

The Resettlement Experiences of Southern Sudanese Women Refugees in
Minnesota

A Dissertation

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

BY

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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September, 2015

Acknowledgements

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude and appreciation toward faculty members who made this study possible. I would like to thank my adviser Dr. Rosemarie Park for her guidance and support throughout my years in graduate school and her encouragement and dedication throughout the process of writing of this study. I am thankful for my dissertation committee members: Dr. Richard Krueger, Dr. Alexander Ardichvili, and Dr. Catherine Twohig for all their expertise, insightful suggestions and guidance. I am thankful to all my family members, friends, and co-workers for their solid support and encouragement.

Dedication

To the Southern Sudanese women refugees, your narratives are a source of strength, resilience, and empowerment.

Abstract

Over the past two decades, the United States of America, Australia, Canada, Britain and other Western European nations have witnessed a high influx of African Refugees from war torn countries in Africa. Southern Sudanese left their country to escape the civil war between Southern Sudanese and the Northern dominated government. The civil war began intermittently in 1955 and continuously in 1983. The civil war ended in 2003 and has resulted in the death of 2 million and the displacement of four million Southern Sudanese (UNHCR, 2001).

The lives of the Southern Sudanese refugees have not been easy after resettlement, especially the lives of women. Many Southern Sudanese women have experienced violence and rape during the civil war in Sudan and in refugee camps and have lived in fear of such violence (Tankink & Richters, 2007). The resettlement of Southern Sudanese women refugees into a society that is geographically and culturally different has been challenging.

The dissertation indicated that adjustment to a new culture is a difficult process for many women refugees. (Sullivan & Deacon, 2009), (Martin, 2004). Barriers that hinder the adjustment process include racial and cultural discrimination against women refugees in the host society. Women refugees are likely to face racism and sexism in seeking employment or vocational training in their host country. There also personal barriers that hinder the adjustment process for refugee women. These barriers include

trauma, lack of language skills and vocational skills, and cultural differences (Martin, 2004).

In general, there is a little literature that focuses on the African refugee resettlement experience in the US (Boas, 2007), (khawaja, et al, 2008) and there are less literature on Southern Sudanese women refugees and their overall adjustment in their new environments. This study expands the understanding of the Southern Sudanese women refugees' experiences and the barriers that prevent them from achieving their goals.

The significance of the study lies in its search for a deeper understanding of the process through which Southern Sudanese women refugees attempt to balance their life demands as they are integrating to American norms and values. This area of knowledge, based on the experiences of Southern Sudanese women as they settled in Minnesota brings increasing awareness of the particular needs of Southern Sudanese refugee women. This will also assist service providers, educators, and policy makers in developing best practices when working with Southern Sudanese women refugees

This is a qualitative study research used narrative analysis. For this qualitative research, a purposive sample of 7 Southern Sudanese refugee women was selected to participate in the study. Two methods of recruitment were used; first through nominative sample and second through the resettlement agencies and adult education centers in Minnesota. Strict measures to ensure that participants were protected from any undue harm or coercion as a result of interviews.

The sample selection criteria were as follows: Be a Southern Sudanese women refugee 21 years or older; has entered the United States with refugee status; is able to communicate in English or Arabic; has been living in the US for longer than one year, who is coming back to school or in school to get an education or some sort of credentials related to language skills or career preparation.

The findings of this study supported and corresponded with the literature. The interviews of the seven Southern Sudanese women refugees revealed a range of reactions and experiences in navigating and resettling in their new home, Minnesota. The variation of the women's ages and backgrounds, and the circumstances of their experiences, produced a variety of themes. The most prevalent themes identified were the cultural conflict and its impact on resettlement; the challenges the women experienced in adapting to their new homes; the impossibility of returning back home; the traumatic experiences pre and post resettlement; and coping and sources of resilience.

The narrative methodology allowed the women refugees the voice to provide a context specific knowledge beyond the generalized explanation of the refugees experiences in the literature thus adding a rich picture of this marginalized group and their perspectives and unique experiences to the literature.

This qualitative research provided some understanding and explanation about the experience of some Southern Sudanese women refugees but it cannot be generalized to all Southern Sudanese women refugee populations, or any other ethnic refugee group.

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Chapter 1

Over the past two decades, the United States of America and other refugee resettlement- sponsoring countries like Australia, Canada, Denmark, New Zealand, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden, have witnessed a high number of African refugees from war-torn nations. The United States accepts more than double the number of refugees accepted by all other sponsoring countries combined (Boas, 2006). There are currently more than 2.6 million refugees resettled in the United States (Steimel, 2010).

Due to the large scale of these resettlements and the diverse backgrounds of its refugee populations, the United States faces significant challenges (Boas, 2006; Deacon and Sullivan, 2009). Commonly, refugees spend long periods of time in refugee camps prior to their arrival in the United States. Many have experienced considerable amount of distress, trauma, and violence and some suffered from disabilities. These refugees often have no prior work experience, and some are illiterate and have no knowledge of English (Irvin and Gambell, 2013)

The Southern Sudanese women refugees resettled in the United States and other resettlement countries after they escaped the civil war between Southern Sudanese and the Northern-dominated government. The civil war began sporadically in 1955 and unremittingly in 1983. The civil war ended in 2005 and has resulted in the death of two million and the displacement of four million Southern Sudanese (UNHCR, 2001). Today, one of the largest populations of internally-displaced people, about 2,500,000, reside in Sudan. Southern Sudanese who fled the war have resided in refugee camps in Kenya,

Uganda, Ethiopia and Chad. Some were able to escape to Egypt, Syria and Lebanon (Willis and Nkwocha, 2006).

The lives of the Southern Sudanese refugees have not been easy after resettlement in the United States and other countries, especially the lives of women. Many Southern Sudanese women have experienced violence and rape during the civil war in Sudan and in refugee camps and have lived in fear of such violence (Tankink and Richters, 2007). Tipping, Bretherton and Kaplan (2007) argued, “people from refugee backgrounds bring with them the ongoing influences of their pre-arrival experiences, including the nature of the conflict in their country of origin and its psychological impact, previous levels of education, and cultural beliefs and practices.” p.157.

The resettlement of Southern Sudanese and other African refugees in the United States have been difficult due to several factors. First, the resettlement agencies in the United States have no prior experience in dealing with refugees from Africa. Second, refugee resettlement programs have limited funding resources. Third, Southern Sudanese refugees of Sudan came from a collective pastoral background where technology rarely existed. They have a strong kinship system and they share the resources that are depended on farming, fishing and raising cattle. The transition into an individualistic society where technology and money are important and significant in the new culture is difficult (Willis and Buck, 2007). Fourth, the high visibility of Southern Sudanese refugees as dark black Africans subject them to racism and discrimination. Ong (1996) as cited in Shandy (2006) argued “Race and economics coalesce to position Nuer refugees

on the lowest rungs of the socio- economics ladder.” p. 60. She also argued “Race is an overarching variable in the organizations of the US society that tends to function to locate those with darker skin at the lowest runs of the social-economic ladder.” p. 97.

Hadley and Patil’s (2009) study assessing the prevalence and predictor of discrimination among a community-based sample of refugee resettled in the US indicated that African refugees resettled in Europe, Australia, and North America have experienced high levels of discrimination which is considered a major stress factor. Skin color is considered a source of liability when refugees’ come to the United States. The research concluded that African refugees are placed in subservient positions because of the “unique and lamentable history of slavery, civil rights abuses, and continued discrimination in the USA.” p.511.

Another factor that challenges the African refugees’ resettlement is illiteracy. The majority of Southern Sudanese women refugees come to the United States with little or no formal education and limited occupational skills. There are no reports in the literature to show the statistics of illiteracy among Southern Sudanese women refugees in Minnesota or the United States in general, but illiteracy and language barriers were identified by refugees as an obstacle to getting jobs. Mortland and Ledgerwood, (1988) indicated that illiteracy of refugees has a great impact, especially for those who are illiterate in their own language. The lack of the classroom experience for refugees adds to the challenge of learning a new language. In addition, adult refugees also struggle to learn employment skills as they get older.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to examine the life experiences of Southern Sudanese women refugees in Minnesota as they navigate the resettlement process and examine how they balance the demands of their culture, the demands of their families and their needs to obtain education or work. The study aims to examine the culture of Southern Sudanese women refugees and the ways in which it may help or hinders them from achieving their goals. The study also aims to identify the challenges facing Southern Sudanese women refugees who seek access to education or career training.

Statement of the problem

Minnesota has a high number of refugees, an estimated 70,500 refugees originating from 30 different countries. Southern Sudanese refugees resettled in Minnesota in 1992 to 1997 and were considered a smaller minority group than other refugees resettled in the Midwest. The Nuer tribe is the main Southern Sudanese ethnic group residing in Minnesota. Typically, the Nuers are either Christians, follow indigenous beliefs or both (Power and Shandy, 1998). The majority of the Southern Sudanese refugees settling in Minnesota at this time were young, and almost none of their grandparents were present (Holtzman, 1999).

Most Southern Sudanese women refugees arrived in Minnesota with little formal education or vocational training. Lack of English language proficiency, cultural differences and limited work opportunities have been indicated as factors that hinder the

process of integration (Wilder Research Center, 2003; Darboe, 2003; Hill, Hunt, Hyrkas, 2011; Ali, 2011). The illiteracy rate among African women refugees is a major obstacle to them entering the labor market or qualifying for job training programs (Wilder Research Center, 2003).

The U.S. State Department initiates the process of resettlement before refugees arrive in the country. Once they enter the United States, the Department of Health and Human Services coordinates with non-profit organizations contracted to provide case management and resettlement services for each refugee. The resettlement process includes access to transitional cash, housing, food, and referrals to education and employment programs for a period of 90 days that begins upon arrival. The U.S. refugee resettlement program is based on the assumption that refugees coming to the United States should be able to find employment shortly after they arrive.

During resettlement, refugees also receive services from the state which include medical and cash assistance. Refugee families and their children resettling in Minnesota are eligible for the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) which includes cash and medical assistance. This MFIP program continues for 60 months. Refugees who do not have children are eligible for Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA) and Refugee Medical Assistance (RMA) for the first eight months after their arrival (Minnesota Department of Human Services). The Minnesota Department of Human Services oversees the resettlement process (Ali, 2011).

Minnesota budget cuts have affected Minnesota's low-income populations as a whole and refugees in particular. The Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) has reduced benefits for non-citizens since 2000. There have been a number of cuts to key assistance programs. Food stamp programs were reduced and refugees' cash assistance dropped from 36 months to only 8 months coverage (Ali, 2011). The requirement for survival adds tremendous pressure on women refugees in getting off welfare and into paying work. The lack of education and vocational experience of Southern Sudanese women refugees confront and challenge them after their public assistance ends. Welfare time limits force many women refugees to abandon or change their goal of enrolling in school to learn a language or skill in order to work and support their large families.

Southern Sudanese refugees came to Minnesota with little or no money, and their livelihood depends on federal assistance. Both men and women faced great economic difficulties when they arrived in Minnesota. According to social services workers, Sudanese refugees have the hardest obstacles in adjusting and resettling in Minnesota compared to Vietnamese, Hmong and Russian Jews (Holtzman, 1999). Though a few Southern Sudanese men were educated, the majority came with little or no English language, and the majority of women were illiterate. Finding employment is particularly challenging if a refugee does not speak the language of their host country. Refugees are confronted with economic challenges when they do not have the job skills, language proficiency or formal education required to succeed in their host countries'. Refugees who have academic credentials and skills from their homelands often face challenges as

they cannot obtain similar jobs in their new countries of residence (Irvin and Gambrell, 2013). Southern Sudanese women refugees who do have educational and vocational credentials in their home country face difficulty in obtaining an employment because the United States does not recognize the education or vocational credentials (The Minneapolis Foundation, 2004).

Hortzman (1999) in his book , “ Nuer journeys , Nuer lives in Minnesota”, indicated that balancing between obtaining an employment, caring for their children, and learning a skill to better their life is a challenge for many southern Sudanese refugees. He also indicated that racism is another reality that Southern Sudanese refugees encounter during their resettlement in Minnesota. Southern Sudanese are tall, black, and they stood out. Some Minnesotans have struggled to make sense of the refugees’ arrival, and they already have stereotypes of Africans.

Actual research questions

The three main questions addressed in this study are-:

What is the nature of the experience of Southern Sudanese women refugees in attempting to strike a balance between demands of culture, family life and their education in Minnesota?

What are the challenges facing Southern Sudanese women refugees who seek access to education or career training.

What are the barriers and limitations that prevent Southern Sudanese women refugees from getting educational career training?

Justification for the study

Even though the majority of the refugee populations are women and children, there is a gap in the literature to understand the views and perceptions of the refugee women themselves (Baird and Boyle, 2011). There is a limited literature on Southern Sudanese women refugees and their overall adjustment in their new environments. This study will expand the understanding of the Southern Sudanese women refugees' experiences and the barriers that prevent them from achieving their goals.

The significance of the study lies in its search for a deeper understanding of the process through which Southern Sudanese women refugees attempt to balance their life demands as they are integrating to American norms and values. This study is considered critical as little is known about the qualitative description of the Southern Sudanese women refugees' lived experiences in within the context of the new environment in Minnesota. This area of knowledge, based on the experiences of Southern Sudanese women as they settled in Minnesota will bring increasing awareness of the particular needs of Southern Sudanese refugee women. This will also assist service providers, educators, and policy makers in developing best practices when working with Southern Sudanese women refugees. It is important in working with refugees to listen to their voices and taking into account their perspectives.

Theoretical Guide

The transformative theory of learning and the narrative methods are utilized to frame the context of the Southern Sudanese women refugees lived experiences.

Mezirow's transformative theory of learning will be used to explore the manner in which Southern Sudanese women refugees subjectively interpret varying meanings and realities in the context of adapting to a new environment. The transformative learning theory provides a framework to understand the resettlement experiences of Southern Sudanese refugee women.

A major theory in adult education, transformative learning, is concerned with understanding the significance of experience as a guide to action and was defined by Cranton (1992) as "the process of critical reflection, or a process of questioning assumptions and values that form the basis for the way we see the world" (p. 146). Transformative learning is a process of effecting change within the learner's frame of reference, which Mezirow (1997) defined as "the structures of assumptions through which we understand our experience" (p. 5).

Mezirow's theory of adult learning is grounded in cognitive and developmental psychology. Mezirow (1997) indicated that learning takes place through one of four ways: "by elaborating existing frames of references; by learning new frames of reference; by transforming points of view or by transforming habits of the mind" Mezirow, 1997. p.7. The central idea of the theory is perspective transformation. Perspectives are composed of beliefs, values, and assumptions which we obtain through our life experience. The transformation process occurs when we understand our experiences and make meaning of them through reflection, critical reflection and critical self-reflection (Dirkx, 1998). Mezirow's theory of transformative learning focuses primarily on the

process of individual change, and is embedded in the idea of critical thinking. The transformative change starts by challenging the assumptions that we have acquired through our life experiences which have shaped the frame of reference that define our worlds.

Mezirow's transformative learning theory was developed through the integration of other theorists' work in adult education. He was influenced by Kuhn's paradigm, Freire's critical consciousness theory and Habermas' domains of learning to promote critical reflection as the essential element needed to transform experience into knowledge. Kuhn's frame of reference paradigm presented the base for Mezirow's transformative learning. Mezirow (1997) defined frame of reference as "the structures of assumptions through which we understand our experiences. They selectively shape and delimit expectations, perceptions, cognition and feelings. They set our line of action" (as cited in Erickson, 2011, p.66). Mezirow's concept of frame of reference has two dimensions: habits of the mind and meaning perspectives. Habits of the mind are wide ranging ways of thinking, feeling and acting, and they are influenced by assumptions that represent a set of codes. Cultural assimilation and people's upbringing certainly affect their frame of reference. Mezirow argued that as individuals we transform our frames of reference by making them more reflective and receptive to change, so that we can create the truth that guides our action (Erickson, 2007).

The essence of transformative learning is making meaning through the interpretation of experiences. According to Mezirow, the process of meaning making can

be understood by using two concepts: meaning schemes and meaning perspectives. Meaning schemes and meaning perspectives help us to understand our experience. Nagata (2006) cited Mezirow and wrote, “Meaning schemes are the specific beliefs, attitudes and emotional reactions articulated by an interpretation. They are derived from earlier, often unreflective interpretations. Meaning schemes serve as specific habits of expectations. Meaning perspectives are groups of related meaning schemes” (p. 42). Mezirow described three meaning perspectives: epistemic, related to knowledge and how it is used; sociolinguistic, related to language and its use in social settings; and psychological, related to people’s perceptions of themselves.. Meaning perspectives are transformed through critical reflective assessments of epistemic, sociolinguistic and psychological distortions obtained through the process of accepting others’ values without critical reflection (Kitchenham, 2008).

Mezirow saw Freire’s work on conscientization as parallel to his own work. Freire’s last stage of critical consciousness influenced Mezirow in his own ideas of disorienting dilemma, critical reflection and critical self-reflection on assumption and critical discourse. This highest level of critical transitivity is evident in individuals who are able to have a global and critical perspective on their existing circumstances and are able to take action (Kitchenham, 2008). Both Freire and Mezirow took a constructivist approach to transformative learning. Mezirow described transformational learning as a constructivist theory of adult learning that is “intended to be a comprehensive, idealized

and universal model consisting of the generic structures, elements and processes of adult learning” as cited in Erickson (2007) article.

In 1981 Mezirow based his transformative theory on the framework of Habermas’ three domains of learning to create a critical theory of adult learning and adult education. Habermas’ domains of learning are: technical, practical and emancipatory. Technical learning is designed for a specific task and presided over by rules. Practical learning entails social norms, and emancipatory learning is based on learner’s self reflection and experiences. In 1985, Mezirow expanded his theory to include the view of perspective transformation by relating the emancipatory process to self-directed learning, creating three revised types of learning: instrumental, dialogic, and self-reflective. Instrumental learning is focused on goal-oriented behavior which involves controlling or manipulating the environment or people. Dialogic learning is learning to understand what is being communicated with an emphasis on understanding values, ideals and normative concepts (Servage, 2008). Self-reflective learning is the result of critical reflection that frees the learner from constraints.

Mezirow suggested individuals learn when their perceptions of reality are not in harmony with their experiences. The disharmony occurs when people experience life crisis, for example divorce, loss of a job, promotion, or relocation (Cranton, 2000). The core of the learning process is centered on critiquing one’s own assumptions and beliefs. Mezirow’s process transformative learning was based on his study of women returning to college after an extended number of years out of school. This national qualitative study’s

data, collected through in depth interview, identified the following 10 phases of Mezirow's (1978a, 1978b) Transformative theory of Learning:

- Phase 1 A disorienting dilemma
- Phase 2 A self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame
- Phase 3 A critical assessments of epistemic, socio-cultural, or psychic assumptions
- Phase 4 Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change
- Phase 5 Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
- Phase 6 Planning of a course of action
- Phase 7 Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans
- Phase 8 Provisional trying of new roles
- Phase 9 Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
- Phase 10 A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's perspective

(Kitchenham, 2008)

Transformational learning is initiated by a disorientation dilemma which requires learners to question their own beliefs and values during a significant personal crisis or major life transition. This crisis will then lead to the second phase, self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame. In phase 3, the learner experiences a critical assessment of

assumption. In phase 4, the learners recognize that their own discontent and the process of transformation are shared with others. In phase 5, the learner explores options for new roles, relationship and actions. In phase 6, the learner plans a course of action. In phase 7, to accomplish this plan, the learner acquires the knowledge and skills for implementing the new plan. In phase 8, the learner provisionally tries out a new role. In phase 9, the learner builds competence and self-confidence in the new role and relationships. Lastly in the final phase, the learner reintegrates new assumptions into their life on the basis of conditions dictated by their new perspectives. These 10 phases are not necessarily sequential ((Kitchenham, 2008)

Mezirow developed and revised his theory throughout the years. In 1991, Mezirow revised the 10 original phases and added an 11th stage to the theory: altering present relationships and forging new relationships. This stage emphasized the importance of critical self-reflection. Kitchenham (2008) indicated that Mezirow implemented the constructivist assumption as the base for his revised theory “including a conviction that meaning exists within ourselves rather than in external forms such as books and that personal meaning that we attribute to our experiences are required and validated through human interaction and communication” (p. 113).

Taylor (1994) suggested that Mezirow’s theory of transformative learning offers a framework for understanding the experiences of immigrants as they move to a new cultural context. The transformative learning theory is an applicable lens to study the experience of Southern Sudanese women refugees during their resettlement process since

it is concerned with understanding the significance of experience as a guide to action. Magro (2002) argued that the “disorientation dilemmas’ which refugees encounter during the resettlement process as a result of the loss of land, culture and language may force them to adapt new ways to endure the challenges of living in a new culture. The experiences of southern Sudanese women refugees in their new society will enable them to challenge their perspectives. The Southern Sudanese women refugees’ adaptation stories will be analyzed through the lens of Mezirow’s transformative theory.

Definitions of terms

Acculturation: According to Redfield, Linton & Herkovits (1936) as cited by Berry (1997) acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups

Adaptation refers to changes that take place in individuals or groups in response to environmental demands. These adaptations can occur immediately, or they can be extended over the long term (Berry, 1997)

Culture: Torbiorn (1988) defined culture as a set of norms, according to which things are run or simply “ are” in a particular society or country, and so to which most members of the society adhere in values, attitudes interpretations, and behaviors (p.168).

Cultural barriers: Torbiorn (1988) defined cultural barriers as referring to individual reaction in situations of cross-cultural contact where cultural differences

negatively affect an individual's ability, willingness to understand, accept, adhere to, or adopt the norms of a foreign culture (p.168).

Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP): MFIP is the state's welfare reform program for low-income families with children. MFIP helps families move to work. It includes both cash and food assistance. When most families first apply for cash assistance, they will participate in the Diversionary Work Program (DWP). This is a four-month program that helps parents go immediately to work rather than receive welfare. Most families can get cash assistance for only 60 months (Minnesota Department of Human Services).

Refugee: A refugee is any person who "owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it".
(UNHCR.org)

Resettlement: Resettlement involves the selection and transfer of refugees from a State in which they have sought protection to a third State which has agreed to admit them – as refugees – with permanent residence status. The status provides a resettled refugee and family or dependents with access to rights similar to those enjoyed by

nationals. Resettlement also carries with it the opportunity to eventually become a naturalized citizen of the resettlement country (UNHCR.org).

Setting the Context: A Review of the Literature

Background on Sudan

Sudan is located in the northeast of Africa and was the largest country in Africa before the north and south of the country separated in 2011. Sudan is surrounded by eight countries including Egypt, Libya, Chad, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Uganda, Kenya, and Central Republic of Africa. Sudan is part of the Arab world and has been a member of the Arab League since its independence in 1956. Sudan's many cultures, languages and religions make it a microcosm of the African continent (Edward, 2007). Sudan's population is 34 million with more than 500 ethnic groups and more than 100 languages. The majority of the people of Sudan are Sunni Muslims, 25% practice indigenous beliefs and 5% are Christians. Arabic is the national and official language.

