organizations, where they gain social contacts. But perhaps more importantly, the Bantu are able to practice their own culture, to feel at home using their own language, and to share their religion and other aspects of their culture with comfort, respect and pride.

The Education Day celebration was a showcase of how the Bantu were comfortable producing their celebrations where they live. This allowed them to share with the local community and develop relationships, be exposed to new ideas, and acknowledge the contributions of those who had helped them move forward. In the Southview Estates community, they can freely connect the diverse spheres of their life. They are whole here. They can feel recognized. Their Africanness may at first have made them “strangers” in Southview, but now their Africanness is recognized. In this community, which is predominantly Black American, they are able to maintain their ethnic distinctions. The Bantu are also drawn to Southview Estates because it is a place where they can settle near each other (relatives and Bantu friends) for mutual assistance and to reduce the stress of being newcomers. Here they were able to – meeting in the home of a Somali Bantu father – develop a community-based education and cultural institution to facilitate the retention of their language and culture.

8.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE SONS

But in the end, community matters, and successful integration for the sons relates to the community context in which they grow up. A community is multidimensional. It is connected to schools, labor markets, neighborhoods, politics, and law. In communities that are highly segregated and impoverished, all too often these relations are connected to poorly performing and underfunded schools and labor markets that are underserved or nonexistent. This challenges community building and mobility for the sons.

By living in Southview, this typically meant the Bantu children would have been assigned to schools that were racially segregated, and ranked at the bottom in terms of test scores and achievement. However, when they are young, the sons are able to avoid these schools with assistance from the white volunteers who use their knowledge and connections in the school system to direct the families to other choices. It's the knowledge and cultural capital of the white volunteers that enable the sons to navigate the school bureaucracy and open the doors for the sons to attend some of the higher-performing public and charter schools in the area. In addition, the white tutors from a local university helped the elementary, middle, and high school kids learn American culture and impress upon the Bantu youth the value of education in the American context. Furthermore, the Bantu, by being connected with a white attorney who advocates for equity in education, were able to gain resources in the public schools to help teachers and school staff with outreach and assistance to the Bantu students.

Also, given their age when they entered the United States, the sons were young enough for the schools to significantly impact their level of acculturation. For the sons, their dress, many of their music and popular culture indulgences, and language are practically indistinguishable from the other American kids around them. The exposure to their community's local culture and Western norms has influenced some of the young men. Unlike their parents, they have non-Somali girlfriends. Some of the sons worry that their peers are acculturating to secular values of the mainstream and losing their identity as Somali Bantu and Muslim adherents.

The maintenance of kinship obligation also seems to keep the sons grounded in their Somali Bantu identity. However, at times, the sons seem to have tension between the struggle with balancing their individual needs to seek higher education and the Somali Bantu tradition of prioritizing kinship interdependency and support. In Somali Bantu society, kinship support

provided a safety net and it was tough to move away from that. If a choice was to be made between furthering their education or working to help the family, almost always they decided to work to help the family, even if it meant sacrificing their attempts at higher education. Even though it was challenging, kinship obligation gave the sons a connection to their tradition, a sense that not everything in their life was changing.

Kinship interdependence and reliance on faith seemed to give the second generation a continuity of ethnic identity. One participant in my study even said that he would pass along this sense of identity to his son, who has a Black American mother. He said that his son would be Somali Bantu.

But kinship interdependence also shows how intertwined the sons' lives are with the fathers. By the time the sons graduate from high school, the fathers are proud. It is a significant accomplishment for a people who for generations had been denied access to formal education, and whose first exposure to formal education came when they resettled in the United States. The fathers want their sons to do well. But the fathers lack the cultural capital local to the United States to understand the nuances of the American higher education system. They may want their sons to pursue college, but they are not familiar with how to support the process. An important complicating factor: the fathers are not able to pay for the sons' college. On their salaries, there is no way they can pay for both college and support their family. Often, when the sons graduate from high school, the cultural expectation is that they will help the family. This often means getting a job. In the city's high-tech and advanced-education fueled job market, having limited college experience hinders one's job choices. Furthermore, the sons, in relying on the father's social network for aid, are often attached to jobs in the same low-wage and service industry

positions as their fathers. The threat here is that they then get “segmented” to the same class position as their fathers.

What we see here is that while the sons may have obtained a degree of cultural integration, in terms of higher education, language, dress and social norms, there remains the challenge of fuller structural integration. Their community’s race and socio-economic dynamics and the parents’ class position limit their choices of moving forward. It shows that for the sons, cultural integration is not a process entirely dependent on or mutually exclusive of structural integration. You can achieve one and not the other. For example, when my fieldwork ended, several of the sons had completed several semesters at a community college. The sons had achieved a significantly higher level of education than their fathers. In the community, several of the sons were seen as leaders, often teaching Arabic classes, leading cultural celebrations, and encouraging their younger siblings toward high educational attainment. Yet, when they needed jobs, the sons relied on their father’s network. This put them into the same low-wage service sector circle of employment in which their fathers found themselves. Herein lies the threat of segmented assimilation. I saw that the sons were frustrated by not being able to immediately move beyond the father’s employment network and that they aspired to move beyond the working class. As Portes mentions, a bifurcated society, split along divisions of race and class, will allow the second-generation to move across the space where they situated, but it may not allow them to move up.