Sudanese society is collectivistic and hierarchical in nature. It is a male-dominated society; men have control of the social and political structures (Eissen and Falola, 2009). Typically, men are the head of the household and the women's primary role is at home as wives and mothers. Marriages are often arranged, and men are allowed to have more than one wife. There is a Southern Sudanese proverb that says, "If you marry an individual, you also marry the extended family as well." This proverb demonstrates the importance of family in Sudanese society. There is no such thing as nuclear or extended family as married couples are committed to their siblings, parents and their grandparents. Family tradition also emphasizes family members to respect the elders. (Wills, 2009)

Ryle (2011) pointed out that in the North, most of the people identify themselves as Arabs or belong to Arab tribal group. They speak Arabic and identify Islam as their faith. Sudanese Arabic cultural identification was developed in 1920 by Sudanese nationalist. Deng (2003) stated that before Sudanese independence in 1956, the British colonial rule focused its efforts on modernizing the North and depended on Christian missionaries to develop the south. Deng stated “Thus the Southern Sudanese had a sense of identity based on indigenous culture and Christians cultural norms.” p.3. English was the official language for education in the South. After Sudan’s independence in 1956, the government in the North adopted the policy of Arabization and Islamization. The central government in the North expelled the Western missionaries from the South and replaced their official English language with Arabic. The Southerners were victims of ethnic prejudice. This prejudice was the result of the early history of enslaving people from the South (Ryle, 2011).

The civil war

The civil war has affected Southern Sudanese for more than half a century since the independence from Great Britain in 1956. The wars have devastated the whole country and caused great harm to its citizens. The first civil war began in 1955 and ended in 1972 and the second civil war started in 1983 and ended in 2005 when a peace agreement was signed. The second civil war caused two million deaths and displaced over four million people. The war has caused a lot of destruction and displacement and has devastated the country socially and economically (Kustendbauder, 2012).

Scholars, journalists, academics and human rights activists have studied the Sudanese civil war. Sudanese Northerners and Southerners differ in their opinion in regards to the root causes of the war. To the Southerners, the war is about race ethnicity, religion and economic deprivation and the unequal distribution of natural resources and power. Dunstan Wii as cited in Edward (2007) stated that north-south conflict goes back Sudan before colonization. He argued, “The conflict between the two groups results from historical roots as well as from cultural, racial and economic antagonisms leading to distrust and desire for succession.” p. 20. In addition, the Southerners have experienced slavery by the Arab Muslims since the Turko-Egyptian rule in Sudan and after its independence from the Anglo-Egyptian rule in 1956. Jok (2001), “the violent enslavements of Southerners is a result of enslaving communities having developed a racist ideology which ascribes subhuman status to the enslaved communities.” p.7. Journalist Cameron Duodo in his article, “Africa’s Forgotten War”, has described the conflict as racial and religious one, that is between the Arabized black skinned Muslim northerners and the black Africans Christians Southerners (Jok, 2001). According to Northern Sudanese scholars, culture, economic factors, and British colonial policies towards the south are the main factors for the hostile relationship between the North and South (Edward, 2007).

The flight to refugee camps

Many Southern Sudanese were forced out of their villages due to the fierce attack from the Northern Sudanese government militias. The escape from the war-affected areas

in the south to the refugee camps was tragic for many Southern Sudanese. Many died on the way during their escape. It is estimated that 500,000 Southern Sudanese escaped to nearby countries. Some fled to the Ethiopian borders, others ran towards the Ugandan borders, and some made it to the refugee camps in Kenya. It was also reported that 15,000 young Southern Sudanese boys between the ages of 5 to 15 fled to Ethiopia accompanied by few hundred adults. During their escape, some of these boys were killed by either Sudanese soldiers or Arab militias or died from hunger or were attacked by wild animals (Jeppson and Hjern, 2005).

According to the UNHCR's field office, there is a great amount of violence in refugee camps including death, serious injuries and sexual violence (Crisp, 2000). The largest group of Southern Sudanese refugees who escaped the civil war is located in Kakuma refugee camps. The Kakuma refugee camp was built in 1992, and it is located at the northwestern Kenyan desert. The refugee population in the Kenyan refugee camps was over 110,000 and the majority of them were Southern Sudanese. These camps offer temporary asylum for refugees and provide short term food relief, temporary housing and medical services. These programs have minimal focus on the refugees' self-sufficiency and economic independence.

The refugee camps in Kenya were a harsh reality for many of the Southern Sudanese women. These transit camps were unsafe and treacherous for many refugee women. Violence against women became a norm, and it was rarely addressed. Women who were raped were rejected both by their spouses and the communities they live in

(Beswick, 2001). In addition to the tragic living experience in the camps, Southern Sudanese women have suffered from unequal access to education during their resettlement in the refugee camp. Before resettling in refugee camps, Southern Sudanese women had an unequal access to education in their home country. Eljack argued (2012), “This systematic lack of education has historically constrained the economic and the social activities of Southern Sudanese women and men.” p.26. Eljack (2012) also indicated that Southern Sudanese women in the refugee camps had to take the responsibilities for caring their family including their siblings, children and the elders, in addition to the domestic work and she argued, “the additional gendered responsibilities that women were forced to take had exposed them to gender-based violence and death.” p. 21.

The transition from refugee camps to countries of final resettlement might take long periods of time up to several years. The applications for resettlement is free, but families are required to pay for travelling expenses over a period of time once they are resettled in the United States. The resettlement process involves many interviews by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees and then by staff of the Resettlement Support Center working on behalf of the U.S. State Department. Once the application is approved the refugees have to undergo medical checkups. Refugees have to be cleared from infectious diseases like Tuberculosis prior to their departure to the United States (US State Department)

Review of literature of the resettlement challenges of Southern Sudanese women refugees

In general, there is a little literature that focuses on the African refugee resettlement experience in the US (Boas, 2007; Khawaja, et al. 2008) and there is less literature on Southern Sudanese women refugees and their overall adjustment in their new environments. Warriner (2007) indicated that there is a gap in research and theory concerning the African refugee and immigrant population living in the United States in the field of immigration, education, language learning and national identity formation. Boas (2006) stated that even though there is a significant amount of literature on refugee resettlement, there is little written on African refugee resettlement in the United States.

There are few studies examining the post-resettlement experience of Southern Sudanese refugees in the countries where a significant number of them have resettled. The majority of the studies were conducted in Australia and some in the United States and Canada. In this section, I began by highlighting the literature that I found on Southern Sudanese women refugees in countries of resettlement and because there is a limited literature on the subject, I added studies on the Somali refugee experiences since their experiences are comparable to Sudanese; they too came from Africa, escaped a civil war and resettled in the United States and other countries around the same time as the Sudanese refugees. Somali refugees are considered the largest African refugee group in Minnesota. I also included a few studies on refugee women experiences of resettlement.

In Australia, Hatoss' and Huijser's (2010) qualitative study on the educational opportunities and barriers that Sudanese women refugees face during resettlement indicated that there are post and pre resettlement factors that impact the resettlement process. The transnational space, whether the country of origin, or the country of first flight or the final resettlement has played a part in shaping the educational opportunities for Sudanese refugees. Although the Australian government offered various educational support programs, there were many social, economic and cultural constraints prior and post resettlement that prohibited Southern Sudanese refugees from accessing them. In interviews with Southern Sudanese women refugees, they indicated that their education was disrupted during the war in Sudan and again during their time in the refugee camps. When they arrived in Australia, these women were confronted with the responsibilities of taking care of their families without any English language skills to be able to communicate in their host country, in addition to the responsibility of supporting their families back in Sudan. Hatoss and Huijser (2010) argued that, "In the context of such severe dislocation, social and cultural gender roles can provide rare instances of stability, which may in some cases be preferable to challenging this long-established status quo." p.158. Even though these women were eager to learn, they were confronted with their cultural and family demands that limited them from achieving their goals.

Khawaja, et al. (2008), qualitative study examining Sudanese refugees residing in Brisbane, Australia, and their pre migration, transit, and post migration experiences indicated that many Sudanese have experiences difficulties in resettling in their new host

country. Some of the obstacles they faced were adapting to a new environment and culture, lack of financial and social support, discrimination and racism. The study identified several coping strategies employed by refugees during their flight from their country and after the resettlement in Australia. Religious practices, social support and network, cognitive reframing of the situation and focusing and thinking about the future were identified by the respondents as their coping mechanism.

The results of Shakespeare-Finch and Wickham's (2010) qualitative phenomenological study to investigate the experiences of Sudanese refugees' and their adaption in an Australian context concurred with the resettlement difficulties identified in previous studies and concluded that language difficulties, Australia's cultural norms and life style in addition to the refugees post-traumatic stress and forced migration were all major factors than hindered the adaption process for Sudanese refugees

Milner and Khawaja's (2010) review highlighting the psychological effects of trauma and adjustment among Southern Sudanese during their resettlement in Australia indicated that the refugees encountered trauma before they fled their homeland in Sudan and after they left. The period between leaving Sudan and arriving in Australia was also very distressful. Some of these refugees have spent long periods of time in refugee camps which had a great impact in their mental health and well-being. Jackson (2007) as cited in Milner and Khawaja indicated that a lot of these refugees had no prior information about Australia before arriving there. This in addition to lack of social and financial support, language difficulties and lack of skills and education, and domestic violence has all added

to the difficulty of the resettlement process. The difficulties in adjustment are experienced at an individual, family and community level. Conflict exists when the adjustment process differs from one family to another in addition to the intergenerational conflict and new gender role within the new society.

Smich, Hamilton and Bay's (2006) mixed method study examining the mental distress, economic hardship and expectation of life among Sudanese who arrived in Canada, identified that significant mental distress was experienced during the resettlement. This distress was related to the economic hardships and struggles in the new society in addition to the absence of family members and close friends. The failure to fulfill the financial obligation towards family members who were left behind in Sudan or refugee camps is another factor that adds to refugee stress and anguish. Most of the respondents in the study indicated that they were in good health. This reporting of good health among the refugees in Canada was because they received medical health screening and were given medical care prior to their arrival in Canada.

In a qualitative study by Tankink and Richter (2007) on Southern Sudanese women in the Netherland indicated that there is a lack of knowledge on the experience of Southern Sudanese women who were victims of sexual violence. Some of the Southern women refugees experienced sexual violence during the war in Sudan or during their flight to safety. These women would very rarely reveal their experiences or seek treatment. Most of the women were traumatized by their experience. Shame, guilt and lack of trust made it extremely difficult for these women to share their stories with other

members of their group or to health care professionals. They also found it difficult to find meaning to what they have experienced. These women choose to keep silent about their sexual violence experience as disclosures of such experiences are not acceptable in their culture.

Willis and Buck's (2007) study examined the Southern Sudanese diet dilemma in Nebraska, and the results of a health survey covering demographic, health risk prevention factors and barriers to health care among 263 Sudanese refugees had indicated that the refugee population is relatively young, 29 years old and younger. The majority are uneducated and with low incomes. The study indicated that half of the research participants had no more than an eighth- grade level of education. Those who had completed high school at home did not have their diplomas recognized in the United States. Many of the women refugees could not read or write in their own language especially those who spent years in refugee camps. The Southern Sudanese refugee respondents in the study indicated that they did have health insurance and 1/3 of the participants had expressed that racism was a barrier for accessing health care services. 53% of the respondents claimed that they had experienced racism and 20% reported that racism was a major obstacle to accessing proper health care. Some of the respondent stated that they had prior health conditions from Africa that has not been treated or evaluated after residing in the US (Willis and Nkwocha, 2006). The study also revealed that the most difficult factor in the resettlement was the transition from a preliterate agrarian pastoralist community to a fast-paced technology based community in the

United States. The federal funding for the resettlement of refugees did not address their needs. The refugees in the study has expressed their desire to be educated and more involved in the American practices particularly in health care and legal customs but they indicated that there was a lack of resources to help them achieve those goals. (Willis and Nkwocha, 2006).

The impact of trauma experienced in the country of origin is one of the factors that make readjustment more difficult (Ben-Sira, 1997). Clinical studies have shown that the rates of post-traumatic stress disorder among refugee populations ranges from 39% to 100%. Depression rates are also high, about 47%. Peltzer's (1999) study to determine the extent of traumas and mental health problems among Southern Sudanese refugees residing in refugee camps in Uganda indicated that Sudanese refugees have suffered from trauma due to the civil war, isolation, from others, loss of family members and being without food and water for long periods of time.

Refugees who arrive in the resettlement countries are frequently in urgent need of medical and mental health care. Southern Sudanese refugees had limited access to education and health services in their refugee camps. When they arrived in the United States, some of these refugees had preexisting health conditions, and a lot of them were not able to talk about their medical history due to their limited English skills (Power and Shandy, 1998).

Neuner et al. (2007) indicated that readjustment for refugees is more difficult than other migrants because of stress and maladjustment. He reported that refugees escaping

from war-torn countries suffer traumatic experiences that included physical and psychological torture, sexual violence in addition to other traumas. This resulted in a high rate of post-traumatic stress disorder among the refugee population.

The review of literature on Southern Sudanese women refugees' resettlement experience has paralleled some of the literature that I found on other refugee women's experiences of resettlement in the United States and other western countries. Sudanese refugees have much in common with Somali refugees who are also a minority group who came from Africa and resettled in the United States around the same time as Southern Sudanese refugees in the early nineties. The war trauma, social isolations and changes in social status are significant challenges impacting the integration of Somali refugees into their resettlement (Schuchman and McDonald, 2004). Since the war is longstanding in Somalia, nearly all Somalis have been in some way affected by trauma. Some of these families have experienced violence themselves or witnessed it. Many Somalis suffer from traumatic memories, flashbacks, depression and anxiety (Schuchman and McDonald, 2004). Stein and Portes (1979) as cited in Stein (1986) indicated that refugees with low occupational skills, refugees on welfare and refugees whose role have been changed, for example women becoming head of household, are considered high risk groups or are experiencing mental health problems.

The challenges of resettlement of Somali women refugees in a new society are comparable to Southern Sudanese women refugees' experience. Sales and Gregory (1998), in their report on experiences of Somali women refugees in London, pointed out

that many Somali women face barriers to employment. Many Somali women felt that they were discriminated against because of ethnicity. Even those who had professional skills were not able to work in the same area because their qualifications were not recognized in Britain. The concern of caring for children and adapting to a new unfriendly environment made employment inaccessible for these women. Somalis in Canada have a similar experience. In an article stressing the challenges of Somali women in Canada in adjusting to life in Canada indicated that culture shock, family disintegrations, social isolation, and economic difficulties are significant factors hindering the process of adjustment. The lack of support and family social network added an increased challenge for Somali women in parenting and taking care of their children. Many of the Somali women believed that their practical needs of resettlement have not been met. They suffer from lack of employment and racial discrimination (Mohamed, 1999). Valentine and Sporton (2009) indicated that Somalis are discriminated against because of their high visibility as African Muslim as cited by Hebbani and McNamara (2010). Mgoheissi (2005) indicated that the Muslim immigrant population faces difficulty and a feeling of not belonging in the diaspora. The feeling of being an outsider is intense among immigrants who are often become targets of discrimination because of the visibility of their dress code, skin color and cultural practices.

The struggle and challenges of resettlements of Southern Sudanese women refugees are also found in another ethnic refugee group. Sossou et al. (2008) qualitative study investigated the individual and environmental resilience factors of Bosnian refugee

women who have settled in the United States after they fled the war in Bosnia. The war between the Serbs and the Muslims Bosnians had claimed the lives of more than 250,000 people and forced more than 3 million to flee their homes (Becker, et al 1999) as cited in Sossou et al. (2008). Many Bosnians have experienced distressful events including exposure to killing and violence, separations from family and loved ones, lack of medical care and loss of homes and properties. The study identified language barriers, lack of public transportations, and inability to access educational opportunities as major challenges for Bosnians women refugees. The study also revealed that many refugees are not willing to admit they need mental health care and are not willing to be patients. The research participants stressed the importance of family as a resilience factor. The refugee women stated that they were able to survive in the new host country simply because they believed that they are needed by their children and husbands. Religion and spirituality were also included as resilience factors.

The review of literature on women refugees indicated that readjustment for refugees is more difficult than other migrants because of stress and maladjustment. Adjustment to a new culture is a difficult process for many women refugees. (Sullivan and Deacon, 2009; Martin, 2004). Barriers that hinder the adjustment process include racial and cultural discrimination against women refugees in the host society. Women refugees are likely to face racism and sexism in seeking employment or vocational training in their host country. There are also personal barriers that hinder the adjustment

process for refugee women. These barriers include trauma, lack of language skills and vocational skills, and cultural differences (Martin, 2004 ; Stiemel, 2010).

Deacon and Sullivan (2009) stated that women refugees showed a tremendous resilience during their encounter with obstacles and hardship, but the process of resettlement has a great effect on their mental wellbeing and health. The social and economic challenges that women refugees encounter in resettlement in addition to the difficulty in learning a new language have impacted refugee women mental health. Dona and Berry (1999) as cited in Deacon and Sullivan (2009) indicated that women refugees also face difficulty in accessing employment especially when their skills or credentials are not recognized in their new host country.

Refugee women are confronted with the challenges of their news gender roles in the host countries. These gender roles are often different than what these women and their families are used to in their home countries. Kulig (1994) as cited in Deacon& Sullivan indicated, “ Although these new gender roles may represent new opportunities for some women for many it is difficult to negotiate their place within these new contexts.” p. 273. Women refugees’ social roles change after resettlement. Most of the women from developing countries have no prior work experience as they are confined to traditional roles: staying at home and taking care of their children. Women who came with employment experience view employment in the host country as culturally different (Martin, 2004). Kulig 1994 as cited in Deacon and Sullivan (2009) indicated that the reason is that women might have a hard time negotiating their new roles from what they

were used to in the new society. Benson 1994; Comas-Dias and Jansen as cited in Deacon and Sullivan (2009) also indicated that refugee women who never experienced labor outside their home would find it challenging to balance between their duties at home as a mother and wife and employment. Shifting gender role in addition to stress experienced by refugees during resettlement might be a contributing factor for domestic violence among families.

Accessing education, learning a new language, creating a new identity are challenging processes for African women refugees especially when they are dealing with the loss of their homeland and the separation from their social, political and cultural practices, in addition to distressful past experiences prior to their escape. Warriner argued, “With issues of language, race, ethnicity, class, gender, and international politics salient and consequential in their movement across borders, their claims to particular services (including high-quality English-language instruction) and their abilities to secure a job that provides a livable wage are challenged daily.” p. 344 . The question of identity and belonging is perplexing for African women refugees particularly in the context of school, work and community.

In summary, the literature on Southern Sudanese women refugees mostly focused on examining pre- migration traumatic experiences and post-migration challenges; mental health of refugees and brief highlights of some of the coping strategies and resilience adopted by some of the refugees. These studies provided an emerging picture of the resettlement challenges in general but there is still a gap in the literature of

conclusive studies in regards to the lived experiences of southern Sudanese women refugees and how they conceptualize their own experiences, if they have managed to cope despite of their traumatic experiences, and how they are balancing the demands of their families and culture and how they are fulfilling their own goals of career and education.

Chapter 3: The rationale for using qualitative narrative methods

Sword (1999) defined qualitative inquiry as “an interactive and transformational process in which the researcher seeks to learn about and interpret life experiences.” p. 270. The qualitative methodological approach is driven by the research topic. Since this research is concerned with the understanding of the lived experiences of Southern Sudanese women refugees in their new resettlement therefore, this study is more concerned with interpretation than quantification. The qualitative research methodology is justified for collecting the research data.

Shakespeare-Finch and Wickham (2010) indicated that there are few advantages in using the qualitative methodologies for examining the experience of Southern Sudanese refugees in Australia. First, the research will avoid issues of validity that comes with using questionnaire to collect data that is ethnically inclusive. Second the qualitative methodology will examine the experiences of refugees without forcing prejudiced theories. And finally, refugees will be able to express themselves without “being limited to certain categories of trauma and post-trauma outcomes.” p.23

This is a qualitative study research that used narrative analysis as a methodology. According to Connelly and Clandine, narrative inquiry is a qualitative approach that studies “the way in which the individual experience the world.” p.2. Cladinin and ConNelly (2000) as cited in Creswell et al. (2007) indicated that narrative researchers “situate individual stories within the participants’ personal experiences (their job, their

homes) and their cultural (racial or ethnic) and historical (time and place) contexts.” p. 244.

Using narrative in refugees’ studies would clear us from obscurity. As Hopkins (2013) described, “it will bring life to the subject and bring the subject to life.” p.136. Norman Denzin (2008) as cited in Hopkins (2013) indicated that a narrative in research is powerful on behalf of refugees. He argued, “Critical personal narratives are counter narratives that disrupt and disturb [dominant] discourse by exposing the complexities and contradictions that exist under official history.” p. 137. He also indicated that there should be a research model that will hold the researcher accountable to participants rather than the institution or the discipline in order to achieve the ethical dimensions of research. Hopkins (2013) stated that the use of narratives in refugee research because it humanizes its subjects. Narratives can offer a thorough understanding and awareness of how a policy will affect the lives of these refugees. It can tell us about lives and places we never experienced or seen. He argued that narratives attract our minds and our rational intellect to “provide the context within which our imaginations can fly to the space of the other, to glimpse the world that the other inhabits”. p. 137

The narrative method was selected because it provided details on how women refugees view themselves and their experience, and how they make sense of the new society they are living in. Eastmond (2007) pointed out , “Narrative analysis is used in much qualitative research today grounded in the phenomenological assumption that meaning is ascribed to a phenomena through being experiences and more furthermore

that we can only know something about other people's experiences from the expression they give them" (p.249). She also indicated that narratives are important in the field of forced migration as they inform us about lives in times and places that we have little or no access to.

The practice of narratives or story telling is considered part of the social cultural practice in Sudan. Perry (2013) indicated that storytelling is recognized as significant practice amongst the refugee groups especially for those who are new to the American society. Some of the African refugees are coming from cultural background that has more emphasis on the oral practices rather than literate practices. Oral practices are important in Southern Sudanese lives and culture. Storytelling would help all those who are working or involved with the refugee population to understand the refugees' experiences. Bok (2003) as cited in Perry (2013) stated, "to do something that would help our people by telling my story".

Atkinson (2002) as cited in Pavlish (2007) identified 3 guidelines for the narrative inquiry. First, the research should not judge or analyze the storyteller, but focus on "establishing connection and examining the personal aspect of each story." Second, the life story can stand by itself in providing an approach into the human experience, and third, each story will disclose something about life.

Maxwell & Dickman (2007) identified five basic elements for capturing and writing a successful story. These elements are passion with which the story is told, a hero who leads us the story and allow us to see it through his or her eyes , an antagonist or

obstacle that the hero must overcome, a moment of awareness that allows the hero prevail, and the transformation in the hero and the world that naturally results. p.9

Research questions

The three main questions addressed in this study are-:

1. What is the nature of the experience of Southern Sudanese women refugees in attempting to strike a balance between demands of culture, family life and their education in Minnesota?
2. What are the challenges facing Southern Sudanese women refugees who seek access to education or career training.
3. What are the barriers and limitations that prevent Southern Sudanese women refugees from getting educational career training?

Question 2 seeks to find everyday challenges that the Southern Sudanese women refugees face in their school or place of employment. Question 3 seeks to find bigger and complex barriers that disallows Southern Sudanese women refugees from going to school and/ or getting a job.

Population Sample and Recruitment

For this qualitative research, a purposive sample of 7 Southern Sudanese refugee women selected to participate in the study, chosen by the following criteria:

- Be a Southern Sudanese women refugee 21 years or older.
- Has entered the United States with refugee status.

- Is able to communicate in English or Arabic.
- Has been living in the United States for longer than one year,
- Is coming back to school or in school to get an education or some sort of Credentials related to language skills or career preparation.

The number of participants were chosen based on Kuzel(1992)'s recommendation of 6 to 8 participants for a homogenous sample as cited in Guest, Brunce and Johnson (2006) . Sandelowski (1995) also indicated that sample of 10 might be considered acceptable for a homogenous sampling but it might be too large for a narrative analysis. Therefore 6-10 interviews will be appropriate until meaning is saturated and the representation is adequate.

The first method of recruitment of Southern Sudanese women refugees to participate in the study is through nominative sampling. Nominative sampling was an appropriate method to use because participants were hard to locate or identify. The strength and the weakness of this approach is that selection of the participants is controlled by prospective informants (Morse, 1991).

This researcher has a good relationship with few members of the Southern Sudanese refugees. This helped to identify the first informant to participate in the research. One informant was able to introduce me to another participant whom I was able to recruit in the study. Other participants gave me contacts of other women whom they knew they would be interested in the research but that did not work as none of the contacts given responded to my phone messages.

The second method of recruiting participants was by contacting the adult education center in Saint Paul. Through the assistance of the program director, I was able to recruit 3 participants to be part of the study. This researcher made sure that the recruitment was voluntary and no coercion was used to recruit participants for the research. Participants did not receive any monetary compensation for their participation.

Data Collection

A copy of a consent form, written in a simple and clear language, was shared with the participants including a detailed information of the purpose of the study, what to expect from the study, the duration of the interviews and the study, potential risk and benefits of the research, and a permission to be audiotaped or videotaped if possible . The consent form included a statement that allowed the participants to withdraw from the study at any time, and a statement that all information shared during the interview would be confidential.

Lim (2009) in his qualitative study on the Sudanese refugees' lived experience of transnationalism indicated that qualitative research using face to face interviews are considered appropriate for refugee research for the simple factor that refugees have experienced significant traumas and hardship which made them so isolated as medium for self-protection. Qualitative research allowed personal involvement with the research participants which was important in establishing trust. That was important in the gathering of the data in order to be able to gather accurate description of the experience of the participants. (Lim, 2009)

After obtaining the signed consent, the participants were interviewed 2-3 times, approximately lasting between 60-90 minutes each. The initial meeting was to establish rapport and trust and allow the participants to share their stories without interference from the researcher unless to seek clarification. Rubin and Rubin (1995) argued that “early questions should be core the subject, but not threatening, and should deal with matters that the interviewee almost certainly knows about and ideally feels good about.” p.131. The second meeting was an in depth semi-structured interview that focused on seeking details and clarification on respondents’ stories and getting fact and detailed descriptions of the stories shared. Each participant was interviewed on her experience using open ended questions using clear simple language. The key questions for directing the conversation focused on the Southern Sudanese women experience in their adaptation and how they strike a balance between cultural demands, family demands and their personal goals. The open ended questions focused on Southern Sudanese women’s personal characteristics, social background, education, family, religion and culture. During the interview, the participants were asked questions regarding their past experiences in their homeland and their journey to travel and resettle in the United States.

The interview questions were designed to focus on the cultural context, historical continuity, thoughts, attitudes and ideas of Southern Sudanese women refugees, as well as the choices they make based on their values and beliefs. Each story offered insight about one woman’s experience during acclimation and connections between stories, as

well as the personal relevance of each story were examined. Examples of prompts and probing question to guide the discussions were: Tell me about your life back home before you came to Minnesota. Did you work or go to school when you were in Sudan? When did you come to the Minnesota? Why did you come to the Minnesota? What did you expect when you came here? How does it feel to be a refugee? Tell me about your life in Minnesota. How did your life changed when you came to Minnesota? What are the challenges in living here? Tell me about your experience at work, school or both in Minnesota. Tell me about the challenges that you have at work or school or both.

Force field analysis was a strategy that this researcher considered in implementing in the study as a method to identify hindering factors (restraining forces) and helping factors (driving forces) of complex situation described by participants. For example, this researcher asked the participants to identify factors that helped her go to school or find a job. This researcher then listed the items identified by the participant in a paper with an arrow across the page pointing to the right and give each item a rating scale, for example 1-5, where 5 is a very high force and 1 is the lowest. The researcher wrote the number by each of the items listed. For high rated items listed by the participants, this researcher asked which one was the most forceful. This researcher asked the participant to share a story that reflected that particular experience. In another page the same steps were repeated with the participant to identify the restraining factors and then asked to share a story reflecting the hindering experience.

All interviews were digitally recorded after getting permission from each participant. Handwritten notes were taken during the interview as well. The notes allowed this researcher to write down potential questions to use in the interview but also to remind her where they were left at during the discussion when the participants decide to stop the interview or any other unexpected any interruption (Rubin & Rubin, 1999). Descriptive field notes were taken during the interview to describe the setting and actions of the participants. The field notes included anything that is shared by the participants including, pictures, clothing, and documents. All digitally audiotaped interviews and field notes were transcribed immediately after each interview.

Protection of Human Subjects and addressing potential ethical issues:

This research is a qualitative study that aimed to explore the nature of the experience of Southern Sudanese women refugees in attempting to strike a balance between demands of culture, family life and their education in Minnesota. Given the nature of the study, a number of ethical issues were addressed. The participants of my research are women refugees who have little knowledge in participating in a research study. According to Lipson (1994), “Many refugees have little understanding of or sympathy for research.” p.324. Trust is a major issue as some of these women might be skeptical in interacting with public institutions. As a researcher, I was able to establish a rapport with the participants so they are comfortable during their participation in the study. Participation was voluntary, and my task was to ensure that these refugee women

understand their rights before they signed the consent form and to treat them with dignity and respect.

All research participants chose the time and the place that was convenient for them to conduct the interviews. They were informed that they have the freedom to terminate the interview at any time they wish to discontinue. Participants were also informed that they can refuse to answer any questions or talk about any topic. During an interview, one participant got very emotional as she told her experience about the tragic death of her daughter. I advised her that to stop because she was too distressed but she wanted to continue. She said it was helpful for her to talk about it. My plan was to end an interview if a participant showed any sign of discomfort or emotional distress but in that case we continued at the request of the participant. The participants were told to certain and confident that their identity would not be revealed in the research. Confidentiality was maintained by changing all the participants' names to non-identifying names. Participants' personal information including interview notes, transcripts, pictures, field notes and digital recording were stored in a locked cabinet. All data will be destroyed after the completion of the research.

The refugee population is considered to be powerless and vulnerable in this society. As a researcher, I recognized the power relationship that might influence the research, and therefore I was very careful and empathetic in dealing with the participants during the course of the study especially during conducting the interviews. Although no major risk was anticipated during the study, the interview process unearthed sensitive

issues for these women such as escaping the unfortunate events that led them to seek refuge in a foreign country. As the researcher, I had the moral obligation to create an environment of empathy and sensitivity; and looked out for the best interest of the participants, and to make sure not take an advantage of such painful experience for the sake of collecting data for the research. My plan was to end the interview if the participant displayed any sort of discomfort, fatigue or experienced an emotional breakdown.

The use of an interpreter to alleviate the language barriers with the research participants might have created an ethical issue. I anticipated that if I used an interpreter during an interview, a participant might be hesitant to open up or be exposed to an interpreter from their own community, especially when the community is small. Another possible issue that I anticipated is that some interpreters might be cautious on how the research might expose or project the community of refugees. This can result in delivering what the interpreters believe as positive to say and hold off any negative aspects from the search. In this study, only one participant needed an interpreter. The participant elected to use her granddaughter, who was also a participant in the study, to interpret for her during the research interview.

Data analysis

Data analysis in the narrative research does not have one particular approach or a fixed methodology. Scholars of different disciplines have used numerous approaches to data analysis thus influencing its procedures. Priest et al (2002) suggest that beginner

researches should use a fixed procedure. The following are 8 steps procedures that were combined from different narrative sources (Dollard 1949; Emden 1998; Goodfellow, 1997; Polkinghorne, 1995; Reissman, 1993; Seidman, 1991) as cited in Kelly and Howie (2007).

Step one – Connecting with the participant’s story: In this step, this researcher listened to the interview audiotape while reading the transcript, and then reread the transcript several times to get connected and be familiar with the data.

Step two – Attention to Dollard’s criteria for life history: This researcher paid attention to life events as narrated by the participant. This researcher then reread the transcriptions with Dollard’ criteria and bracketed sections of the transcripts that is connected to each criteria. A cross referencing system was used to record the number of the criterion to which the data element related to the transcription text. This researcher provided a summary that shows how the data element is related to each criteria.

Step three – Chronological ordering of events and experiences: In this step, events and life experiences were organized in chronological order.

Step four – Core story creation: In this step, subplots and themes were identified. The story was reduced to a short length.

Step five – Verification of core stories: The core stories were shared with 5 of the participants for verification. This researcher was not able to connect with two of the participants after the interviews. This step is important to establish the accuracy and the validity of the participants’ narratives. The participants were allowed to make changes,

delete or correct the core stories. Only participant made a change and corrected the spelling of her tribe. The other participants approved their core stories.

Step six – Examination of plots and subplots to identify a theme that discloses their significance: Polikinhorne (1995) indicated that in the emplotment process, the researcher “will look for connection of cause and influence among events and identification of actions that contributed to the outcome”. p141. This research investigated the core to make connection between the events that were shared by the participants against the themes identified by the researcher

Step seven – Examination of plot structure: In this step, each core story were examined to identify plots and subplots and connecting which event or experience resulted in an outcome.

Step eight – Emplotted whole narratives: this final step involved reviewing the emplotment chart for each participant. Events and experiences were reorganized to show the connection that resulted in the final outcome. The emplotted whole narrative was not a story but a narrative construct that gives meaning and understanding to the narrative data (Kelly and Howie, 2007).

The following chapter has two parts. In part A, the stories of each participant is narrated. Part B analyzed the themes emerged from the narratives.

CHAPTER FOUR PART 1: DESCRIPTION AND STORIES OF THE PARTICIPANTS

This chapter is divided into two parts. Part 1 gives a contextualized description of 7 southern Sudanese women refugees' experiences of resettlement in Minnesota. Each participant gave an account of her life before resettled in the United States and the challenges she is facing in resettlement. The names of the participants were changed to protect their privacy. Part 2 of chapter 4 highlights the finding that emerged from the data.

April

April is a 52 years old Southern Sudanese woman who came to the United States with her 8 children as refugees at the age of 41. April is in level 5 at the Adult Basic Education Center. Level 5 is defined as a high-intermediate English language learning course that assists learners with their reading, writing, speaking and listening skills. April and another participant, Lori, whom I interviewed for this research, were both invited to participate in this study through their teacher at the adult education center

It was a casual conversation, and It was a great opportunity to establish a friendly relationship to get them comfortable talking to me..

April arrived an hour late to the interview. April appeared to be exhausted. She said that it's overwhelming taking care of her sick mother who just got out of the hospital and she said that she is sick herself. I reassured her that it was ok and that she does not need to get stressed about coming late to the interview.

Telling the story:

April appeared to be relaxed throughout the interview, and she responded to the difficult question about escaping the war in a very comfortable and relaxed tone, I felt a sense of tremendous pain as she was narrating the traumatic events of escaping the war and fleeing to Uganda. She was able to answer the majority of the interview questions in English, but sometimes she had a hard time expressing herself in English, so she explained what she wanted to say in Arabic. During the interview, she hesitated to talk about her involvement with the Ugandan Army in rescuing her kidnapped children. She said, "I don't know if I can talk about something like that". And she was silent for a moment so I had to tell her that she is under no pressure to talk. She then continued to talk about the kidnapping events without mentioning her role in the rescue.

April's story**Leaving home**

Before I came to Minnesota my life was good, but when the war started my life was not good. Because of running out of the house to the bush. I stayed there with the kids, without blanket, without clothes, without shoes, without anything. This made me mad because I don't know why they are fighting about, but at that time maybe because of religion, maybe of what I don't know.

It was the second civil war in Sudan when we fled to Uganda. I think it was in the eighties. When I fled to Uganda, we were in refugee camp. When things happened to me with my kids, I left the refugee camp and moved to town and stay in a town with my kids.

When the war started, we came to refugee camp. They camp is called Imbaby in Uganda. We ran out of our homes in Sudan and hid in the bush and then we waited there, and after that the UN took us to Uganda to the refugee camp and it's called Imbaby. But there it was worse. People were coming. Those people were called Garguru. Those people belong to Uganda. They are guerilla fighters in the bush and they are not connected with the government. They came attack people in the refugee people, they kill

people and they take everything out of people. They even took my two kids. And then I struggled and cried and I ran to the army barracks to tell the army and the army considered my talking so that the army can help me. They said ok and they called another team for another place and so they took that team, and they came and cross those people in front of them and behind them. So we worked with those people. I myself volunteered because when I was – I don't know.

Saving the children, joining the army

I have 8 kids. So and they took my boy and the girl. The boy at that time was ten and the girl was seven. They took 17 kids from us. They were kidnapped by the guerilla fighters. I myself training and be a soldier. In Arabic we call it shaweesh (a rank in the army equivalent to private). So I have that rank and I was not afraid of the soldiers because I was trained in Uganda.

The MSF (Medecins Sans Frontiers), an international medical humanitarian organization, was in Uganda, and I worked for them after I moved from Sudan. I was in Uganda for 15 years.

The army fought the guerilla group, and the guerilla group ran away and left the kids behind. So we went to collect our kids. That time was in September. It was raining a lot. And the grass was high. The kids were running away and the Ugandan government announced to those people in the village if you find a Sudanese kids in the bush, don't kill, just bring them back and we will pay you money. People did that and brought the kids back. Our kidnapped kids were gone for five days. When I got my kids, I felt bad because refugee camp is somewhere you get food. There is nothing else you can do. And then I decided take my kids from the refugees camp and move into town. My husband was with us when we went moved to the town.

Coming to the US

My first daughter heard about this. She was here in the US. She lived with her husband. She sent me a sponsorship form and I filled the form and I sent it to the UN and the UN looked for me and sent me the form and then I applied to come here. The process took like 6 months for us to move then, yes and I came directly from Kampala to Minnesota. I've been in Minnesota for 11 years. I've been here with my kids and my husband did not come. And then when I went to have a process for him to come here, he got denied. He was working with the Sudanese government. He was denied to come to the US because he had two jobs. He is working for the government and he is working as a business man. Then my husband passed away in 2007 in Sudan. He got sick. He had cancer and died after two months.

Surviving death

When he got sick, I went back. But I did not go to Sudan. They brought him to Kampala to the hospital and he was there for two months and then I came back. When I came back, he passed away on the same year, the same month. I waited till 2008 to see the place they put him. He was buried in Sudan. And then I went there to see. I went back in 2013 to see too. This is my habit now.

Work before coming to the US

Before I came to the US, I worked as a midwife. I went to school in Sudan. I got my certificate. After I got my certificate, I worked for three organizations the first one is Exxon Africa and then after that MSF. For Exxon Africa, I think for 8 years. And for MSF I worked for a year and half, and then the last organization, I worked for 2 years. That was the same job for midwife. I worked in the village, and then I felt happy. I felt happy because I helped my people. I was happy in Sudan 'til the war started

Growing older in the US and combating loneliness.

I think I am now 52. I came to the US at the age of 41. When I came here, I felt that I wanted to go back home because in my country it's ok you just walk if you want to go to friends or visit your aunt and uncle. You sit outside and talk, but here, when I came and my daughter went to work and her husband, and the kids go to school, I just be alone in the house and I think why I am alone. And then I get mad all the time and I say I wanted to go back. Then my daughter told me to calm down and don't worry about that. Ok, after a while I know and gave up. I said that's fine. I am here with my kids, no problem.

Looking for a job and going back to school

So and then the things I think about was looking for a job. When I applied, I sent my resume and they said your resume is ok but you need you to go to school. We cannot consider your certificate and we need you to go to school. I said ok. So at that time, I had my younger son who is so little. I could not go to school. I cannot leave him alone.

So I waited till son grew up. He was 12 and then I looked for a way to go to school. When I started school it was in South Saint Paul. My friend, she told me about the Adult Education Center here. She said it's another school that when you go there, there will give you an assessment and they would want to know whose class you go. I started to come here to the adult education center and then I came to their assessment. At that time they put me in level three.

An uneven path to progress

I think I start at this adult education center in 2006, between 2006 and 2007. I am in level five. I am still in level five because I skipped. I go to Africa and then when I come back I come to the same level. I like to go back all the time for like three months or four months and when I come back I call the school and I say I want to be back in school and they say come.

Looking for a job and losing one

I tried to look for a job but I was told that I can't work because I don't have a certificate so I looked for another job, I found a job. The company was called Life track. I worked there for two years doing packaging. I worked there in 2004.

When I went to Africa, I was late for work, I called them and I said I will be late and they said that they did not get my message. They said you don't have job. I said ok. So for that my mother is disabled so for that I applied for a job to take care of my mother, as a PCA. So now I work as a PCA (Personal Care Attendant). My mother came after. I applied for her to come to the US and we live together. She is in a wheel chair. So when I saw that she can't walk, so that's why when I saw her I applied for PCA. She came here six years ago in December 11.

Going back to Sudan

I have family members back in Sudan. I go to Sudan to see my people there. My mom people and my dad people too. You know my uncles they need my mom so my mom cannot go there so I need to go and talk to them. Because all the time they need their sister back so when I go there and I talk to them I apologize and then if I got something a little, I give to them. And then my dad side too. My dad side they need to see me too. So this is the things that keep me to go there and then I have my sisters too. My sisters and my half-sisters. Because my dad married 3 women, so my brothers and my sisters are there so I need to go and see them. And then I help them because if I did not see them, I don't feel well. It is still home there. I am supposed go back there and see them

Life in Minnesota is different

When I came to Minnesota, my life changed because it's a good thing for me in Minnesota. I do not go looking for water. The water is inside, everything is inside. The food is near. This has changed my life. Because in Africa when you want to go looking for food, you want to go looking for water and you want to go looking for firewood, you

want to go do something, that really all the day is terrible and keep you busy, busy, but here it is ok. These are the things that changed my life.

Life in Minnesota is not easy- it takes adjustment

There are things here that's difficult for me like health insurance. If you want to go to the doctor and you don't have health insurance, you cannot find a treatment. I don't have health insurance. I had health insurance before but when I am here for long they cut out my insurance. When you come here, you look for a job, you look for a job, then you find a job, this is the time when they take everything away. Because when you come in, they will help and give you assistance. The assistance can be for one year or for two years if you did not get the job. Some people who come and understand everything and they know English well, they come there just for six month and looking for a job, if they find a job, they will cut the assistance out. And then you just struggle by yourself. But if you don't know English because they wanted to teach you, or tell you the way how to get a job, so they keep you there after you get the job and then everything is gone. I had insurance and the system here they will give you 6 months and they cut out and stop and then you will be for 6 months again and after six months they need you to apply. So I don't know.

Our Sudan you did not do that. In our country, you just go to the hospital and they give you and the government would pay if you don't have money in your pocket but here you need to pay from your pocket and here too they see you looking good, you have money, they will not give you insurance. They say your income is high. So these are the things I don't understand.

But I pay for the house, I pay for the heat, and I pay for the water. I have a little money left but for them, they don't see it. Then don't give me health insurance.

Learning English

In school here, it's ok. American English is so hard if you did not put your attention to understand you don't catch the words. The way they call, you think it is something big or something different but you don't understand. It's hard to me. American English is hard. Because our British English go with our language, it's easy but this one is hard.

They have tutors in the center but it's not for you only. It's for all the students on this table and one tutor. But in our country it's ok; you can hire your tutor and pay him a little bit, but here, no.

When I started working in packaging, it's ok because I have some people over there that understand English. When you go there the first day, you don't understand, you will be like what am I doing here? Who am I going to talk to? But some people near you and you guys communicate with you and you be friends. My coworkers are Americans, some know English some don't know English. I had training. They trained me and after they trained me they give me an interview and at the interview I do well. They surprised, too, because how can I knew. Before I went to the interview my daughter told me when you sit down you cannot move, you have to have an eye contact, just talk and listen and I did that. When I done my interview, they told me that I passed and that I have to come to work tomorrow. God blessed me.

Following American rules: It might be scary

The things I learned here in America, just I want to be careful and I don't want go to jail. Because here when you know, they don't want you to be – you have to be nice. I think you have to be nice and don't look for trouble and don't steal something from somebody, and then don't drive the car without insurance, just follow the rules here. You have to be happy, because you didn't follow the rules you say this is a free country, you want to be free, and I want to do this and this, soon you will go to jail. I am scared to do something. I learned about this from people talking. Some people like talking even like me and you're talking and someone sit there and you think that someone is not listening to our talking but they listen to our talking. That word will give him experience and learn.

Life is better in the US but it can be lonely

My life is better when I come here, right now it changes. Why it changed, because I am with my kids I be happy, because the kids are here and it's crowded and I am ok but now the kids grow up and they are gone and I am here with alone with my mom. I am alone in the house. So I think what happened to me, why I be like this. Sometimes I cannot eat, you know. I think about what happened to me, my kids are no longer with me, my kids, I don't know. Better that I get home, my sisters' kids and my sisters, uncles and brothers we sit together so that makes me happy.

I am lonely right now. My kids don't live with me, they grow up. The younger one is 22 now. That's the last. He finished his school. He finished college. They were looking for jobs and they went for different states. One is in Las Vegas, one in Seattle, one in Ohio, one in Texas, one in North Dakota, and one Minneapolis. The one here does not live with me; she lives in New Brighton with her husband.

They visit sometimes. They bring me the kids. They bring me the kids and I spend all day with them. It's messy and crowded. When they are gone I just watch TV and I will be thinking. These are the things that let me think about going back to Sudan.

But I can't go back

I would be able to live in Sudan. The food is expensive and it's not good. I heard last week in Juba they killed a man. It's not safe, they kill people, most the ones who come from America are the target because they say they have money. They target people coming from the US thinking they have money. They will say, "Give us money," and if you say, "I don't have money," they will say, "You come from America, how come you don't have money?" Just for that time you don't give the money, they will kill you. The country is not safe. The police are scared or something like that.

A lot of things that happened me to me because when I be in my country, Sudan, I am really happy because it's my country. I have house, I have everything, I be happy. I have husband, I have kid, I have house, big, big house. I am really happy. But for this war, everything is gone. So everything is gone. What can I do? I just pray for God because God say if you dead coming, you die, you cannot take these things, just you go by yourself, so for those things is gone, I cannot worry about that. It's gone, it's gone, I just start another new life. If God give me day to stay for this world, I have to found it, again I have to build house, I have to pay car, I have to come back. That's the things I do, I plan for that, but that's in the future. It's not now. Because the country is not good. It's not now. So if the country be ok, I will go back. If the country continues like that, I will be here with my kids.

Helping to adjust

The things that helped me manage something like that, I think just I got to the church because I went to church every week and when the priest preaches something there and priest says something that touched my heart, I see everything as nothing. The good things is to avoid everything, avoid everything. Your sister is your sister, your brother is your brother, and water is water. Do you understand what I am saying?

At that time, the church helped me. I have 8 kids. They bring for me clothes. They bring me money. They bring me saucepan, plates, couch, everything. And then they rent for me the house. They rent for me the house for 6 months, and then for 6 months they wanted to buy the house for me and the owner didn't want to. They moved me to another house, in a 3 bedroom and they paid a down payment. The payment was \$5000 and then the rest of the money you pay like \$500 a month. They put the money for the house and they told me, "April, this is your house if you want to be here, and when you want to move, you can take the \$5000 and it can be yours." I said ok, so I am still in the house, and be happy. They helped me buy food and they bring to my house. There is a father, right now he moved. That father, when he was in the church, he gave me \$1000 and for Christmas \$1000. He is a really a good father but he moved and there is no money no more. (laughing) So that was really good.

I have friends through the church until today. They are white people. No Sudanese in that church. I am Catholic. I am from Pujloo. They speak Bari language. I also have friends from South Sudan.

I don't care about money. I care about people, relationships, things that are important. This is the things that made me happy. I don't like to fight people, I don't like to talk behind people, I don't like to do anything, just you is a human being, we be together, we talk like sisters, we are human beings.