In this sense, the Bantu sons are similar to the Black Americans in the Southview Estates community: they have obtained a level of cultural integration but still face struggles with structural integration because of barriers of education, race, income. However, the Bantu sons also have a remarkable human capital: a sense of optimism and perseverance. I saw the sons

change jobs frequently in their search for better-paying, higher-status positions. Several showed a pattern of not wanting to give in to segmented assimilation.

8.5 IMPLICATIONS, FURTHER STUDY, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The scope of this study was limited to the exploration of the experiences of Somali Bantu males living in an urban and impoverished Northeastern public housing community. As refugees, the Somali Bantu cannot make it entirely on their own. They arrive here with shattered social networks in a brand-new culture and they need help. In order for them to pull themselves up by the bootstrap, they need to be given the “boot” and the “strap.” They have to rely on infrequent, yet sustained, external associations with a mostly white and female middle-class set of volunteers connected to refugee aid groups and local friendly Black American neighbors. These two social networks become the two primary pathways they use to create economic stability, social support, and a way forward for themselves and their children.

Moving forward takes more than their human and cultural capital: it involves the social, political, and economic context into which they migrate and interact. This includes the schools, workplaces, and communities where they interact with others, which affect the way the Somali Bantu seek and are able to build their lives in the United States.

The first generation has been able to make gains despite flawed immigration policy that asks them to sacrifice strengthening their education and language skills in pursuit of low-wage employment intended to make them self-sufficient. However, this “intention” falls short. The low-wage mostly consigns to them the need for sustained government assistance with housing,

health, and other support. Therefore, resettlement policy should be concerned with not just getting them in, but getting them settled. Here, I offer a few policy recommendations to foster more successful integration and assimilation.

- Consider their kinship traditions. Housing the first-generation in a ‘village’ near each other can help lessen the stress of acculturating into such a dissimilar culture. Kinship and extended kin relationships are foundational for the Somali Bantu and if they are in a space where they can pull together, they can mount the obstacles of resettlement.
- Provide, early on, more educational and training assistance to help the Somali Bantu prepare for higher participation in the labor force. To do this can have positive implications not only for their lives, but also for the lives of their family.
- Acknowledge and recognize their human capital. Perhaps lead them to skilled training such as bricklaying, plumbing or carpentry.
- Consider support for how they might access religion and religious services.
- Extend the period to achieve self-sufficiency to be longer than 60 days.
- Provide a longer opportunity to learn/master English. This provides confidence and gives greater access to navigate their new society.
- For the sons, consider that as they age, they face an erosion of services and connections to helping networks. Provide support services and greater economic assistance as they enter college so they don’t have to work full time to help provide resources to their families and risk their higher education, which can pay dividends for the future of the community.

Unless these issues are addressed, it hampers the Somali Bantu chances of “melting” into American society and gaining greater economic prosperity. For any new group of people, there will be challenges in religion, social support, culture, language, and employment. But these need to be addressed if the newcomers are to adapt and assimilate successfully.

For further study, I make the following recommendations:

- Somali Bantu women are critical to the success and livelihood of the family unit, yet too often their voices go unheard. In the course of this research, cultural practices and expectations severely hindered my access to the women of the Somali Bantu community. That is, it is considered out of order and not culturally appropriate for an adult male to be alone with a Somali Bantu woman – married or unmarried – so creating and establishing long-term contact and one-on-one interviews was difficult with the women. Consequently, the focus of my research fell to the male heads of households. Therefore, additional study of Somali Bantu women is warranted, especially given the likelihood that their encounters with the two social networks might be different than their husbands. How are they incorporated into the economy and the community? Do the encounters lead to jobs for the women? What are the challenges of gender and family when the Somali Bantu mother goes to work?
- As all parent-child relationships go, the lifestyles of the Somali Bantu male heads of households have a lasting effect on their sons’ health, security, and happiness. Therefore, it is worthwhile to follow up with the sons. A year later, how is the second-generation faring? How many are they moving forward with higher education? How many are able to leave Southview Estates but are choosing to stay, seeing the space as community? What are their experiences in the larger society with racial identification? How do they

maintain a sense of identity as a Somali Bantu? Ultimately, it would be interesting to observe the adult lives of the Bantu sons – what is the level of social change, the evolution of socio-economic structure in response to the earlier observations of their parents' connection to the two social networks that enabled them to get resettled.

- Lastly, not every Somali Bantu family chose to settle into Southview Estates. As well, not every Somali Bantu family came into the United States with the same quantity or quality of resources. For the one-third of families who decided to reside elsewhere, are their social networks different, and how? Are they being incorporated into job and community networks differently? To what degree does racialization and race structure play a part in their effort to advance in American society? The Somali Bantu are a community-oriented group. Because of this, it might be important to observe how Bantu who are not living in Southview are being incorporated into communities with different racial, socioeconomic, political, and religious demographics. This research might be especially beneficial if it reveals a support structure that could aid the processes of acculturation, assimilation, and integration for the Bantu in Southview Estates.

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