Reflection on April's story

The interview questions as with all the interviews aimed at investigating the experiences of Southern Sudanese women refugees and the challenges they faced in their resettlement in Minnesota. April started describing her experience of resettlement in the US as being lonely. Although she is grateful for having a better life in the US after escaping the civil war and living in a refugee camp, it took her a long time to adapt after she arrived in Minnesota. More than once she expressed her feelings of loneliness during the interview. April shared memories from the past and drew a contrast between her rich social life back home and her loneliness in America. She said that she was living a happy life with her husband and her 8 children until the war broke. Even though that her life is far away better here in the US food and water are available in the US and she does not have to spend all day working to get them, the feelings of loneliness was overwhelming being a single mother of 8 kids and without her husband and her family. Another factor that added to April sense of loneliness is the lack of the family support system. She said it's easier to raise children in Africa because everyone lives together and everyone eats together.

April explained that she overcame some of her struggles when she finally realized that she has no other option and that she has her 8 kids. She said she lost everything when the war started but now she is forced to face it because she has no other option. She found a way to cope and adapt by going to church on a weekly basis. April's strong belief system was a key factor in helping to face her challenges in resettlement. She said "she now sees everything as nothing. She is more interested in building positive relationships with people rather than material possessions. She has accepted what god has given her. "If I got I got it and if I couldn't find it, I don't care".

The church also played a significant role in supporting April's family financially and providing a community and sense of belonging. The church helped her financially and rented a house and provided furniture of the entire family and continued to support them for a significant amount of time. She also was able to establish friendships with some of the church members.

Challenges of Resettlement: April worked as midwife back in Uganda but her work experience and educational credentials were not recognized in the US. She was told that she had to go back to school and get a certificate from a US educational institution in order for her to become a midwife. She was unable to go to school because she had to care for her youngest son so she stayed at home and started school 3 years after resettling in the US

After enrolling in school to learn English, April had difficulty understanding American English. She said that she has difficulty understand the American accent. She

said that she will benefit from a tutor but there is only tutor for many students. She wanted to hire a tutor to come to her house and teach like back home but she can't access that here. April's understanding of English has improved. She said it is easier than before.

April's family ties and obligation in Sudan has been a challenge that had an effect in April's employment and her education. She was fired after she took a longer time in Sudan and was jobless when she came back. She said that is having a hard time advance from her level in school because of her travels to Sudan, and ending repeating the same level at school. She said that she is committed to visit her family in Sudan since her mom is here and she has to fulfill her mom's role by visiting her relatives in Sudan because they need her. She also supports them financially when she is able to save some money. She said, "It is still home there, I have to see them"

April lack of health insurance is a struggle for her. She said that she had health insurance in the past through government assistance but now she does not qualify because she has a higher income. She said that they are not considering the bills that she is paying and that she is struggling because she can't afford to go to the doctor for the lack of health insurance.

April continues to struggle with loneliness now that all her children have grown and moved to other states. She spoke with excitement when she talked about when the kids and her kids come to visit. But it makes her think about moving back home and be

around her extended family but she knows it's not realistic decision because the country is not safe.

April's endurance of the traumatic events of the civil war and the hardships of living in refugee camp embody the strength and resilience of her character. April portrayed herself as a strong woman as trained as a soldier. She took pride that she had a role in rescuing her two children and determined to get them back. She moved her children from a refugee camp to the city in search for a better life and worked hard to support her family. She raised 8 children on her own as single mother in a new environment where she barely speaks the language. She recognized that she is not getting the education that she needed and decided to enroll in another institution in search for a better education. She is a fast learner who was able to get a job after being coached interviewing. She is taking care of her disabled mother and she is supporting her extended family financially. April has adopted a positive thinking and is determined to fulfill her goal to become a midwife in the US. She said that she will go to school and get her certificate. She said it is attainable because now she can understand English better. She said it might go fast to get her certificate.

Shary

Shary is a 23-year-old woman who was born in Sudan. When she was almost four years old, Shary and her family came to the Minnesota as refugees, fleeing the civil war in Sudan. Shary, poised and elegant, works as a freelance model in the Twin Cities. She

speaks fluent English with an American accent. Shary is very proud of her Southern Sudanese heritage and background.

I was introduced to Shary at an event hosted by a friend of mine who works as professional photographer in the Twin Cities. Shary is one of the models that worked for that photographer.

When I learned that Shary was from South Sudan, I took the opportunity to briefly introduce myself and tell her about my research project. I asked if she knew of any Southern Sudanese women refugee who would fit my research criteria and would be interested to participate in the study. She was excited to hear about the study and initially suggested her grandmother as an excellent candidate to participate in the research. I asked if she was willing to share her experience since she, too, came to the United States as a refugee. She agreed to participate.

I interviewed Shary at her boyfriend's apartment. After he left, she confessed to me that she was keeping her relationship with him a secret from her family because they had only started dating four months before. She would not be able to introduce him to her family until she made sure that the relationship was serious. Shary brought some tea for us to drink and I started recording.

Telling the Story

Shary is a great storyteller who spoke in a candid manner. She narrated her story with enthusiasm and clarity. Shary was able to answer my interview questions in such detail that I rarely had to stop and ask her to clarify or repeat what she said. She had a

vivid memory of unfortunate experiences of discrimination and racism. She was able to describe events that brought discomfort, in detail, from as early as five years of age.

She described that she was able to recognize that her mom was struggling, working in the service industry, but she was not able to understand what those feelings were because she was young. A number of times, there was sarcasm in her voice as she narrated some of the reactions of her classmates to her presence in school. Even within the sarcasm, I could sense these were painful experiences for her that she is trying to subdue.

There were a number of times when Shary was emotional during the interview. She was upset when she shared her experiences with racism in college. Another time, there was an anger and frustration in her voice as she talked about her experience of racism at work and the lack of support from her manager. She tried to laugh as she narrated some of the unfortunate circumstances that she went through during school and college, but again it was evident the these experiences are a source of pain that she is trying to put out of her mind.

Shary's story

Coming to the US at an early age

I am 23 years old and I was born in Sudan. We came in 1995 so I was between the three, three and half. I was raised here into this American culture. My memory of Sudan is almost none. I have pixelated memory, maybe dreams with sequences. We came to the US because of war and violence in the Sudan.

I believe we stayed in a refugee camp for a while but I was so young and I was the youngest in the family at the time. I was so sheltered, I imagine, at the time

I have five siblings and I am the fourth and the youngest is the 8 years old. I am the last one who was born in Sudan. My dad, like I said, was a teacher. And my mother worked for the United Nations for a while, I believe it was. AIDS relief. So AIDS education. Educating the populations on safe practices and stuff. And she made alcohol. She made, distilled and sold alcohol as a way to make money. My mother has never drunk but she can make something like moonshine. So that's what my mom did to make money at home in South Sudan.

Resettlement was hard for us

As far as transition, I remember it was kind of uncomfortable for me to see my mom working at Boston's Market. This is what she did when she first came. She worked in the service industry and that I remember feeling, when I went to see my mother at work, it was kind of uncomfortable for me watching my mother serving other people and that was uncomfortable, how people would treat my mother. I don't have an accent but my mother does and she was clueless and you can see people in their faces, and I can ever remember that as a child, and it was difficult for me to see my mom.

My mom did not have her license when she came here and that was the other thing. I watched her struggle to do that. The most present memories are watching my mother struggle, maybe because I was old enough to understand what that was. But that was the time I began to understand those feelings.

It was hard for my family resettling here in the US. Looking back, it was a lot of situations and things that could be avoided if [we] were second or third generation. Just like thinking now as far as watching us try to get jobs and things like that. Me and my siblings have to rely on each other.

Another example is that when I was in college, I remember my friends would send their papers to their parents to read for them or to proofread for them and I never had that option. Things like that. Maybe the next generation. My kids would be able to send me their college papers and I will be able to help them. Things like that.

My parents were not college educated but both finished high school. So they are relatively educated than anybody else at home. And my mom here in the US, she is a nurse. So, yes, my parents are educated but not relative to my classmates' [parents].

The church helped us a lot

The church helped us resettle in the US predominantly. We are kind of a fund raising family so we got associated with this nonprofit organization early when we came. My dad has always been charismatic and great speaker, so they kind of had him tell the

story, the Sudanese story, and through that we got a lot of extra support that others families may not have gotten

My mom has this one benefactor that has this mother-daughter relationship and through that a lot of money has been put into our family, into our education, into resources like that.

The challenges of looking different

The challenges that we faced from a personal level, I assume it extends to others, just looking really different to Minnesotans. Not fair skin, blonde and not having been characterized, at least during that time, in the media as beautiful. You know. So it was really difficult for me just the way people are uneducated and stupid and say rude things.

I have one distinct memory of walking down the hallway when I was a kid, probably in like 3rd grade and my mom didn't braid my hair, she did not have time, so it was like everywhere and she did something like seriously embarrassing hairstyle and I was a head taller than my classmates so I was walking and to my right is a bathroom that has a huge mirror, so I had to see my reflection in the mirror for that period of time and I remember doing my very best to look straight because I don't want to see the contrast of my crazy hair, been so dark and being so tall against the rest of my classmates. That was my most prevalent memory as far as feeling an outcast.

My experiences with racism in school

I think I blocked most of the racist incidents off my mind. I remember one when I was really young. I think I was in 5th grade and my classmates asked to me to play whatever, pretend make believe game and my classmates asked me if I can play the slave. I was like arggggh. They were the cool kids and I didn't want to play alone, you know. That was my thought process as a child, so I did. I remember even now thinking about that I am like arggggg. I played with them. I never did it again after that, except one time, I was in high school I tried out for a play, "You Can't Take It with You," and in this play, there was a backward southern servant and I tried for this play for multiple roles and that was the part that I got. And I remember my drama teacher pulling me aside and telling me, "Hey, I wanted to make sure that you actually accept this part before I tell anybody else that you got it." It was like making sure before they tell anybody that I got the part that I was willing to accept it so that when they tell people they say, that she accepted and not, "We cast her as a servant." Do you know what I mean? (laughing).

And yeah, the crazy thing that I did a great job and we ended up rewriting the part a little bit so it does not look like super racist but just a little bit racist, right?

I was gifted and talented since kind of young so on top of being dark; I also was taken out of my classrooms and dark. So when I was in elementary school, I was required to go to ESL in the first grade. And on first grade I was suffering from being out of the classroom because I was not learning while my classmates are learning. I am sitting in ESL and didn't learn anything new. You know. So I need to be taken out of ESL and put back in my classroom and given the same chances like the rest of my classmates. And other 6 years old don't have to make a case for themselves like that you know. I have to make that case for myself.

I don't understand why they put me in ESL when I came so young to this county. And my English is great (laughing). Yeah, I never understood that either but I was really young and that's when I learned that people would take excuses that you will fall through the crack so as far as being immigrant or whatever. My education I had to decide that I wanted to learn early because nobody decided that they wanted to teach me.

The only time I felt like I had proper teachers is when I was out east. That's because I had a lot of professors of color

I was the only something always

I felt like done but college came with its own set of struggles. I felt like then my teacher really wanted to teach me but before then it was just a constant struggle to learn not because I had. It's because I felt like I learned quickly, so to get the teachers take the extra step into teaching as far as my mind would go, it never happened, until I went east. There is a lot of stupid stuff that happened to me when I was growing up in the educational system. Both public and private schools.

I got into politics and it was my professor, Fadia, who is Fadia and at that time, I was taking the class because there was a cute guy in class and didn't have any inclination towards politics but in the class, we were dealing with political ideas and I really enjoyed it. I really enjoyed the teacher and so I felt like I wanted to make my work on par to the expectation of the teacher so I worked really hard.

Fadia called me into the office and said, "You only said two words in the whole year and your work is good, what's going on?" I said there is a lot of dickheads in my class. There is a lot of people who are talking about political realities and identities, but don't have any basis and experience and I did not how to share my particular space in the world because I am generally the only female of color in the kind of classes that I was taking, or the only African, or somehow the only something always. So I really did not want to talk and didn't want my personal experiences picked apart by white dudes, you know? So I told her that. And she said, "Ok fine." She said that we are going to have meeting once a week and we can come and process your ideas with me, so [she] put an

extra hour out of her schedule every week and talked because I did not feel comfortable with these people spouting words out of their mouth that day.

We did that most of the semester and midterm came. Fadia has this reputation as a teacher that she does not give out A's and you have to really impress her very regal and everyone is trying to impress her. So she came class with the midterm and she said, "You know what we have two different kinds of students in this classroom. We have the Scott's," which is one of the guys who had repeatedly talked out of his ass and whatever, who got a C out of this class, and she handed him the test. And she turned to me and said, "We have the Sharys, who never spoke in class who got an A in her midterm." She said, "Congratulations Shary, you got the highest grade in the midterm for this class."

And I sat there and in that one moment she changed everyone's perception of me as a student, as a person, and there was so many upper classmen in that classroom who became my friends or whatever because they knew that Fadia had a lot of respect for me as writer, as a thinker as whatever. She handed out A's for me like it was her favorite thing to do. I don't know.

They were not able to see that before. I felt like it was something that always stuck with me. Fadia done the talks and she was a great political thinker. Even when I was at Saint Cloud State and feeling just terrible about myself as an academic and as a thinker, I was able to go back to the moment and validation from the teacher that I never got.

People were really uncomfortable with my presence

Another challenge that I faced when I was in college is people were really uncomfortable with my presence, being put into a box. Not so much at Vassar, because the student body was so small and they really knew everybody really quick, but at Saint Cloud State, I will be carrying my super heavy books and get stressed out about my whatever stupid class and be walking down the hall to get some food and someone would stop me to ask if I was a model, and I just wanted to slap them. I say, "Yes, I have a modeled, definitely, it's awesome but right now I have to write these 30 pages," you know? Essentially they just want to stop me and say, "Hey I noticed your appearance." I just don't stop people to notice their appearance. Or even beyond that. I guess if I stopped people on their appearance, I try to have and build a relationship with them beyond it and I felt a lot of times when people pressing about my appearance, they get the tip of information, the qualifier that they are looking for as you are a model, as you are from Africa, blah blah blah factor. They want to validate that really quick and they check out of the conversation. You know, so very few people go beyond that, so you adopt a wall between you and the rest of the world and from there you end up getting whatever.

I've got a lot of mean girl behavior (laughing) that was really bad. I feel that a lot of those has been because, I feel like it's always been white girls. Black girls can get whatever and mean but they recognize the thing in my eyes that says don't cross this line, you know, but I've gotten so much whack behavior from white women.

And I felt that a lot of it's because I've gotten to a point maybe it was late teens when I was realized no else would tell me and appreciate me as beautiful until I decided that I was beautiful. This culture is not going to validate my beauty until I accept for myself, and that is something that I had to choose, so I started modeling. And I wanted to see myself instead of, you know, guess what other people saw, and understand how my own image could be manipulated. But yes somehow when I was 17, I was like I am hot and I am sexy and no one can tell anything else. So after that point I was like. I remember when I was younger when I was 14 and 15, I am trying to get that mentality and that mindset, also having a lot of strong women at home, I think it threatened the white women around me because they did not feel I should be empowered and I should feel that way about myself, and on top of it was jealousy because I was skinny and I can eat whatever I want and that's just my metabolism. It's just genetic things that I've been blessed with. So [they] have feeling that like constant animosity towards my physical being for looking the way it does. It's something that I experienced for a very long time.

There are a couple of points that made me say enough is enough. Two things stick out to me. One at the end of my freshman year, taking that politic class with heavy workload, a friend of mine who is from Cameroon, who was kind of a playboy, him and I were close friends way from school started. He is African, I am African and we have similar culture so - so he was a kind of a playboy doing whatever with girls, but he always hide this special place in his heart for me.

And one girl he had a relationship with early in the year and she has developed this weird whatever reality in her head. And her and I were in fine terms. We had one class together and said hi and bye, how are you? Whatever and smiled and then the class ended and I didn't really talk to her after that. And then one time a friend of mine who has been really a good friend of hers made a nasty crack about her in the dining room. I laughed. I probably shouldn't have. Ok. But that was the extent of our contact

So the year goes by half way through freshman years, she filed a no contact order against me. I haven't talk to this girl once. I got to my mail box and I find this no contact order which is a college equivalent to a restraining order and I am so confused. And then she filed an anti-harassment suit against me with this the school. And comes out with all these incidents that have happened that I have no idea about, no idea, and I have no reason no motivation whatsoever to hurt her.

She filed this anti-harassment order and has all these things and insults on the wall written in students union. So all of these things I felt from the way everything was going that she left the people who are probably responsible for it, and she wanted someone to blame, and she picked me to go through it.

That something really stuck out to me because I had to go through the entire institutional process. I am telling the institution that this girl is just psycho and she had a vendetta, I have schoolwork to do and I don't want to deal with this anti-harassment shit, now that I have finals. I have to go through the entire institutional process and show up to stupid meetings that I did not have time for because of random girl who has some weird perception of me. Just dealing with time costs and people continuously taking time out of your day, label you with other, it becomes too expensive. That was one that really frustrated me.

Another year, I dated a white guy. He hit me. And I ended up breaking up. It was really bad. A lot of people ended up believing that I made the whole thing up and whatever. And you couldn't see against my skin bruise or nothing. You couldn't see any of these things or again it was a white guy. I have friend who is really a good friend of mine, who kind of took his side through the whole thing and at the end of the summer I messaged him. I said, "You know what, it was difficult for everybody, you are kind of his friend during this process but I don't care. How are you?" That was the road that I took and I got this really long letter back, it was essentially like, your pain is too much for me to handle, blah blah blah, some elitist shit. Some crap. And I got it back and I was like wow. I literally forgave you for whatever pain I felt you caused me by not being supportive during this time, I was trying to say hi and you want to point out a way that he was the better person through this traumatic experience, probably for both of us? You know.

He was a friend for both of us. All three of us were really good friends so when my boyfriend and I broke up, this friend stayed friends with my ex-boyfriend, and the summer I felt like I want to keep in touch with my friend and don't care about that crap anymore and move forward

That's another thing that happened that I was taken very aback and again reminded that I will always being other to the vast majority of people, especially in institutions. Then I went to Saint Cloud State, and by the time I was done with Saint Cloud State, I was just done. I think being a student there and listening and seeing the way in which certain days were chosen to have kids "come see the campus day." It's the day they schedule a black preacher so they would have more black people on campus and they have Asian students walking around and I was like, what the heck? And the Black people looking at me and I felt like a great poster child for diversity and I wanted to scream.

Racism at work

At work, there were random stupid things just happening. My last work experience, I left because of a very weird situation. I was working on Planet Fitness at the gym. It was a 24 hours gym and I was working 6am to 2pm generally. I come in the morning and just stupid things happened. The manager hired his cousin, his hick cousin, and one day this cousin who is also comes from a devout Christian family – I think Christians in this country tend to be meaner just like any other group of people and more ostracizing – but I am on the clock and this cousin asked, “Hey Shary, my friends from a basketball team they always called each other nigger, why would some people liked to be nigger and other people don’t like to be called nigger?”

I was looking at him and I was like, I don’t really know but I just feel like, I am at work and I don’t think you can ask when I am on the clock, I don’t want to spend my time answer this question, and it’s not appropriate to ask me that. I am not a sociology teacher. I told him to stop. I don’t want to talk about it. Dude stop, STOP. I was raising my voice because the dude did not want to stop. The personal trainer at the gym, who is in charge when the manager is not around, was standing and heard me saying stop, stop, stop. He saw the whole things happening, he turned around and walked away.

The manager, who was supposed to be on duty manager, sees the situation and walk away. Right? So manager comes back and said, “I heard this conversation, Shary, what do you want me to do about it?” I said I don’t know. He wanted me to tell him what kind of punishment was appropriate. The only punishment that I thought was appropriate is for him to get fired. I asked him to stop and he wouldn’t stop and that’s just beyond something that I can handle. And the manager told me, well I can understand but I would have fired him if he had called you a nigger. Because he made the distinction whether I would like to be called a nigger, he is not going to be fired. So the manager said whatever you think it’s good, I will do it. I told him, “I am not the manager. You hired your cousin. You need to punish your cousin how you see fit. So we can see how YOU see fit, not how I see fit.” You know? This is so ridiculous for asking me this. You do whatever you want. I am not going to make the choice for you.

And then, what actually made me leave that job was, I was at work and was working out. I was not on the clock. So a couple of co-workers came up to me and said you need to see this. My co-worker showed me a Craigslist ad. Like personals or whatever. Looking for the pretty African girl that works at the Planet Fitness in Coon Rapids. He has seen me there on a Saturday. I am the only African or Black person who works there. It’s about me. It’s a description of what I look plus the day, I worked and where I worked. For me that was too much information to be on Craigslist. Some random person who I guess was looking for me (laughing). Just creepy and I was furious. And my co-worker who was this white woman turned to me and said, “At least he called you

pretty.” I wanted to slap her. I wanted to say, I’ve been called pretty enough, I don’t need to be on Craigslist to feel that kind of feeling. I called the gym on Roseville, that were the regional manager is and I asked if I can work on the gym on Roseville for a week so I can clear my head. And she said, yeah we saw that and we knew it was about you. I was like, “What the hell, you saw this and you did not call me?” They don’t care. For \$8.50, here is your scheduling, I am out, I am done and I can’t do it. Just insanity like that. And I left that job.

Reflecting on my experiences as a woman of color

My experiences in the world, the first thing I have to ask, is it because of my color? That could be more determining than what is actually is, because of your color. I think a lot of time it’s because of my color and just my attractiveness level and how I interact with both men of color and white men relatively equally and that could be threatening to people. I think that’s part of it as well. I think if I looked like I did and didn’t speak like I did, would women feel this threatened? No. Probably not. Those are some of the experiences that I can think of. So I try to behold myself to as few institutions as possible.

I am learning that I have to be more honest with myself, be more honest about what people want from me and what and how much of my soul comes with those different requirements and whatnot. I am learning that also the world around us is kind of changing. A big impact I think. My little sister for example, the other day, came back from school and one of her classmates came and made fun of her hairstyle. I was like, “Really, so what did you say?” My sister said, “I told her that I like my natural hair”. And that being byproduct of what my sisters and I went through, now my little sister can be like, “I don’t know about you but I have older sister and they are awesome and I am awesome because of them.”

So we have a lot of problems with the way media is projecting imagery of women and there are more you start to see this influx of color in media campaign and that’s another thing. And also, I guess with my [economics] background, I think there is a certain point that I stepped aside and saw myself, if I will see myself as a [commodity] and would make the choice to commodify myself, I would be a rare one. You know. That how I saw myself highly because of that. My place in the world is unique and my place in the world is one that it’s not going to very easily replicated. We are from the cradle of life, the source of the Nile, like all these things that people forget to.

I don’t to immerse myself in someone else’s culture

One reason that I did not want to spend these particular years in a classroom, because I felt my education no matter what, I chose I did not want to do like Pan African

studies, I did not want to do philosophy, I chose to do political science. I chose to do economics, that's what I am in, that's my field. And I just, I felt I was spending all my, when we learned about culture, it's always a western one, so I felt I was immersing myself in somebody else's culture. I was spending all my time learning about somebody else's culture and I never spend my time seeing my culture and myself occupying this place I did occupy, so making that decision to just stop allowing teachers with their whole history and their lives and whatever to choose what I put into my mind for a semester, you know. Little things like that, makes me want to kind of curating my own visual, curate my own reading, and curate those things even though, yes, a lot of people would say I should go back to school and I shouldn't allow people to dictate what I read and what I write and how I feel about what I write and what I've written. You know and graded and whatever.

I made that decision for 23, 24, these particular years I just want to not be westernized, actively westernized. Indoctrinated, actively indoctrinated into these thought process. So I've changed the way that I spend my days. I changed the way I feel about my own mind. I don't hole myself up in the library to produce 40 pages documenting someone else's history. I don't have to feel the suffering of another people, on top of the suffering of my own people. So taking myself out of those cyclical thoughts of number one, westernization, continuous westernization, and number 2, hyper-productivity allowed me to kind of rest my mind and I feel like when I go back to it, I will be in a different – [trails off]

Another thing is my financial situation that I was in, my mom was paying for school and I had a lot of scholarships. I was a younger kid, so I did not know how to manage many things. Another thing I would like to be when I go back to school is a better financial situations with more networking been done so I can feel more secure when I got back into an institution. I will be in a situation if this institution were to treat me wrongly, my voice should be heard which would guarantee that they will treat me right. This is one of the reasons I am focusing in publishing right now, so I want to walk into an institution and say, "These are the things that I published and you better not mess with me don't step on my toes today, I am just here to learn. I am not here to teach a bunch of other people or whatever," so – [trails off]

I am going to my economics and political science program but I am just kind of done with the wide eye striving for knowledge, that feeling. Or feeling like people are giving me a gift by giving me their knowledge, you know teachers or whatever, school and things like that. I wanted to shape my mind into a place where I was the, you know, I knew how to hold the body that I've been given, because if I was in classroom and those settings people are going to respond to me, people are going to be affected by my presence, people are going to be asking me where I am from. So before I put myself in that situation, I really want to be able to [?] for myself.

I don't think the answer to most of those questions would have changed, when I have to answer them again, but I think whatever truth to those answers would have changed. And that maybe gives me some ability to handle or maybe just to smell the crazies, you know before they come to me, before I open myself up these situations where people can hurt me or other westernize me or make me feel less than. Because what I know from being a kid and what not, yes, people can never dehumanize you without your consent or whatever or that idea, but it's so easy to say that and it's so much harder to live within, you know a bunch of other people's energy and not feel.

Mistrust in public institutions

I just want to put myself in a situation where they can come at me all they want but they can expect me to come back as I should. And I just want to make sure all of those things are in place. When I do go back, like they said, lawyer up first wins, generally. So when I do go back to school, I want to have legal representation, some of those things I want to be able to afford to have someone there. I can talk about the different things that go on in an institution so I can protect myself. Because at the end of the day, the way institutions treat people of color, oh my god. Illegal things happen every day.

I am gifted in a lot of areas so I just have to find one that I want to do and probably, most definitely, I will be working for myself and I don't need a degree to do that.

I published. I had 30 words in the NY Times and I published internationally as a model. I have 10 international credits this year, which is cool, published out of most big art cities. I have a credit out of Barcelona, Paris, New York, so you know and that's an accomplishment as well. So this year my first goal is to get my website up and running and that is, I have 4 weeks of work on it. I've got films and videos and things like that, but that would be out and be able to book. I've been charging \$100 an hour for modeling. A lot of my graduated classmates can't say they can charge a \$100 an hour. Which is an accomplishment as well I feel.

The influences in my life

A couple of things influenced my thinking today, experiences of people not been there for me, just not being present. I always had these pretty high expectations of people and that's my personal maybe downfalls, or strength and a weakness. I really have high expectations of people and they tend to fail. I have people who have been cruel to me and also a tradition of Christianity really influences my thought process. A tradition that I critically don't accept it in the way that my family does. I am the only one in my family that – [trails off] I am happy to go to the church on Sunday and sing but I can't – I will

say the apostle's creed, but I can't say that I believe. So for dealing kind of the odd sheep has been you know, I've always been an observer so that reality has always been on the outskirts looking in, people even with my own family. I look like them but I have my own radius so feeling a little bit on the outskirts.

So, yeah of course, critical thought, I've been halfway influenced by Weber, Max Weber, who is German and I was really deeply influenced by him, even with some of these writers who influenced me, they influenced me on certain level but these are European thinkers again. I have to take them and like, boil them down and that whole process of continuously boiling down other people's life and trying to understand how it influenced mine. Mine is so different, it feels so different. It's a process that I have to do so many times, so going through that process is a major influence. I guess I call that a process of interpreting. When I have relationships with people I always have to interpret myself to them because the vast majority of people can't wrap their minds around what I am saying.

I have 3 friends that I can speak to in any state of being and I can mumble jumble tearful. Two of them are white women, one from the south and one from southern California and used to be a Mormon out of non-religious family, who became a Mormon and then left the faith. So she is really one of my good friends. So a couple of good friends understand me and have siblings who accomplished a lot. They are accomplished individuals.

And me being the fourth out of six kids also is the reason my education is all about power and resource, and the way they were given and taken from each other why? Because I have 3 older siblings who used to beat up on me so I have resources and holding on to them (laughing) so things like that I see how I am influenced by that. I was a big reader because my siblings did not want to play with me or have to watch me and I spent a lot of times in my own mind and my parents affirming that. My mother saying, "You are intelligent, you are smart." And me being like, huh? When people tell you that you are extraordinary and you really feel like forgotten, it's an interesting way to be.

Reflection on Shary's Story

Shary is a bright young woman who escaped the civil war in Sudan and came to the United States with her family as a refugee at a very young age. She portrayed herself as an intelligent thinker who is gifted and talented in many areas.

The church community played a major role in helping Shary and her family resettle in Minnesota. With the financial assistance of the church, Shary and her siblings were able to enroll in private schools in the suburbs of Minneapolis.

Shary described her family as resourceful and very loving. She has a great relationship with her siblings, even though they did not play much together because of the large age difference. Shary was the youngest at that time. Shary and her siblings supported and relied on each growing up. Shary's parents played an important role in boosting herself esteem and affirming her belief that she was an intelligent young girl.

Challenges of Resettlement

Although Shary resettled in Minnesota at a very young age, she faced many challenges adapting to a new environment. At the age of five, Shary recognized that she and her family looked different than Minnesotans and that people were rude to them. Shary witnessed her mom being mistreated by customers when she was working in the service industry because of her heavy accent.

When Shary enrolled in the elementary school in the first grade, she was placed in English as a Second Language (ESL). Shary recognized that she was not learning because she was frequently taken from class for her ESL lessons. She never understood why and was confused because her English was great. She had to advocate for herself to stay in regular classes. She said, "I decided to learn early because nobody decided to teach me." She felt the neglect and discrimination of the school system for immigrants. This particular experience in school made her determined to have the best English possible.

Shary has a very dark complexion and is very tall. Shary's height and features made her feel like an outcast in her classes. She tried not to be visible in order to the pain of being different. The fact that there were no other minority kids in the school made her feel isolated. She said that she blocked most of the unpleasant incidents in school from her memory, but that there were many of them. Shary went through a lot of unfortunate circumstances now questions why she accepted them. She wanted to be with the popular kids. Shary is still hurt that she was chosen to play the role of a slave in a school play when she was in middle school.

Shary believes that circumstances may have been different for the family if they were second or third generation immigrants. The fact that her parents were not college educated meant they could not help her academically, unlike her colleagues. She said that the only time she felt that she had a better education was when she was in college on the East Coast and had professors of color. She felt that those teachers then wanted to teach.

Shary spoke at length about her struggles adapting in college. She felt isolated and could not relate to her classmates because they did not share the same realities and understanding. She was the only female of color in the classes she was taking, "somehow the only something." She was not feeling comfortable talking in front of her classmates. After receiving a high on an exam, a professor who had a huge influence on her validated Shary's presence and intelligence in front of students. That affirmation from her teacher gave her some sort of confidence. She described it as the validation from a teacher that she never got.

Shary felt that she did not have friends. She felt constant animosity because of her appearance. She said people were really uncomfortable with her presence especially when she transferred to a college in Minnesota. She explained that very few people took the time to get to know her, saying, “You adopt a wall between you and the rest of the world.”

Shary’s feeling of isolation in college was not limited to her classmates. She felt that her education was immersing her in somebody else’s culture. She realized that she was not seeing herself and her culture occupying the space and felt she was losing her identity. She did not want to be westernized and indoctrinated into a western culture. Shary quit attending school, in order to rest her mind. She plans on returning when she financially stable and has better resources.

Shary’s educational experiences in school and in college have potentially affected her trust in academic institutions. An anti-harassment order filed against her in college made a huge impact on her. If she decided to go back to college and finish her degree in economic and political science, she would only do so when she is able to afford a legal representation that can guarantee that she is not mistreated and that her voice will be heard. She said that many illegal things happen every day, but she cannot prove it. She wants to protect herself; “I would rather not get my diploma than walk into an institution again without certain things in place

Shary has coped with her struggles of being different by transforming and changing the way she viewed herself. She realized that the only way people would

appreciate her as beautiful was if she decided she was beautiful. She had to validate herself before expecting validation from others. She is learning that the world is changing and accepting people who look like her, evident in the influx of people of color in media campaigns. She now views herself as a rare commodity and values herself highly. She believes that her place in the world is unique and it's not easily replicated. Shary is surrounded by a loving, supportive family, which has helped her deal with the challenges she has faced growing up in Minnesota.

Shary is currently a freelance model who has published internationally in Barcelona, Paris and New York. She is making a decent living from modeling and is planning to start her own company. Her plan is to get out of debt and go back to school when she has the financial means to do that. She believes that she will achieve that in two years.



Figure 1: A picture of Shary at the age of 5

Kate

Kate is a 27-year-old woman from South Sudan. She was born in a refugee camp in Ethiopia to Sudanese parents who fled the civil war in Sudan. Kate and her family arrived in Nashville, Tennessee in 1994 and resettled as refugees. They moved to in Minnesota in 1996.

First Meeting: I was introduced to Kate at a social event attended by many Southern Sudanese immigrants. Kate was elegantly dressed and was very friendly in her interactions. I introduced myself to Kate, briefly explained my study, and asked if she or any other Southern Sudanese women that she knows would be interested in participating in the research. She agreed to be part of the study and we scheduled a time for conducting an interview

Telling the Story

Kate had a cheerful, friendly attitude and her mannerisms reflected that. She took her time before she responded to my questions and was able to narrate her story with clarity and in a sequential order. She didn't display any unpleasant emotion or discomfort as she described her escape from Sudan, but sighed deeply when she recalled how she and her siblings walked for five days, crossing the borders of Sudan to the refugee camp in Ethiopia.

When I asked her about her expectations of the United States before her arrival, she laughed out loud and replied, "I imagined it as Disney Land." The cheerfulness in her voice faded away as she talked about the loss of her eldest brother who was killed in

Sudan few years ago. As a result, she developed anxiety and had to seek mental health services. She laughed again when she recalled her experience during the parent-teacher meetings in her elementary years. There were no Nuer interpreters for her mother in the town where she lived, so she had to do the interpreting during the meeting. This put her in awkward position and forced her to do well in school to avoid any humiliation in front of her mother and the teachers. Kate was very animated as she told the story of how her mother and other relatives embarrassed her during the high school graduation. The guests has been told to hold their applause until everyone's names were called, but her mother ignored that and cheered loudly when Kate's name was announced to receive her diploma. The 90-minute interview went very well and Kate was extremely happy to be part of the study.

Kate's story

Born in refugee camp

I was born in 1988 in Ethiopia in refugee camp called Itang. I have three siblings from my mom's side and six from my dad's side, six half brothers and sisters. My parents worked for the UN at the time and the Ethiopian civil war happened so we went back to Sudan and I think we stayed there for a couple of years before we went back to Ethiopia. And in 1993 there was another dispute in Sudan, so we walked back to Ethiopia. And during the journey, I lost my father and we ended up in Gambila in the spring of 1993

Escaping the civil war in Sudan

I think maybe my earliest memory is when we actually came to Ethiopia. We crossed a river. It was in the spring when the water was high up and I remember I was with a couple of women because I did not know how to swim and they were carrying me through the water.

We were coming from Sudan and we were going to Ethiopia. We were fleeing our home and ended up in army base actually and my uncle was in, we had – [trails off] During that time, I had left with several siblings. I fled with two of my siblings and walked for about five days till we got to the army base and we lied and said that we were our uncle's kids because we knew that he was in the army, working for the army. And they got us to a different camp where we met our parents there, and then we walked to Ethiopia to the refugee camp. I think we walked for about three or four days to the refugee camp and there was a lot of kids so they had to stop a lot.

Life wasn't really didn't change that much but just was trying. I don't know, my parents were trying not to tell you what's going on but you can figure out what's going on. I think I was in Ethiopia temporarily and I know I shouldn't take things too serious, just try to make it seem like its home. I think I have pretty good childhood. I had friends. We played a lot. Like every Sunday, we were involved in church and it was community style living when were there.

Coming to the USA

We got in Minneapolis in June, which was summer, and met some of our family members. That when I met my brother for the first time. I guess it was kind of scary to get on the airplane and so many different airports and not speaking any English. One of this the people we came with spoke English and that helped, but it was scary to eat different food, I don't know. I just felt like a horrified trip.

We don't know when we are going to land. We got in Minnesota, I kind felt that it was kind of massive, it was too big. I felt the world was too big for me because all these tall building that I never seen before, so many cars in the street. But then we settled in Rosemount, Minnesota, in the suburbs somewhere and we stayed there for a couple of months 'til we got our shots and stuff, once we arrived.

We resettled in the US through Lutheran Social Services. It was pastor (X) he worked in the church and he is the one who actually worked with Sudanese and reached out to us and helped us get through finding out where we need to go, maybe getting groceries and go shopping. He would pick us up on Sunday to go to church, so I felt he was the one who reached out the most to us. I think Lutheran Social Services and people would come to our house to interview and ask us questions and see how we are doing and something like that.

Living in Minneapolis was challenging for us

And then after that, we moved to Minneapolis and went to school for about three, four months. Minneapolis was a little rough, I felt, because of being picked on a lot

especially we coming from a different country and not speaking English and, yeah, we got picked on a lot in Minneapolis.

I was in Minneapolis public schools for at least four months, at the most, because we came in June and we left in the winter to move to Faribault. I spoke a little English, just the regular, how to say hi and bye, the regular, basic English. I couldn't write formally and stuff. The school had actually set up a counselor, someone who could actually guide us, someone who can pick us from the bus, pick up from the classrooms and at lunch take us to her office and see how we are doing, and see if we were struggling with anything. They put that in place.

I thought it was hard in terms of adjusting, adjusting to a new culture or getting along with people who can't really understand in a way. I sometimes felt like my teachers kind of brush it off. If I had a question, or I was struggling, even students were picking on me, they just don't do anything. I got punished a lot for that. It's a lot of misunderstanding, I felt like it was a huge barriers. The language barrier was really huge.

There was a lot of bullying from students in Minneapolis. Most of the bullying comes from African American students. I felt that was weird. They used to pick on us a lot. They call us monkeys and stuff like that. That was very difficult to deal with. I think in my mindset I got it will be a different setting. I knew they were obviously Black, and also from Africa too, so I thought we will get along actually better than I would with Caucasian kids, but that was not the case.

The building we were staying at was in North Minneapolis, around Dupont Ave., and the building we staying at was kind of sketchy, I would say, and someone was shot upstairs. I think it was a public housing. And so because my mom was super terrified that someone was shot in our building, she had reached out to her friends and they reached out to Trinity Lutheran church in Faribault, Minnesota. They helped us find a place and we settled in Faribault for the rest of our lives I guess.

We navigated Faribault on our own

The assistance from Lutheran Service Program stopped once we moved to Faribault Minnesota, everything stopped. There was no checking. There was no help to navigate the town or navigate the system. I remember I had to translate for everything basically. Sometimes I would have to ask, cause we had a caseworker through human services, so I had to ask them on why this is happening and I felt like I have to ask them without anyone else explaining anything.

It was easier to adjust in a smaller community

We went to a Lutheran private school, and I felt it was more like a community in a way and because they really helped us a lot. I guess sometimes maybe assimilating and just learning about things and stuff like that, they helped us a lot. I guess it's cool. I think being in a smaller setting really helped us or me and my brother learn in faster pace than we would have.

We were one of three Sudanese families over there, and in our school I was the only Sudanese in the class, and it was I guess little hard because there were no other Sudanese people there, but I felt it was more welcoming and it wasn't pressure or being picked on, but it was learning. I think people in Faribault were welcoming more than Minneapolis because the church knew where we came from, and I think they knew previous situations which is why they were more welcoming in that sense. But there were people in town who are obviously not welcoming and there altercations in the communication with people. But the general people knew where we were coming from and why we were here and a lot of people didn't really question or really asked me. But they knew that we came from Sudan and there was a war going on and the purpose of why we were there so they were not picky and did not question that much because they knew the sensitivity of the issue.

My experience with the police taught me to be careful

I would just say, just when kids fighting or when people I guess like racial situations. That was the only incident that I would feel like we are out of place, this is when somebody will pick on us because of my race and that was probably it. Other than there was no problem.

I think when I was 12 years old I remember going to mall with a group of friends who were also Sudanese and we were just looking around the mall, and we had \$20 each or something like that. And we were hanging out and girl clerk accused a friend of mine of stealing and she was like, "Can you please give back what you stole." And she is like, "I did not steal anything. I put it back where it came from." She said, "No, I think you stole it." So they searched her and called the security guard of the mall and they searched the girl and they didn't find anything and they said fine, we are going to call the police. And so they called the police and this is the six of us sitting there and wondering what's going on.

And the police comes and it was the first I realized that I have to be careful of what I do and the police was like looked at us and said, "You niggers should go back to Minneapolis." And we were just shocked and I remember he was being really, really not being police wise. And we were so mad about the situation, then they should give all of us a citation not to come to the mall again.

So that was my first memory of that sort of situation. I learned to be careful. My mother always told me to be careful, this is not our country, people here treat black people different. And I thought she was just Then this came to reality for me.

Adjustment was easier for me but not for my mother and older siblings

I came at a very young age, so adjustment was easy to some extent, but that was not the case for my mother and my older siblings. I just, in a way, I kind of adapted to it. I don't really dwell on it and say, "Oh, no. She is struggling." I just adapted to knowing that I am going to be the one to help her if she need help with anything. I don't think I take a step back and say maybe I should see how this is going.

It was challenging because there was a whole translating issue and at sometimes she had to get me out of school so I can go and translate for her and stuff like that. And sometimes, I felt that my school did not understand. This is when I was in the public schools, but in the private school, they knew what was going on, so they would excuse me and let me go.

I had to translate for my mom all the time

But when I was in a different setting, I had to go and translate for my mom and they were like, "Why are you leaving?" But I don't know, I learned to adjust and just move on and do anything that I can to help her. Because I was the only one. I was the only child because my older siblings, they had their families, and my younger brother, I felt that he is not that old to understand. He came at five years old, so he adjusted to American culture in a way.

My mom was not able to communicate with my teachers when I was in school. They would request that we bring an interpreter, but that town did not have an interrupter for the Nuer language or anyone who was Sudanese. So they ask if I can bring a relative to bring him/her out here and so we would always try to find someone to translate, and if we can't it will be me. It put me in an awkward place with my teacher, but I think they kind of understood that it can be done in a way that. That made me aware of the fact that I have to be better in school if I want to translate.

We spoke Nuer. And there were no Nuer interpreters in Faribault. Not even in the court system. So I would go in like case meeting or the doctor or anything. Sometimes I felt it was too much for me because I am young and I was very young and I have to learn so much about adult thing. And I think it was like the first time I found that my mom had diabetes. I was like freaking out because what I hear about diabetes in TV, it's like a bad thing, so to hear that my parent has something like that and even to tell her what it is, you already like freaked out about the subject itself. It was a very weird day for me. But as

time went on, I learned that I have to take the responsibilities and not take it personally as I should.

When we were growing up, my mother made it a priority for us not to speak English at home. And so, at first, I really hated it and was questioning why we have to speak Nuer in our house. And as I got older I think I understood, the reason that I speak Nuer language so I don't lose it and didn't try to assimilate. I just learn English and kept my own language. I felt that the hardest part was maybe being independent in a way. That came through the fact that I was raised by a single mother and so I kind of structured my life knowing that no one is going to take care of me and that I have to take care of myself and stuff like that.

Torn between two cultures

So growing up, I was always be more, I just kind kept to myself in a way, I don't seek out, and I did not have many relationships with people who were Sudanese because of the fact that I just kept to myself and I just hang out with my American friends. I really didn't dive out into the community that much. I just was close to my family, and I was just close to my immediate family and I would go out and venture and sometimes people took that as being too Americanized.

And so there is a whole thing of fighting between the cultures. In your culture they think you are too American, and the other culture, they don't think you are enough and so it was difficult to balance those two. I just had a mindset of American child. I think when I was a teenager, I was battling the most, being an American teenager and been a Sudanese teenager are totally two different things. And at that time, I get in trouble maybe talking back to people, standing up for myself. I wouldn't like it when people speak to me in a certain way and then I would be defiant and speak back and they say it's because you've been American, acting American. That was very difficult for me to explain, that's not right for someone to talk to people or yell at people like that.

The things that I learned not to do here is to get in trouble, especially getting in trouble with the police. My mother was terrified with the police. And so I learned not to get myself in trouble and try to be kind of civil with everyone and not to get in argument and fights. Maybe there are cultural boundaries, knowing that there are certain things in my Sudanese culture that I can do that I can't do in the American culture. Maybe like social norms. There are a lot of things that my mom did that I was embarrassed about. I was like, "Oh wait, maybe you shouldn't do that here."

I remember in school it was during my high graduation, they had told us, "We want to you to applaud after everyone is done." And my mom has brought my whole family. Everyone came, and they have said my name and she got up and she started

cheering and everyone was looking at me and I wanted to be so invisible (laughing). So this social cultural misunderstanding, oh my goodness! I laughed though. Even if I told her that things that she can't do, she smirks and say, "You think you are better than me, and why can't I do this?" It's hard to explain the culture to her. She thinks it's just me being a teenager, not knowing actually that you can't do that in a way. Most of it came from misunderstanding of culture.

I learned that I have options

The things that I learned to adjust to life in the US is that I think that from the moment that we have to develop a sense of work ethic and everyone has to work. And in America not everything is given to you, so I learned that from a very early stage to know that you have to work for everything that you want in a way. Also, I like that fact that you have options. Like, there are options that I guess being a woman or a girl from South Sudan or Sudan in general, I knew that I have option because I heard about a lot of girls who got married at 15 or a very young age. And so I think was to have the option of not having the fear of getting married was very relieving for me, because I was thinking that I was the next in line.

I did not know that American culture is totally different in that term, like when you get married when you are 18 or whenever you want to. I think navigating the education system. I guess our parents very strict in education in general but I felt that they were good advocates, but they were not like good pushers for it. They themselves can't really help you. They can't read or write. They can't help you with your homework, so in a way I learned that to teach myself like everything whether to do my homework or make sure that my brother do his homework or knowing that I am not going to rely on someone else to help me. I know my American comrades, friends have parents at home who can help them with their homework. But I had to know that's not my situation and that I can't look at things in that way. So I was going to do my homework in school, and get help when I can and do things in faster pace. But I think I learned how to adapt in a way, to adapt from two different cultures or transitioning from two different cultures and living in two different cultures. I feel like now that I am older I am more like accepting of my culture than I would when I was younger.

I finished my elementary, junior and high school all in Faribault. I had a good experience in my senior years. I was in sport. I did well academically. I don't think I had any stresses to worry about. I think the main problems came through for me in college.

I went to Augsburg College in Minneapolis. It was the first time I was away from home from that setting that I was in Faribault. It was a welcoming school, I felt, very diverse. I never had seen so many diverse students before in one place. That's the reason

why I really liked it. I got to learn different things and different people and be friends with so many people that I never actually get a chance to meet when I was in Faribault.

Dealing with loss and grief

But Augsburg, in the first year of college, I have lost my brother in Sudan. That one who was in American, he went to Sudan to visit and he was killed. Yeah. We still don't know what happened today. He was killed by government soldiers from what we know. It was a confrontation. They shot him and that was the end of the story.

So trying to figure out what's going on and at that time I was in school and it was very, very heavy year for me. I did not know how to deal with because I never had this. Yes, I've seen my dad and people close to me die but I never had someone who had this kind of relationship with me die in such a time of my life where I kind of knew them. And so I think I had a lot of, I developed a lot of anxiety and I don't know, it's such a weird place for me to transition coming from being I guess safe mentally at home and then going somewhere else and trying to deal with.

My brother was the oldest one in the family. I was already worried about my mom, about my sister, about my younger brother, about everyone. Like, I go to class and I get ten different phone calls and it was so much going on. Yeah, and so during that time, I was really, really starting to like [slack] off my studies, and my teachers have noticed and say, "Hey." I was like I am dealing with a lot of stuff so they let me go see a counselor.

So I saw a counselor at Augsburg for about six months, and I was talking to the psychiatric counselor there and I think, obviously trying to get to a better transition and then a month later in January, I lost one of my best friends to a car accident. At that time I felt that I was, I don't know, I felt like school was not the right thing for me at that time so I took the next semester off. And so I took the semester off to figure out what's really going on and what to, what I need to do and how to move forward and stuff so I can get myself together mentally, because I was just not participating in my school work and I don't think that was right. And I know I was not going to do good and try to do everything at once, so I did that and yeah, I went to school again for the fall and obviously had to make up for the semester that I took off. I learned a lot of about myself at that time.

College was a great experience

I majored in social psychology. I had a lot of good experiences in college actually. Beside financial aid, I think I had a good experience. College was a very nice place in terms in how they were very open, they are very hands on. They are the ones who

recommended for me to see a psychiatrist; otherwise I would not have been able to transition out of that. Therapy helped a lot. So they were accommodating to me in terms like knowing things are happening, perceptive and very helpful through that. I never had any bad experiences. College was overall was a good experience for me, I really liked it.

Race was not an issue at all. It was very diverse and I like it because you learn how people view things differently because of the fact everyone comes from a different background. And yeah, I really explored and I wanted to learn more even about the religion classes. We had lot of students from Islamic faith so I wanted to learn more about that because of that and I dealt deep into it, yeah, just learning in a way. I can felt it was kind of diverting experience, just learning about people feel. I graduated from college in May 2013.

My hopes for the future

During the time I was in college, this is when I was actually filming a movie. And so I had to take two months off college to go film and during that time I was at a point that I did not need anything else but to submit papers. And I had all my exams done, so when I was filming I was doing homework and finishing my research paper and stuff. So yeah, I came back on the weekend that I was filming and walked in Augsburg. And that was that, but after college, I stayed in Minnesota for about a year or so and moved to LA last year, last November.

I worked in Minneapolis. I was working at sales associates at American Apparel and then I was modeling part time and right before that I was working at Hope Village. It was a psychiatric office in Woodbury, Minnesota. Two years before that I was working as a caregiver at home health care.

I think the most hard for me when I was interning in Hope Village, because they have these group meetings, group counseling meetings and I was talking to group of men from Minneapolis. I think they were Somali or somewhere from East Africa, asking them about talking about their experiences. I think that was the hardest thing for me to know how much about these stories. They were hard, but that's how their community connected, to similar stories and how they came together and helped each other out. I think this when I realized that this is something that I wanted to do.

Before I left to go film, I actually wanted to continue my studies in psychology and do more research in refugees and psychiatric or psychology of refugees, but then once I started the movie, everything got bombarded at once and I said maybe I should take some times off and not go straight to graduate school. But now I am here actually in LA. I can navigate what I wanted to do, learning more towards advocating for refugees. I guess helping refugees with resettlement programs. I did advocacy work for Lutheran

Immigration Refugee Services. I was like over there and speak. I also wanted to work with UNICEF, want to work with children and hopefully my goal is develop. I wanted to develop a psychiatric clinic in Sudan or South Sudan. That's what I wanted to do in the future. I wanted to go to grad school.

I can't go back to Sudan

I think my life is better here in the US in terms of quality of life, safety. I mean I feel like the reason why people wants to come to America, especially when you are in situation like war, definitely the better result for you. But I think I know now that, now that I've worked with refugee relocation, relocating was the last thing they do to people.

I can't go back to Sudan now because of the ethnic issue. Obviously, I feel that it's a better thing. Of course, I want to know my culture more and reconnect with my family stuff like that, but everything has its time. I can't really push for something initially that could be dangerous.

There are more things needs to be done to help Southern Sudanese refugees

There are things that should have been implemented in working with refugees. They should have been more aware of the fact that refugee, the term refugee means their country is not safe enough for them to live in, so they should be aware of the fact that they are in traumatic situation. And that they are adjusting to this culture and I felt they were not cared for. Like, there should have been more hands on, at least provided mental assistance. That was the one thing that was not focused on throughout the whole experience. I've seen a lot of refugees. No one comes to America and talks to psychologist. And I haven't seen that at all. One of the things that their mind is going through a lot of different things, and that they need some sort of relief and guidance to adjust and move on. That was never addressed at all.

Sudanese community do have stigma about mental health, but I think just knowing the culture in the sense, Sudanese culture is more communal, more community wise. And so to get the people together, get the men together, get the women together, come about in a way and talk to them. I think everybody want to talk. They want to talk, sit, laugh, they just want to sit and talk. And so that kind of structure is already there, it's already open. So maybe the problem is bridging it because sometimes they are not really open or welcoming of it. So it takes time to infiltrate that and go in and talk about serious things in that sense. I think it's knowing what the culture is and knowing how to combat it and talk to them and bridge that kind of gap.

I think now that time has gone by, that there is enough time to know how one's culture reacts to a certain thing and knowing the livelihood of the culture. It's better now

for people to know where they can step in, where before it was about figuring out who these people, what they do. Now they should be enough information or enough leverage to have time to communicate. The literature is definitely lacking at the end of the day, it's not that much. I tried to study even the whole psychiatric issue of refugees and I found 2 papers from the University of Minnesota about Somali refugee and some in Canada about Sudanese refugees. There was no information at all. I think the topic itself has not been explored at all

The US has a higher population of refugees. So they should, I don't know, I feel that a lot of these issues were not addressed it will lead to a lot of different things like for example incarceration. I just have a cousin who has been diagnosed with schizophrenia and it's genetic because her mother has it. And the doctors was not really up to, I guess they were kind of giving her, I think it was more forced, rather [than] addressing the issue, the psychology and other stuff. Even a lot of Sudanese people that I know, very, very traumatized and people don't address this issue. A lot of girls in the community are sexually molested or raped by people that they know or by relatives and friends and, because of the whole stigma, the issue of even addressing the psychology of the refugee population, nobody talk about it.

Reflection on Kate's story

Kate's traumatic experience of escaping the civil war in Sudan was one of her earliest memories. She was young at that time, but she was able to remember details of the escape. She recalled how she and others had to cross the river and how she was carried on one of the women's shoulders because the river was high and she could not swim. Kate and her siblings had to walk for five days, crossing the border of Sudan, until they reached the refugee camp in Ethiopia.

Despite the horrifying experience of the civil war in Sudan, the loss of her father at an early age, and living in a refugee camp, Kate described her childhood as pleasant. She had friends that she played with. She went to school and church and lived in a close community. She was aware that her life in the refugee camp was temporary.

Kate, her mother, and her younger brother came to the United States as refugees. They were sponsored by her eldest brother through Lutheran Social Service. She described her trip to the United States as horrifying. It was the first time she and her family traveled by plane and they went through many airports. No one spoke English at that time, so it was a terrifying experience for the entire family. She was excited to meet her eldest brother for the first time and was fascinated to see tall buildings and cars in the streets.

After arriving in Minnesota, Lutheran Social Services helped Kate and her family resettle. The pastor of the church they attended reached out to them and helped them with resources and transportation.

Challenges of Resettlement

Kate and her brother were enrolled in Minneapolis Public School. They both found difficulty in adapting and adjusting to the new school environment. The two siblings fell victims of bullying and racism. Kate felt that other students picked on them because they were from a different country. She was surprised the most of the bullying came from African Americans. She thought that because they were all black, they would get along better, but it was the opposite experience for her. They were called monkeys. The school had a counselor that assisted Kate and her brother to get to class and guide them in school, but Kate believed that the classroom teachers did not make any effort to help them. She was punished a lot. Kate couldn't get along with everyone because she

couldn't understand them and they did not understand her. The language difficulty was a huge barrier for her to adjust to in school.

Kate and her family lived in public housing in North Minneapolis. The public housing was unsafe and they were forced to move shortly after someone was shot in the building. Her mother reached out to church to help them relocate out of Minneapolis. Kate and her family lived in Minneapolis for four months before the church helped them find a place in Faribault, Minnesota.

Once they moved to Faribault, Lutheran social services stopped their services to the family. Kate's family had to navigate the system on their own. The church community in Faribault stepped in and helped Kate and her brother enroll in a private school. The smaller setting helped them to adjust better in school.

Kate struggled with being the only Sudanese person, the only person of color in the class, but she felt that school and the students were more welcoming than in Minneapolis. There was no harassment, no bullying and no pressure; she was actually learning. The church community in Faribault made it easier for Kate's family to be welcomed in their new community. Members of the church knew that Kate and her family were refugees who were victims of the civil war in Sudan. People did not question that much because they knew the sensitivity of the issue. She said that there were a few people in town that were not nice to them, but the majority of people were very welcoming.

Kate experienced a few racist incidents in Faribault. She recalled one incident when she was at the mall with other Sudanese teenagers and a store clerk accused one of her friends of stealing and called the security guards. Even though they were searched and security guards could not find anything on them, the police were called. The police were abusive to Kate and her group and yelled, “You niggers should go back to Minneapolis.” That incident impacted Kate negatively. Her mother was always fearful of the police and warned her that Black people in this country are treated differently. That mall incident affirmed her mother’s fear of the police and forced Kate to be very careful and avoid getting in trouble.

Kate had the responsibility of interpreting for her mother, who did not speak English or read English. Therefore she often needed assistance and there were no Nuer interpreters in Faribault. Kate regularly had to miss school to interpret for appointments, meetings, and other occasions. Kate adapted to that, knowing that she was the only one who could help her. There was no other option. Kate said it was awkward and sometimes uncomfortable because she was young, and was forced to learn a lot about the adults’ world. Kate shared the terrifying experience when the doctor told her that her mother had diabetes and she had to explain to her mother what the doctor said.

Adjustment and adapting in Minnesota was not easy for Kate and her family. She had to work hard for everything, so she developed strong work ethic from an early age. She was also aware that, being a Southern Sudanese girl in the United States, she had the option to choose not to conform to the cultural norms of getting married at a very young

age. She learned to live and adapt in two different cultures. She is also appreciative that her mother insisted that they speak the Nuer language at home, so she does assimilate into the American culture and lose her native language

Kate felt that resettlement agencies did not do enough and that they should have been aware of the fact that these refugees are victims of trauma. They did not provide mental health assistance or resources to help refugees cope with their trauma. Although there is a stigma in the Sudanese community in regards to mental health, Kate believes the Sudanese community would be receptive to a professional who would come and talk to them about serious issues affecting the refugee community. She believes that refugees need some guidance when they come to a new country. She said that enough time has now passed that people should know the livelihood of the culture, whereas before people did not know who they were. Kate was disappointed in the lack of literature, in regards to Southern Sudanese refugees and their experiences. She believes that the topic is not explored enough and that the literature is lacking. The United States has a higher population of refugees, so there should be more information.

Lori

Lori is a 29-year-old Southern Sudanese woman who came to the United States at the age of 16 with her aunt's family. She is in level five, which is advanced English as a Second Language (ESL) class, at the adult education center. Level 5 is defined as a high-intermediate English language learning course that assists learners with their reading, writing, speaking and listening skills

Lori was born in Sudan, but moved to Cairo at the 14 to live with her aunt. Lori was recruited to participate in the research through the adult education center.

I met Lori with another participant, April, in the conference room at the adult education center. Lori appeared to be a bit shy and did not say much as I explained the purpose of my study and reviewed the consent form. At some point during the interview, Lori stared at me for a long time and it got a little bit awkward because she never took her eyes off me.

I asked her if she was all right. Lori was perplexed for a second and then she replied, "My medication is making me tired." I asked her if she was sick. She replied, "I am schizophrenic. I am taking medication for that."

April interjected, "She is not schizophrenic; she just needs her family to be with her." I asked Lori if her medication affected her learning in school. She responded, "It makes me tired all the time and sleepy." I asked if her teacher was aware of her medical condition. She responded defensively, "No and they don't need to know that." Lori was chatty afterwards and participated in the conversation. She was friendly. She agreed to participate in the study and we scheduled an interview.

Lori was waiting for me in the conference room at the adult education center. She was fashionably dressed with a bright red top that matched her red hair extensions. She appeared to have more energy than the first time we met.

Telling the Story

The interview with Lori had a few challenges due to Lori's mental illness. It is evident that her thought process during the interview was scattered. She did not know where to begin her story, or in what country. She started for a few seconds and then asked, "Do you want me to talk about my whole life?" I replied that she could start talking about her life in Sudan first and then Egypt.

Lori began her story by telling how her mother abandoned her, leaving her with her aunt at the age of six. She had dispersed memories of certain events during her early childhood that involved her mother, but her short stories were not in chronological order for a period at the beginning of the interview.

Twenty minutes into the interview, Lori was intense and got very animated as she described John, the voice that lives inside her head, and Rebecca, the aunt who stole her left brain. At that time, her schizophrenia became very observable. Lori was convinced that Rebecca went back to Sudan, and poisoned and killed her mother. I had to ask her twice during the interview about that particular story and without a doubt she insisted that Rebecca did witchcraft on her when she was young, and that she went to Sudan and killed her mother.

Lori seemed tired towards the end of the interview. The interview was interrupted by a phone call from her nurse. Lori said that she had to go home soon to have dinner because the nurse is coming to give her evening pills. Towards the end of the interview, Lori asked me if I noticed what she was wearing. I thought she wanted me to comment on her looks, so I answered, "You look very nice." She then asked, "Look at my feet, are

you noticing anything?” Lori was wearing two different pairs of black shoes. She said that she was in a rush to get to the interview, so she wore a mismatched pair.

Lori’s story

I was abandoned by my mother

Before I moved here to the US, I was in Egypt, too. When I was in Sudan, my mother left me at the age of six with my first cousin, Rebecca and her man, Francis, her boyfriend I think. They didn’t have children. My mother left me with Rebecca and Rebecca took me with her to her boyfriend’s home. My mother visited sometimes. That was in 1992. I was like – I was born in 1986.

I was six years old. But before that I remember when I went to kindergarten. My mother let me live with Arab people. They put me in kindergarten preschool. I went to Arabic preschool. There was a time when my mother brought me to live with her when I was in kindergarten

My mother left me. She left and never came back. I never heard from her. She never sent letters. That’s the time she left me with her cousin. She went back South Sudan. She left me in Khartoum. I was born in the south too. And she brought me to live in Khartoum.

In Khartoum, I went to school with my cousin. My first cousin put me in school. The first year, I went to a private Christian school. That was when my mother was there. Then, when my mother left, we moved from our house and they put me in a public school. From second grade to sixth grade, I went into an Arabic public school. I was in a public school from second grade to sixth grade.

My cousin and her boyfriend had kids when I was living with them. And then we moved from house to house. From the worst house to a better house. We went from a house that did not have electricity or lights and it was made of mud to a government house that has electricity and built with stone. The old house has no electricity and it has two rooms for two families and it was far in the desert. We moved to a better house, but it was still dirty. But it was better than the other one. At least we can watch T.V. and there was a fridge. The other house did not have doors.

And then when the time came in my sixth grade year, they decided to leave. They wanted to leave me to go with my family. Because my cousin, she is my first cousin, is

related to me from my father's side, that's why she took me from my mother. They left and went to Egypt, she, her children and her man. They left me with another relative of theirs. Her husband's relatives. They left me with them so I can finish my school. After that they introduced me to another aunt of mine in Haj Yousif.

So in Al Haj Yousif, they said if I finished school, I will go to live with [the first cousin who left to Egypt]. When I went and met that lady, that lady said, "Don't go with Rebecca," my cousin. She warned me. She was right. She said, "Don't go with them. They are going to use you. They left you here, see? They are going to use you over there." She said, "Look, they went and left you. Now they are bringing you to use you, don't go with them. I will take you to your mother. We will take you to South Sudan. We are going to go to your mother."

I was only 14 years old. I am fresh. I don't know what to do and what not to do, so I couldn't make any decision because I am not grown up. I don't know. I was young. So yes, my school is finished. My cousin, Rebecca talked to somebody, Uncle Alex. He came to the house and got news that my cousin, Rebecca, in Egypt, told him to come and pick me and so I can come with him to Egypt. They want me there. If did not come, my cousin, Rebecca, will come herself and get me.

Moving to Cairo

So I went to Cairo. When I came Egypt, I was fresh. It was in May. My mother did not know that I went to Egypt. And my dad died when I was in the womb of my mother. Alex came and lived with us, too, in Cairo.

When I was in Egypt, we lived in a house that has three families in one apartment and sometimes the bachelor, like Alex. There is Daoodi. There were three bachelors lived in the house. They slept in the living room. The families slept in one room, and me and the girls, we have our room. Alice and Rebecca slept in one room and their kids with them. That's how we lived in Egypt.

I was abused physically and mentally

Alice was abusive to me. One time in Egypt, I said to her son, why he was mean to me. And her son was like around nine or ten. I asked him why he was being mean. We were playing cards and then he was mean and I asked him, "Why do you think I don't have a mother?" Alice got mad and she said, "I am the one who raised you up, you are going to tell Nelson that?" She beat me. I was scared from her. She took sticks and tell me body swallow up and I start screaming and call for my mom. I was abused physically and mentally.

The first year that I was supposed to go to seventh grade, I did not go for one year. I stayed home because the Egyptians are racist, and I did not go to their schools. There is a private school for Sudanese sponsored by Americans. It's called African Hope. They brought us there and they test us if we knew English. If you don't know English, you won't be accepted in the school. If you know English, they will accept you. The first year I tried, I did not know English. They did not accept [me that] year. The second year, I took courses in English and after the English course, I went to the school and it accepted me the next year. I was 15. So, by the time I am finished school, I was 16.

I was in grade seven and I was 16. I started grade seven at 15 – no, no, no. 14. I was at home, 15, I went to seventh grade, and then I was supposed to go to seventh grade. I am confused.

I did go to seventh grade then, but then, when I finished, I came here after my birthday. I came here in June after my 16th birthday. I was supposed to be in junior. I was supposed to go to eighth grade. They came and put me again in seventh grade here in America.

My family mistreated when we moved to Nebraska

I came to the US through the refugee program, through my cousin Rebecca. I came with Frances, Rebecca, the kids and I through the refugee program in Nebraska. I lived there for 4 years and then I moved to Minnesota

When I came to America, I did not like it. I was miserable. My cousin were not nice to me. Rebecca beat me up. when we came to the US, she abused me once. She slapped me. I was 19 years old. After that she did not touch me. But when I was living with them in Nebraska, from age 16 to age 20, I was emotionally abused. They did not give me money to buy stuff. Alice did not give me money to buy my personal hygiene needs. She did not give me money to buy pads for my period. I don't get money, cloth or anything. I wanted to look for a job so I can look after myself. She said if you looked for a job, you are going to get out of this house. But God blessed me. In the school that I went to, there is a program that give you money every month to buy stuff for yourself. It was a program that I applied for, and they give me like 30 or 40 something dollars. That money helped survive.

When I came to America, I did not know how to speak or understand English so people speak to me and I don't understand what they are saying. Me and my cousin, Nelson went to an elementary school and learned English in three months. We spoke English and we got enrolled in classes. We repeated the class that year.

I was diagnosed at the age of 13 and was placed in special education classes

I went to school in Nebraska for four years. I did not like it. The students were younger than me by 3 years. And I had to go to ESL English. I am not in the same level. I had to get special needs for school. They did some testing and I am mentally ill. I was diagnosed at the age of 13. In the America I was here as a 13 years old but my real age was 16. Here in America, I was in special ed all the years of school. We were in different class and we did not hang out with the general class. We were in a special room and we get help.

I made friends in seventh grade. And in eighth grade, I kept the same friends. And tenth grade, I kept with the same friends. I hang out with same friends from junior high. I also hanged out with some friends in the upper classes too. When they graduated, I hanged out with younger students. They were white. They were nice to me. Some of them had special needs, and some no.

Moving to Minnesota

Two of my uncles helped me move here in Minnesota. I lived with one of the uncles. One was in the army but he visited. When I was moving from Nebraska, I planned that I was going to move. I took summer school and one of the aunties helped me to get out of Nebraska. She is in Iowa now. She helped me find the number of an uncle who I used to live with in New Brighton (when she first moved from Nebraska to Minnesota). Uncle David and his wife, Rebecca and their children. She helped me to find another number of an uncle who is in the army. His name is Eric.

So, when I planned to come to Minnesota, I contacted them and set everything up. I got out. They were bullying me, (the relatives in Nebraska). There was this lady by the name of Rose, and they are related. Frances is the husband of Rebecca. Rebecca is my cousin the one who abused me emotionally and physically.

I moved with my cousin in New Brighton, Minnesota. She is mean. And that's another story. When I moved to their home there was a lot of gossip about me. She gossiped about me with her mom and other people. That's another story about them.

Experiences with mental health

I moved to my own apartment when I had breakdown. I had the same problem. My cousin was gossiping a lot. That's why I moved out from Nebraska. She gossiped about me too much. Here the same thing happened. My uncle's wife and his daughter were gossiping, so I had a breakdown and I went to hospital.

At the hospital they were able to find me a group home and they told me to go to an adult foster care. I lived in adult foster care for about three years. I found a friend who

wanted to help me find a place. I found a place, but it did not work, so I moved with her for about seven months and then I moved out. I went back to adult foster care.

I am Christian. I believe that my cousin Rebecca did a witch[craft] on me. It's true, when I was six years old. Yes, she did a witchcraft on me when I was six years old.

Alice Rebecca my cousin. She stole my left brain. She was in my left brain at that time, too. John is just speaking and he is not in any part of my brain.

John is the voice that I hear. He is just speaking. The thief Rebecca in my left brain. She is repeating in the middle of my head. She is repeating. When I went in the morning to the social worker office, I told them that that woman did a witchcraft on me. She went to Africa. I can't live in her home. I have to move out. I got to move out.

They took me to crisis. From crisis, they took to me to group home. From group home, the police took me to Saint Joseph Hospital. From Saint Joseph Hospital, when I went to Saint Joseph Hospital, John told me give the address of that woman to the voice, to the voice, to the voice. I found out when we were speaking. She came back to my brain after, after, after that happened, after she got kicked out from my brain.

I lost my job because I had a breakdown

I did work. I worked at the movie theater. My first job was at the movie theater, here in Minnesota. In New Brighton. Mounds View. And then my second job was in between summer and it was in McDonald's. I liked my job at the movie theatre. It was not hard. I was supposed to be there for about two to three years, but that when I had a breakdown. My breakdown. I couldn't go to work. It stopped me from going back to work. After I got out of the hospital, I volunteered at the hospital, at United Hospital.

I can't work with numbers

I have a nursing assistant certificate. I am looking for a job and I don't have a car that's why. I came to the adult education center to brush up my English. I graduated from high school. I worked at the movie theatre, at FedEx as a package handler and at the McDonalds. My challenge is that I don't know how to work with numbers.

Most of these jobs did not need to work with numbers, but the movie theatre sometimes. I could not work in cashiers. It was a challenge. I couldn't count money. The other jobs were just seasonal or the job ends. Like FedEx is seasonal.

I liked my job as a PCA and home first aid. I did it for five month. I can't say why I left. It's personal but I was not fired.

Finding a job is a challenge

Finding a job is a challenge because it needs to have stuff that I don't have, like a car. I can have somebody help, find some jobs, but I am not good in interviews and that's my challenge. I am not able to understand the questions of the interviews. They asked me big vocabulary questions. I have an employment counselor. She helps me to go to the appointment, though.

When I got my nursing assistant degree, I did not have problem in school. I did the test without any problems. I studied. I got a certificate. I babysat for four years. They were my cousin's children and she did not pay me.

I can't visit my family in Sudan because I don't have money

My difficulties I am having now is not having money. If I have money, I will go back to Africa to visit. My brother is an accountant, a bank accountant in Juba. I have two brothers. My mother, before she died, said he wanted to be a teacher. She was helping him with money. He has two sons. My older brother has two children and then my brother, Sunday is the older one, my brother from my mother's side. From my father's side there are two sister. The oldest one is Maria and the second one is Helen.

I am in touch with – [trails off]. Maria is deaf, but I think she can hear. She became deaf from the war. Her husband got killed in the war. The bomb made her deaf. My sister, Helen, she speaks Arabic. She lives in Toret. She lives in land my father own. I want to visit.

Things I learned in the US

In the US, I learned a lot. I learned to speak English. I learned a new culture. When I was in Sudan, we did not have telephone at home. We started using telephone in Egypt at home. In America we used a telephone at home. I got my driver's license. I took the written test three or four times, and the road test I think five times

My life is better in the US. I am responsible. I take care of myself. I help people when they need help. I get assistance from the county. I live in a low income apartment from HUD. It's good and it's big enough. It takes 30% of my income. I have an income. I get SSI. It's not that enough that's why I want to find a job.

I take medications every morning and evening. A nurse comes to the house and gives me my medication. The medication stays with them and they save it for me. I don't know why they don't want to give it to me. Since I came out of the hospital, they just give it to me.

The medication has side effects. I told my doctor about it. I see my doctor every two, three weeks. The medication is strong that's why I take most of it at night. It makes me sleepy. After I have dinner.

I have a boyfriend, but he is in the hospital because he has schizophrenia. He is in the hospital for two months. He is going to move with his parents, his mom, when he gets out of the hospital.

I want a nursing assistant job. It's hard to get a job as a nursing assistant. I got to work hard on it. They need a one year experience at least and I only have five months. I think I can get a job with my mental health condition. That's it. I am going to get the job. I have to stay positive.

Reflection on Lori's story

Lori came to the United States at the age of 16, accompanying her aunt Rebecca and her family. Lori was born in South Sudan, but her mother left her in Khartoum, in the care of her relative, Rebecca. As a child, Lori lived in several homes of relatives and one Arab family. She finished her elementary education in Khartoum.

Lori lived with Rebecca, who was extremely poor. There were several other relatives living in the same household. After a few years, her aunt left to Cairo with her children and left Lori in the care of another relative. Shortly afterwards, Lori travelled to Cairo to join her aunt. She said that she did not want to go to Cairo because a relative warned her that Rebecca will use her to take care of her kids in Cairo. Lori said that she did not have the option of refusing to go to Cairo because she was only 14 years old.

In Cairo, Lori lived for two years in an apartment with Rebecca's family and two other families. Lori described the living arrangements as very crowded. Lori stated that her aunt, Rebecca was physically and emotionally abusive to her. Rebecca used to beat

her frequently and sometimes hid the food from her. Lori stated that the physical abuse continued when they resettled in the United States and stopped at the age of 19. Lori did not go to school in her first year in Cairo. She said that Egyptians were racists so she stayed home until she was able to register in an American sponsored school for Southern Sudanese refugees in Cairo. She finished seventh grade in Egypt.

Lori came to the United States at the age of 16. It is not clear what Lori's real age is, because her real age is different than what is documented in her immigration papers. She settled in Kansas City first, with Rebecca and other relatives. She said Rebecca continued to be abusive towards her, making her life miserable. Lori said that she did not have any money to buy anything for herself, including personal hygiene products. She applied for an assistance program in the school she attended and was able to get a little bit of money to buy her basic necessities.

Challenges of Resettlement

Lori's experiences of resettlement in the United States presented many challenges. She said that she did not speak English and communication with everyone was hard, especially in school. She was not able to talk to anybody. She also disliked that she was placed in a class with students who were three years younger than her. Lori was placed in Special Education because of her mental health condition. She was diagnosed with schizophrenia at the age of 16, and was in Special Education classes until she graduated from high school. Lori was able to speak English after three months. She made

friends with some students in her class and continued her friendship with them until graduation.

Lori struggled to get along with her aunt Rebecca in Kansas. With the help of another relative, Lori moved to Minnesota and lived with other family members. Lori's mental health continued to be a challenge for her and she struggled to get along with her relatives in Minnesota. After several months, Lori had an episode she described as a mental breakdown and was admitted into a psychiatric hospital for few months. From there, she moved to adult foster care. Lori lived in an adult foster home, later moving out on her own, with the assistance of her social worker, into low-income housing.

Lori had several jobs, but her schizophrenia made it difficult for her to keep a job. She had another mental breakdown that landed her in the crisis unit at the hospital. She lost her job by the time she was discharged from the hospital.

Lori is also not good with numbers. She has a hard time counting money, so she cannot work behind any cash register. Lori does not do well in job interviews. She said that she could not understand the questions during a job interview. She said that they use big vocabulary that she does not understand.

Lori said most jobs require her to have a car, but she does not have one. She said her car got towed after she left it on the parking ramp of the hospital where she was admitted for several months. She said that she got her driver's license after many attempts with the written and road driving tests.

Lori went to Saint Paul College and was able to get a nursing assistant certificate. She said that she studied hard and was able to get the certificate. She wanted to be a nursing assistant but she said that the job requires one year of experience, and that she only has five months of experience. Lori believes that she can work as a nursing assistant, despite her mental health diagnosis. She is determined to get the job and she believes she will get one if she has a good attitude.

Lori is currently receiving disability benefits because of her mental health diagnosis. She said it is not enough to cover her bills, which is why she needs to work. She is proud of the fact that she is living independently and taking care of herself.

I contacted Lori after this interview to set up another meeting, but she did not recognize who I was and hung up the phone twice. She also stopped attending the Hubb Center.

Dakota

Dakota is a 26-year-old woman from South Sudan who came to the United States at the age of eight with her uncle, Jack and his family as refugees. Dakota is a talented fashion designer and the mother of two boys. She is currently finishing her college degree in fashion design in a Minneapolis college. I have known Dakota since my earlier days in social work. Dakota was a ward of the state. The county has had legal custody of her since she was 14 years old. I worked with Dakota for a couple of years before I transitioned to another career. Dakota and I reconnected four years ago through social media. She did not hesitate to take part of this study when I asked if she could participate.

I interviewed Dakota in her apartment, where she resides with her fiancée and her two boys. Her place was very clean and simply furnished. She has several dresses hung on racks and manikins. Dakota was getting ready for an upcoming fashion show.

Telling the Story

Dakota spoke about her experiences in the refugee camp and in Minnesota with openness, sincerity and clarity. She was very comfortable narrating her story during the interview, simply because we knew each other for a while and she trusted me. Dakota spoke with great sadness and sorrow in her voice about her physical and sexual abuse at home. She got choked up and cried as she remembered her experiences sleeping in the church parking lot and open apartment building every night to avoid the physical and the sexual abuse she was experiencing at home. She had a difficult time speaking about the sexual molestation by her uncle Jack. I asked Dakota to stop if she felt uncomfortable talking about those traumatizing events. She responded that she was all right.

The story about the diagnoses and the death of Malak, Dakota's daughter, was the hardest part of the interview. Dakota was sobbing hard but she did not want to stop. She said it is therapeutic for her talking about it. It was very powerful that, at the end of the interview, Dakota spoke with hope and enthusiasm about her future plans for herself and her sons. She was calm, relaxed and it felt like there was weight that was lifted off her chest. It was a remarkable interview.

Dakota

Life in the refugee camp was not safe

I came from a refugee camp. It was a small camp called Dima. It was set up in the border of Ethiopia. Dima is like a bit little further south from Gambela. Gambela is where a lot of my family members lived at the time but, because of the civil war in Sudan, they relocated a lot of people there to a small camp there until the war was done.

The refugee camp, it wasn't really a small camp. It was a small town also, but a lot of the Nuer people who were there, they were put in sections as far as where like they would live. Each section would be labeled with alphabets and I remember we lived in a section called A, and each section has like its own group of Nuer people. Like there is Gadjak, and there Gadjok. There were two different Nuer groups. I am from the Gadjak family of Nuer. And there were mostly on the A and the other ones are outside of the mountain so, in order to get to that, you have to walk very far. And everyone was segregated, too, because they were fighting amongst each other as well.

It was not safe. It was safe at some part just because it was on the border side of Ethiopia, and it was safe from the rest of the war. But it wouldn't, amongst each other it was not safe because people were fighting each other for some reason. Like I remember three wars that broke out just because. I never really understood what the problem was but the Gadjok and the Gadjak were always fighting each other, so whenever a person from my group went to the other side they would attack them.

There is also another tribe called Aniwak and these guys were also part Ethiopian and part Sudan as well. They did not like the Nuer people as a whole as well. They were always try to attack them and wiped them out as much as they can because they did not like them there. And that would happen all the time. It was pretty bad. It affects the whole entire village whenever the war broke [out]. But it would happen so quickly and everyone runs in one direction, chasing other people or whatever, but there was a lot of killing as well.

America was beyond my imagination

I came in May 13, 1996. I was 8 years old and I never understood why we came to the US. I never wanted to come. I spoke some of the basic words because we did study it when we were in Africa. It was basics like hi, hello and how are you? Things like that.

I only hear what's like living in America. I was use my own imagination try to think about what's it like and it was like a fairy tale kind of. That's something that's beyond my imagination. They used to say that the roads are as smooth like a glass and I used to think it's smooth as the glass or shiny as the glass. "Oh there are lights everywhere," and I think there is a lights glowing candles everywhere, like that kind of thing. And then, as far as the weather, they would say, "There is snow," and I did not

know what snow and I did not have a clue of what is snow was so, when they described it, I was thinking like it's a flower or like a white sand or sugar that cover that whole land, but I never imagined that it was cold, the temperature would be. There were my imaginations.

I came it was kind of how I imagined it, but not exactly like it. I was shocked to see buildings and there were lights everywhere, and the roads were smooth but, of course, not a glass and there was car everywhere. Back in Africa, you don't see cars. You see the loading trucks they pack people up from the back and things like that. That's what I was used to, so when I came here it was shocking to me that people own a car or owns an apartment or a house or anything like that. Everything was just too perfect.

I remember a lot when we moved here. I was questioning a lot. You are wondering that you are here now and what kind of world is this and what would you expect. It's definitely out of expectations from where you come from. Because in Africa there is a land where you can run free and do whatever. You wonder and nothing you have to worry about, except the war only. But when you come here, you don't know what to do. You don't know if you just got outside or you should just do the things you do in Africa or if I have to change. What kind of changes do I have to go through to make that. It was a lot of curiosity in your head. It took a little while but because I was a little kid, it probably wasn't that hard to get used to it.

I was not able to connect with other kids in school

Once I started school, then I was able to learn few more things about the country yourself. I was really quiet, very, very quiet. There were social workers that were involved and they take us to like parks and you still don't know what to do, like hang on or swing on. Yeah. It took a while. I think it took me like about two years to finally pick up the life here.

To be honest, it took my whole life to finally understand the country. There is so much you have to learn. You have to know the law, the rule, the regulation, the living skills and all that stuff and it was not easy. You need the right people to guide you, because if you did not have it at the time, you pretty much don't really go anywhere. You kind get stuck in the same box and then live with the struggle of trying to maintain your life here.

But when I did start school, in my childhood, it was only hard because friends were pretty hard to connect with. I mean of kids did not really like you. There was a lot of racism going on, lot of segregation going on. Like other kids will segregate themselves from you that you would find yourself alone, and then, when the school is over, there is this set up for kids that they try to jump you or test you or do something crazy, and you

kind of don't know what to do at all. It's a scary feeling at the same time, but meanwhile, I felt like I have to fight back and when I did that, some of the kids kind of started to show respect like and I started to have friends, even though it was only two friends at that time, but it was good enough.

Once you make a connection and find someone who accepts you and finally wants to be your friend, you to start to feel a little better. And there was another little boy who was really kind to me and he was like my tutor and he would help me in some words and stuff. But, of course, the first thing you have to learn is bad words so when you were a kid.

I had to be bad to fit in

And when you go home on the bus, kids automatically fills up the seats even though there were empty ones that you can sit there, you don't know if you supposed to force yourself to sit there or just stand up on the bus. I mean, you can't stand on the bus because that's the rule of the bus, or if you go all the way back and there are kids who are picking on you, pull your hair, slap you in the back of your head, some crazy stuff like that. It was like a nightmare.

That took a while and then it kind of led me to the route that I felt that I have to [be] bad to fit in. I was still really quiet, I mean. I wasn't like really bad because I did not know how to be bad. But if a kid was to pick on me, we would fight at the bus stop. So when the school is over, were going to meet at the bus stop at three p.m. and fight. That was the deal and I went for it.

Most of the fights came from African Americans. They hated Africans. They can't stand Africans. I think it was their advantage to finally have a different race to pick on. The way I dress, the way I look. It was like nothing they have seen before. They will call you like anything they can think of.

White people were not that bad, they were not at all. I didn't have any problem with white people. I mean I had. I had a couple of white friends but there were some white kids like the ones that were kind of influenced by the African Americans. They would be like the back side laughter and they just kind of giggle but in the end, there were not that bad. Like they did not want to face you and fight you. So it was fine it was mostly African Americans and there were the hardest one to deal with.

I felt worse about myself when I knew what special education meant

When I reached middle school, all that drama ended. Now it was more about fighting for the education level. Because you consider, Special Ed, you consider ESL

level. So when I finally understood ESL was I remember some of the kids say it was for those special kids. I used to think special kids like you are special, you are cool or whatever. And when I finally learned exactly what that means, I felt worse about myself.

Yes, it's English as a second language but other kids would tease you for like retarded kids or something. They did understand that we spoke other languages, but because they know we don't know, they used to mess with our heads. So I would fight with the education, some of the advanced classes, I would not get accepted into it because I was not good enough for it or I was not ready for that level, until I had to prove myself that I was as good as any other advanced or honor students.

And when I finally understood the education system, like kids who go to school to special education class all their life until graduation they have a lower rank of education, you know and I did not want to be in that level. I wanted to graduate with some honors or advanced classes, you know. Because when I was in Africa, I was really advanced, so there is no point that I should be considered less than that when I am here.

I started to fit in at school but things got harder at home

When I finally showed that, they started to see a little bit and they did accept some of it. I was one of the best students when it comes to writings in English and I started to pick up with English very well, and Art and creativity, even in sport. I decided to join sports and get myself involved in a lot of the education. I was always one of the best basketball players, soccer, and those types of sports. That was brought me up. When I finally got to that level, I start to feel like I am fitting in, and when I hit end of middle school and the beginning of high school that was things got harder at home.

With me being at home, I was more involved in the activities but my family were not supportive, still that culture thing that come up. Most of my friends were mixed. They were African Americans, there were white, there were Hispanics, and there were other groups. And my family would always criticize me saying that you can't hang out with black people because they are going to come one day and kill you or take you away or kidnap you and you disappear. Pretty much what they see on TV, they kind of base their life on that. And I was just ignore it because I knew they did not understand.

But in the meanwhile, it kind of got worse where I would come home from school at like 5:30 p.m., when school activities were over. They did not understand that all either. Even if I said, "I am doing this and doing that," they will still criticize and say, "That's not education. This is just making up excuses to be out late." And then when you become a young woman from a girl, it get even worse. They use for other things. Even if you do something good, they don't see it. They still take it as negative in every single way. And no matter how truthful you are, it's not enough.

And it got worse because I was suspected a lot and I get beat when I come late and that did not work. I still kept whatever I was doing and it got to the point I've been accused to sleeping with guys and say all these things. I did not know of any sexual activity at the time. And it's like teaching me something that I don't know of. When I left Africa, I know they probably have stupid rules for girls, but I did not have to go through that in Africa because I came really in a young age.

I hated my life at home

For me to have to go through that here in America, it was also another hard thing. I could not introduce my friends to them. I can't even have my friends come around, no matter how nice and how kind they are. Even when I have like a study buddy, I was not allowed to go to their house so I had to go against their rules and do it. So they really hated me for it and I started to hated the life at home, and then I would do more school activities, find more reasons. And then another way, they always have me watch the kids, work around the house, do all that stuff because, when you hit that age, that's when they train you to become the woman and when you leave the house to get married at that young. I did not know that was the plan. But when it finally came down to it, I said no, I am not going to get married.

I was 13 when they started talking about those things. There were a lot of people that come in the house. There were always people coming in and out living in the house. Like maybe for two months it would be a guy living in the house. My Uncle had a total of four kids. I was in charge of everything. They would always have a lot of company and whenever there were so many companies in the house I would be the one cooking, cleaning and serving them. That was my life in the house. And also I have to get the kids ready for bed, bath and take care of them during the day. Their mother was never home. She was always out doing something. If she is not with her friends, she is working or out of town and my uncle Jack is always with his buddies. And usually around the evening and they stay up until like two or four in the morning. There will be a good number of five to ten men in the house having their social moment.

And it was time for me read to go to bed, I can't go to bed because the kids don't want to go to bed. You know and even when I want to send them to bed, then the parent will always yell or snap at me saying you can't force to go to bed or you can't do this. And even if I explained to them that I have homework, I have things to do and I can't be tired. It affect my school work a lot where I would miss the bus then I have to go to them to give me a ride to school and they would blame on me and say that I was slacking in school that I don't want to go to school anymore. Those kinds of excuses.

The school started to notice that there is something wrong

It came down to the point that I did not want to ask anymore. I would walk to school or start learning how to navigate the bus. If I miss my school bus every time, I would do that, and then I am late for the first class hour. For a lot of times it really affected my first and second hour of class because I would have to retake those classes in the summer. And when I am in the classroom, I am really tired in the morning. It's hard for me to focus, to even catch up in a lot of the lectures. And the teacher would start to wonder like what going on, like they would pull me aside and start to ask me questions. I did not know how to explain that to them. So I was really quiet for the most part and I did not want to talk about it.

Until time and time went by and kind made it really serious and I know you know it got some other people involved. They would sign me to counselor. They got me to talk and I finally start to speak about my life at home it's not easy. I am always babysitting and if I am not babysitting, I am up cooking and cleaning or doing other house chores. And I did not think there would be a way they would understand that at all. So I just tell them I am fine, I will get through it, and it's not a big deal. They would say, it's a big deal and interrogate my problem and I become more emotional and don't want talk about it. There were times that I started skipping school because I did not want to be approached anymore.

I was physically abused at home

My uncle beat me. All that beating became a monthly thing and I became overly exhausted and I became more sad and much more quiet and depressed. That when the school decided to take things seriously because there was something going on the whole entire year.

I got tired of being beat all the time so whenever I am expecting it, I would like lock myself in my room and then he would get more angry and mad about that. And that did not work either. So I would like take a walk and when he does not find me in my room, I would get in trouble again. When I got beat really hard with like a curtain rod, that's when it hit and I decided to run away from home and I probably ran away like maybe a lot quite a few times. And I would like probably sleep at a church, (crying) back yard, and other times I would sleep at any apartment that's opened in their hallway 'til morning come, then go back home and get ready for school.

And that did not help. The beating still continued. I started to talking to his wife about it, but she did not say a word. She just ignored it or passed it and say, "You probably making up excuses or maybe you should just change your life around. Maybe you should just do this." I was like how come you don't understand? Now we are in a different country, how I am supposed to ...

My uncle was abusive to his wife, too. There was another cousin that lived in the house and her name was Mary and I was happy having her around. We were the same age and we went to the same school for two years and one day Jack decided to take her to the bus station and send her back to Iowa. I came back home and I did not know where she was but I knew what had happened. I did not ask where is she. I called her and talked to her and she said, "I don't know why he send me back." Even until today, she doesn't know why she was sent back and then when she got sent back.

It was not just a physical abuse; I was sexually abused by my uncle

That's the stage when foster care started to come up. Because it did not become a physical abuse anymore. Now it became a sexual abuse by my uncle. The more I was involved with the activities, the more – no matter how truthful I was, he had to examine me to be sure that I was not having sex every month and then when he kept doing that – it was the most unimaginable thing in the world. I just could not handle it. Like, I started to think about suicide.

He would teach me all the time saying that it's a normal thing. If you are back home and you don't want to get married, and you are hanging out with guys, even your own father would examine you. And I asked him how and why. It did not make sense. He said it was part of the culture, so probably for the first two times, I would get confused thinking really, it is part of the culture. But how am I supposed to live on like this and thinking that it's always normal. And but anyway, it did not feel right to me.

I talked to his wife about it. I brought it up to her attention. She did not believe me. She thought I was lying. So to her I was no hope. I had no one to talk to about it. I kind of felt ashamed. I did not know it was ok to talk about it. You know. So I kept it in a lot. Meanwhile I started to become so fearful, what if he will do more than that. How would I handle it? I was still a virgin. I don't know anything about sex. And then that's when I finally told the school of what's going at home for months. I finally told the school.

The school took action and notified authorities

The school was shocked and I had doubt that they won't believe me. This is some crazy thing. They won't believe that. It's part of my culture. They wouldn't understand. That's how I started thinking and then after a while, I think one day I got beat really bad and I had scars on my back and was my eyes were really swollen. It was not normal. My uncle forced me not to go school that day. And so I had to wait until he couldn't see me or anything. Where I have to leave the house early or find a way to get to school later that

day. And I went to school, and when I went to school, that's when they were finally able to see the evidence of what I was talking about.

I snuck out of the window. So when they finally saw that, they started to take it a little serious. They called the police and the police came and send me down to a private room and asked me what's going and what happened. I told them and explained to them. When I finally told them what happened, first they did gave me what to expect. They said they had to investigate this first, make sure that this has been happening to you because a lot of time kids could make up lies against their parents. When I heard that I lost hope and was thinking, why would I lie about that? I don't know anything about lie. I always respect them and whatever they asked me to, I have done it.

The police wanted to interview my uncle so I got scared and ran away from home

And so they wanted to call Jack and have an interview with him. I got scared. And I told them, please don't talk to him to know that I talked to you guys. And they said they have to do it so they can find out so they know what's the next step it's going to be. "Ok," I told them, "I am scared, I am scared to go back home because now he is going to know and what's he is going to do to me?" And I just had to swallow it and I said whatever it's going to happen it's going to happen. I lost my faith in god. I did not know if anything was possible anymore.

So when I went home, for the first couple of nights, I slept more outside. And I think when I finally didn't want to go back home, I had to think of – I just did not know what I was going to do next. I was ready to give up. Anyway, that's where Joan, our neighbor, came looking for me. She would come over. I would usually go to her house and do like sewing stuff with her and she when she knew that I was not coming anymore, she came by and asked about me, if I was home and that they didn't see me coming by. My uncle closed the door on her and didn't want to talk to her.

Something told me to go her house that morning like 9 a.m., after I was sleeping outside. I haven't been at home. I went to her and when she saw me, she just looked at me like, what happened? She knew a little bit about my life at home but she didn't know that it was extreme. And then I came in and I sat in the house and I asked if I can sit here for a couple of hours. And then she really freaked out when she saw some of the bruises. She said that she was looking for me, and asked where were I was staying all night. She said that she will go and talk to them and that I can stay here for a week or two till things are settled up. I told her that will be great because the police is investigating back at the house.

And when she went over there and talk to them, Jack told her that we don't know anything to do with her. She is just a problem. That's what they told her and they closed the door. She said, "I was like, 'ok,' and now I don't know what to do. And I just did not know what to say, but I was grateful that at least she will keep me with her for a week. So I stayed with her and then that's when she got the county involved.

Social services got involved and I stayed with my neighbor

She had to do some background check, but in the meanwhile I stayed with her like two months until they found – I remember she said that they are looking for a social worker for you to work with you. And the school and Joan all got involved. The school finally took it serious and they started to talk to Joan and have me stay with her. And the police was still investigating Jack and they were looking for a social [worker] that would permanently work with me, and then when they find you, they told that there going to be a lady who is going to be working with you. She is from Sudan and I think I was like part of Sudan. I hope it's not the Sudan.

They told me you name and I immediately knew that you were from the other side. I was anxious to meet you and then when we finally met and the process of finding foster care for me has started. I was happy living with Joan at the time even though that her house was a complete different. That was the only place that I was comfortable with because I used to be in her house and go back and forth from her house to Jack's house. Then they said that we have to transfer you to a different foster home because until Joan can get a foster home license. She has a lot of history. That's why she was not able to become my foster mother. So when the result finally came back, I am here at the new foster home now. It was in West Saint Paul.

Living with an American family was different and challenging

Being with Joan for the first two months, it was different. They had a routine that you would get up every morning, there is breakfast, go to school. And if there is no school like Saturday, then we have to help around the house and do some chores. Then on Sunday, we go to church every Sunday and I would have to go with them every Sunday. It's a family thing that everybody has to.

I was ok with it because I totally forgot the religion that I was born from anyway. Like I lost all my faith in God and I was not religious anyway. And then it didn't really matter to me. I said maybe this will be good for me and I started going to church with them. Just to pick and stuff. I still don't know exactly where I am born from at that time.

My family from Sudan are Protestants. And I found that two years ago when I went back home. So I listened to the rules and I did what they told me to do. It was hard

to get up in the morning but on the weekend I would sleep in in the room they gave me, and I was sharing it with Stacy.

It was hard because I have to learn about people with disabilities. Or people with special needs. It was so new to me because I did not know. She had autism. Yes in autism, their brain function backwards or something like that. I was scared because I did not know how to interact with her. We were sharing a bunk bed. I sleep on the top and she sleeps in the bottom. And she was attached to the kitties and I did not care about animals. I was scared of dogs.

They had a big dog, I was scared of him and I would have nightmares of that dog thinking that dog will come into the room at night and eat me or something. So I would like curl up in my bed and stay up in the bunk bed so I can make sure the dog wasn't around until I got used to the dog and all that stuff.

With Stacy, I did not get used to her at all. I was doing my own thing. The other kid was a boy and he would take me out with his friends, the boys, but they would do some crazy stuff like throwing eggs at people's windows and drive in the middle of the highway backwards. And I was really thinking, is this how kids behave in this country? It was so new to me and I couldn't fit in that either and decided to just stay at home. I don't need to go out. I felt that they were not really a normal family. They were so different but I respect them and their values and stuff. I just didn't know that I would ever be that way.

I got sick eating different food outside my culture

And the food they would eat, I did not know what I was eating at the time really. I just eat what I know and I what I am used to eat at school. I eat at the house but then when I finally learned what pork was, knew it's the same category of the pig. We never eat pig back where I am from or even here, so I started to get really sick and I couldn't handle the food anymore. My body was changing in a bad way. So I got depressed over that and I started to have constipation and hemorrhoids, which I never had before, and I started missing my culture food.

So Joan thought about and then she said, "Let me buy you something you can eat." I start to make food like what I normally eat. She was pretty open and she wanted me to help me. That's when she decided to sign me up in modeling agency. She helped me with my sewing and creativity. I was into that and I was not doing anything else. When it come to the chores in the house, I did not know what do. So this person vacuums today or did the dishes, if I have to vacuum I don't know where to vacuum. So I would be really confused.

I wanted to live with my neighbor but I did not want her to adopt me

For her, I did know if she actually have a depression or not but she would tell me sometimes that if I am not on my medication I would go crazy. And I was like, "Oh, ok." Then I brush it off and walk away because I did not know how to respond to that. And I was like, "I don't want to see you without your medication, but if you are normal I really wanted to help with the house chores but I really don't know from where to start." Because if I start to pick up stuff and put here, everybody will freak out in the house. Like where did stuff go, don't touch this or don't put this so I was like, then I can't do anything. So it seemed like I was not helping around the house. It was really hard but I got transferred from their house to the foster care and I did not want to go but I knew that's what the law required anyway.

I felt like I have to get used to whatever I was in the moment. And for her, she cried, too, and she did not want me to go. She wanted to adopt me and all that stuff. And then I backed off from that because I did not want to get adopted. I didn't want my last name to be a blank. I thought that my name is what really makes me who I am so, if I had to change it, I would forget who I am and my background. That's why I did not want to get really adopted. But I said, "I like that you guys wanted to adopt me because it make me feel like I am your daughter and I will always be your daughter from a different background."

I couldn't get along with my new foster mother

We settled that and she helped me with the modeling school and we finished that and then I went to foster care in West Saint Paul. She wasn't somebody that I would get along with. She was a big smoker in the car, in the house, in the patio, every single place. I was like, "Can't you go a minute without your cigarette?" And then like questions that I would ask her, seems like it's kind of offensive to her. Like she would be irritated if I said, "Stop smoking for a day." Yes, she did not like it when I said that and she gets frustrated. She says, "You know, honey, you have to deal with it." I was like white people got tempers. (laughing). That was my assumption. I got to know her daughter. She was always in her own world. She never got along with her mom. I think she ran away few times too. They had their own issues. And there was a little girls who also there. Their names were Tiggy or Tigger.

She wanted me to come with her when she takes care of her animals even though I did not want to go, but I liked that she was helping out animals, but there were litter everywhere and the house was filthy with animals smell. Then we started fighting about rooms. The room I was staying in, it was like the den size. I can't close my door all the time. She said that like it's locking out to the rest of the world. And I was like, "Let me be in my room. I want to be in my room." She did not like that. She says, "That not your room." I did not understand that at all. "Well, I know it's your house and the room is in

your house.” She says, “Yes, it’s my house.” She always make these corrections that’s unnecessary and I did not like it so we start to fight.

She felt that she had to go there every single day to investigate my room. And I was like, “You need to come in here all the time? You don’t need to be in here. I thought it was my area where I would have a little privacy.” She was like, “My house, my rules, my way and I can go there anytime I want to,” and I just got really mad. This just brought memories of my uncle walking into my room all the time thinking it’s ok to walk into my room.

I said, “Do I need to get a lock for it to keep you out?” She did not like that either and she thought that I was so dramatic so stubborn and hard-headed. The more she push it, the more I rebel against it. There were times that I thought I have to deal with it. This is better where I was coming from anyways. And I think when the drama picked up this is when I got switched to a different foster home. I was in Burnsville, with the Stern family. Their child went to high school with me. I don’t remember that I lived with them before Helen, my relative, but I remember that I lived with Helen. I only think that I stayed two weeks at that lady’s house in West Saint Paul.

Changing homes and changing school were very difficult

So when I lived with Helen, I did not want to transfer my school so I would take the bus to go to East view high but I had to be transferred to Burnsville high school for the second semester of 11th grade. I did not like Burnsville at all because I felt like I had to make new friends. The reason that I wanted to stay at East View was because I was finally involved with something.

I was finally involved, I used. I made best friends there, girls I can talk to at anytime so I did want to leave because of that. So when I got transferred to Burnsville, I did not like it and I missed a lot of days in school until I met these two girls. But I did not get to know them until the end of the school year. Because at the beginning, they kind of knew me, but they said that we never see you and I never really talked to them. I did not like the school. They became my friends and, once they became my friends, then I started to like Burnsville. And now I felt like I was adjusted and I would get involved in like the African night and other programs and stuff there and I was taking creative writing as an honor classes until I went to senior high school and I was still taking honor classes.

I was raped while I was living with a relative

I stayed with Helen, my relative for about 6 months. This is when I dated this guy from Tennessee, who later became my first child’s father. I traveled to Tennessee to visit him, and I came back to Minnesota Helen’s uncle came decided to take me somewhere. This is when the rape case happened. It was 4 a.m., I was losing a lot of blood and I was

crying. I did not want to show my emotion in front of Helen, but she saw that I was upset and I told her what happened. She did not know what to do and then I decided to go to school. I got sent to the nurse's office. I was having these weird things started coming out of my skin. And then when they contacted social services.

I got sent to the emergency room that same day and gave me antibiotic and other medicine. I don't remember what they found but I was losing a lot of blood and then that was it. Then the case and the trials and everything that went on. The whole Nuer community got involved and asked me to forgive him. Now in East Africa, when a girl get raped in our culture, then they have to get married to him kind of case.

I was begged by family not to press charges because the rapist is a member of my tribe

My sister from back home she called me, and my mother called me. They begged not to press charges on him and let him go and we can do the culture thing, talk. And usually when a guy do something like this in our culture, you have to pay certain amount of cows to the girl's family and I was like what will that lead to? A lot of times it will lead to marriage but if the girl does not want get married, he still has to pay like \$5000 fee or whatever to the girl's family. And I did not want to do all that cultural stuff. I was like no. I wanted him to get arrested and that's it. Yeah. I don't care about cows and money and all that stuff.

He was charged for second degree, fifth degree. He was in jail for six months. They said he could not be arrested and get jailed for like 25 years or something. And when everybody made a big deal, even his sisters called me threatening me and yelling at me and saying, "How could you do this to my brother? You are such an evil child," all that stuff. I was just hang up on her. I didn't even go to court with him and they heard all that stuff. They say you ruined this guy's life, and all these things.

I did not press charges. With the whole culture thing got involved, the fact that my mother crying on the phone begging me not do this. And I said only if you can understand. But I am pretty sure they wouldn't understand. If this a normal thing in our culture then I feel sorry for a lot of girls. I really do. It's not only me now. I am learning something I did not know that this is part of life. And so because of my mom, I listened to her, and I said it's fine. The only thing I had to do was not to show up in court.

Disowned by the Nuer community

It was too much and so I learned his lesson from that, too. It became viral and everyone knew that I was this girl who put men in jail. And I was known as this girl who does not know her culture anymore, who is just lost, and I started to get more rejections

and they used to say that you are not one of our people anymore. You are betrayal and all that stuff.

I was no longer considered. Even all my family in Iowa, I was no longer part of them. Nobody would even talk to me, nobody would even – they would call me a lost girl in America. Or like she is no longer Nuer. She no longer knows her people. She is a nobody.

No matter how many times that story comes about sexual abuse, people just cover their ears

Now when my uncle case got involved at the time, I was the bad one in the house. My uncle was trying to do his job. No matter how many times that story comes about sexual abuse, people just cover their ears like that's not true and you are just making that up. You are just an evil child or whatever. Even when my uncle who was staying with Jack at the time and did a sexual assault, he was charged and went to jail

This is when I was living at my uncle Jack's house and that was the time when all the sexual abuse was happening there was a man living there. That man who lived with us at that time was the only relative that would understand me and I could talk to him about anything and I needed help that he would help without a question. He was a really good uncle. And then he got too comfortable that he was trying to lead me to somehow be comfortable with him and it just go the point. He would tickle me and laugh and he would joke and I would laugh so hard, you know.

But that one day he was like tickling me and it started to lead to something more aggressive. Yeah. And then he would like pick me up. Then he his hands get more tied on me. And I was like, "Let me go now." And then he almost like did not hear me or could not hear me. He was tickling me and touching me and then he was start like blow bubbles on a baby's belly, he would do that on my chest. It was going too far and it, he was getting stronger, so I started fighting to get off. And to him it was different case. When I finally slipped off his hands, I got extremely uncomfortable and scared and I finally got away. I ran out of my room and ran outside and then next day I could not look at him

I just did not look at him at all and he was living in the house, too. If he was upstairs, I would go outside and then I would wait 'til he is not there but he is always in the house. He was not working, so it was extremely uncomfortable for me. He started to side with Jack and then they both thought they can do whatever they want to do. He was supportive of Jack on whatever he was doing. And then I was like, "You, I would put this case worse on that it is on my Uncle Jack. At first, you treat like your child and the next you do this to me? You are supposed to be a family to me." The cops talked to him. They pressed charges on him and he hated me ever since.

He could not stand to see me. When I was staying at Joan's, the kids would call me and would come up to me, but he would literally throw a rock at me and yell, "Get away from here! I don't want to see you here! Don't come near this grass!" And I do it just to piss him off. I was like, "At the end of the day, you are the one who will be going to jail," because he is not supposed to be there. He can't be anywhere near where I am at. And then would get up and go inside the house and I would play with the kids and do my own business. I can't be the bad of person for someone to hate with passion.

Now I am the one who destroyed our culture and I had to accept it and say that's fine. I am the one who destroyed everything there is nothing I can do about it. I don't know how even to act so culturalistic with all these evil going on in here, and I started to think maybe it's because I don't have my family here and my birth mom and dad are not here. None of my siblings are here. I am the only one here and I am a girl. And then I started looking for my parents and I missed them a lot.

I asked God why did he bring me here

Sometimes I get angry at them and ask why they send me here in the US and then other times I was like, why they didn't even look for me? And there was other times I really miss them. I want to go back to Ethiopia and be with them. That the life I was meant to be. This isn't for me. And other times I would ask God, why did you bring me here? Why do I have to go through all of this? It does not make sense.

And then when the county brought up too. And they said, "Who is your birth parents?" and started to get involved. Then they looked for my birth parents. I wrote a letter, but that letter did not go back to me until four years later and I already forgotten and hated my parents. They did not care about me so why would I care about them? And then the letter came back to me and in the letter was from my mother. But I got this letter way later when I got off foster care. They could not find them. There was this option where if they did find them, they might help them to come to the US. And I really wanted that to happen. This is when you convinced me to get my citizenship.

I was really happy when I got my citizenship. All I could think of when I got my citizenship is that I am a citizen of this country now and I can bring my parents to the US. But no one could find them. I wrote letters and I even asked other families in Iowa if they knew my parents' number and no one would give it to me. My Uncle Jack and his wife knew but they never gave it to me all my life. The county even looked for them but could not find them. So I just gave up on them. I would never know who were my parents and I will be stuck in this country and I will never go back home.

Moving to a third foster home

I was felt that was the beginning of my life, starting a new chapter. But I think at that time, too, with the Stern family. I liked the father and the son but the mother and daughter did not talk to me that much. They were isolated. Especially Ann herself, she was isolated. She would come home herself from work and go straight to her room. If she sees me there she does not even say hi or ask how was my day she just goes to her room and always there. I was afraid to even ask her questions because I felt she was trying to avoid me.

I was unable to communicate with my new foster mother

And then when I finally asked her, the whole time she never liked how I asked her. And I did not know that until she finally snapped. She said if you asked me for a ride, or anything like that, you have to say please, may I. All these proper English words but I didn't know any of it. Yeah. I got quiet. I did not know that. Because usually I would ask and say, "Can I get a ride to whatever or so and so," I say, "Can I," [or] "If that ok if you can give me a ride here?" or I say, "I have to be at this place, can you take me?" That's the way I would ask but nope, she did not like them at all. She said you are supposed to say, "Please can you give me a ride here or like..." Please have to be in the beginning of the sentence. Just that word. And I was like, "You don't have to snap at me and so." I said, "If you don't like to give a ride, that fine. All you have to say, I don't want to give you a ride." She never say, "No, I can't give you a ride," but she was never happy to give me a ride. Yeah, and to me it felt like it's something she has to do, that she was forced to do it. I would have my friends over in my room and it's so depressing. Even my friends did not feel comfortable coming. They ask, "What's wrong with your foster mother? She does not like us here." And then I say, "That how she is."

I came to find out the answer a couple of years later. Tom was really awesome. He was the one who comes and tell me it's time to eat, are you hungry or whatever. He would make really good food. I did not like Beth food much. It feels like she never wanted to cook. And food was always locked up. You can't just go in the kitchen and get some food. So I would have to wait 'til Tom makes some food. I never understood why they locked the food. Do white people always lock up their food? I did not get that.

But Kate was like this brat. She was very close to her mom and they are like best friends. She is always in her room listening to her music, play with her make up. Whenever she would come down, we would tease her, oh come down, Look-at-me Kate. And she was like why are you guys do this. She always gets sensitive and it was fun to watch. And even in school, we don't know each other. She is like this popular girl and she was like one of the cool girls in school and we will always tease her. Kate, you are too cool for us in school. And she is like, "No, no, no, it's like that." And I say that's a fake white girl acting. We were always like make her annoyed. We did not really care. She could be whatever she would like to be. And then with the other son, he was in

college and he was quiet, though. There is nothing you could get out of him, but he was cool. At least he would say, “Hi, how are you doing?” It’s only them two (mother and daughter).

I felt isolated and unwanted in the foster home

One day I was stressed and I felt like I am so lonely and isolated from the whole entire house and I felt that I was unwanted. I wrote a letter on the computer and I forgot to close it. So it was sitting there and I came back from school and I saw her sitting there crying in front of the computer and then I was like, shit it’s my letter. So I had to pretend that I did not see anything and I went to my room. And I was quiet sitting in my room the whole time and thinking, man, I hurt her feelings. Yeah, but I just felt really awkward after that . Later that evening she came and knocked at my door saying that she wanted to talk to me. And I was saying, “Oh crap, what is she going to say? I don’t know.” She finally talked to me and said, “I saw your letter. Is that how you feel?” I kept quiet and did not want to say anything that will make her cry more but then I said, “Yeah, that how I felt. You really don’t care. Why are you a foster mother when you can’t help your foster kids? I don’t think think I was a trouble maker and I could be starving here all day and you wouldn’t care.” She said, “I am [not] used to it, this is new to me.”

“I thought I could ask you if I really needed. I don’t have a choice. You are the only one that I can ask if I needed anything, even if it’s personal or if I have a personal issue. You are the only that I could think of that I can talk to. If something happened in my situation that I would come to you but the way you are so isolated,” and I don’t remember how the conversation ended but she said she would really hurt and offended. I did not know if I should apologize to her so I kept quiet. And after a while, I talked to you, and I don’t know if they called and told you about it. I can’t remember how the conversation went.

Moving back with the foster mother in West Saint Paul

They were uncomfortable knowing that I was not happy. That’s why I got transferred out of her foster care and then I went back to West Saint Paul and when I was told that I was going to West Saint Paul and it’s going to be temporary, too, I did not like going back there. I was like I don’t want to deal with that lady again, but this time it got worse. Like we were arguing so much to a point she had to call a meeting. And then social services called a meeting. I went to my aunt Sofi and she drove me all the way to Iowa. It was social services, her, and the foster mom and Sofi was there. One the meeting we got talk about the problems at the house and she got frustrated when I was talking about the issues that I had in the house that she (foster mother) stopped and said that she had to go for a cigarette break. I was like does she gets a cigarette break? (Laughing). I was like, she got anger issues.

My social worker then told me something and I just accepted it. She said be happy that you got food and shelter. And focus on your school, finish your school and you are going to be done with the foster care. That's how I accepted it.

Moving back with Joan, the neighbor

After that, I stayed with Joan. I finally stayed with Joan till my graduation and stuff. As soon as I turned 18, I thought I was out of the foster care system and I could go back and stay with Joan. But the county wanted me to stay in foster care 'til I graduate from high school. So I moved back with that lady in West Saint Paul. I was like, I couldn't handle being in her house and I had my daughter when I was in her house, and there was so much smoking in the house and I said, "You can't even go outside your patio for a new born baby?" And she was getting pissed off me closing the door. But I would close the door anyway and put a towel underneath so that no bad air comes in and I don't even hold the baby at all. She wanted to hold and see the baby and I was like, no. She was having all these red dots in her skin I was even disgusted with that. So, no, she never held the baby.

Then I would leave more often with the baby and stay at Joan's house. And she was not happy about that and said, "She is never home." And I was like, "I don't want to be here." When the argument happened and graduation happened, then I left to school to go to Joan. The county said that you can leave foster care, but you can't take your daughter 'til you prove that you are capable of taking care of her. Because they thought I was too young and wouldn't not be able to take care of the baby.

The baby was with me. I never leave the baby with Joan or anyone else. She (foster mother) offered to take care of the baby and I said no. I got so furious that's the last person in the world I would have her take care of my baby. This baby would not survive day with that woman. But my baby got sick and started to get like asthma and other respiratory problem. So we would take her in and she was diagnosed with reflux.

Moving out of foster care

I left foster care and the county said you are free to go live with Joan if you want. I did not want to live with her because the house was just too filthy and it was not safe for my daughter either. I took some parenting classes and I passed so I took my daughter with me. So I was really happy with that and now I am registering for school and I applied for the education training vouchers through my social worker. I got the education

voucher to get an apartment. And I got that one bedroom apartment in Richfield and then I moved in. Then around that, a couple of months right before I started school, I signed up at MCTC and I got accepted there to take all my general classes, then my daughter went with her dad. It was safer to have my child live with her dad and so she went and lived with her dad for three months while I was getting everything situated. Got the apartment, got comfortable. Then started school.

I was working part time at McDonalds. It was not my first job. Because when I was with Jack, I worked at McDonald and I was 14 at that time but it was for a little bit. And then I worked at Burger King and it was not even that long because of the problems I had at home and I got fired. I got fired twice from those. When I was with the Stern, I worked at a textile and I worked there for a long time. It was my first job that I kept for a year and half. I had to leave because I was transferred to West Saint Paul. It was hard to find transportation or a way to get to work. I just focused in school and took a lot of classes, graduated sooner and now I am in my own.

When I get the apartment, I started to get comfortable with school and then I got a part time job in McDonald. So now I am working there, then my daughter came back after 3 months. I moved in like September and she came back around January. And I was like I was ready to have her back. She was a toddler then and then Joan would watch her. That's when the drama started between me and her father. We broke up and went separate ways. And that when I got pregnant with John around the same time. I was in that apartment.

When I started knowing my boyfriend at that time really well, he disappeared often and one time he disappeared for few months and I did not know where he was. The relationship became really hard and I did not want to be with him anymore. I got affected by him. I was pregnant at the time. I got a volunteer leave from the management of the complex. I did not how to fight that. I took that volunteer leave rather than having an eviction in my record. And I had to look for a place to stay and I only had 10 days to evacuate the apartment.

Getting into fashion design

At the time, my fashion design has just started when I did a pageant. I wanted to participate in pageant but, because I was pregnant, I couldn't, so I designed the clothes and decide to join the pageant for the year after. A guy saw one of my designs on a mannequin and he asked if I designed this dress and I said yes. He said let's have a showcase your work. Maybe you can't be a contestant but we can show your designs. I said ok and he begged the organizers of the pageant to sponsor me and I showed three dresses and it took off.

Another organizer contacted me for a show at the MOA where Diana Ross was hosting. I was scared because they knew that I was newbie in the whole thing so they said, "You better do good in this one because if you messed up, we will break your arms and legs." I believe them that they literally going to break my arms and legs (laughing). The show went well and it was successful and I started to get like news. I was in the Star Tribune, news reports, paper and whatever, but when I left my apartment I was in a situation that I had to settle myself in.

A friend of mine was in North Minneapolis and he was the only one who could help me at that time. He said that they have a room available that they were renting out in North Minneapolis. I ended up in North Minneapolis. I am not working anymore. I still did fashion design but I did not do so much of it and I started doing more modeling. I was pregnant and ready to have my baby. I told that dad that I don't want to be with him anymore but if he wants to be part of this child's life, it ok, but not for her and if he is not here the day the child is born then you will not going to get any of the names.

He did not show up and I ended up in the hospital by luck of a friend because I did not have a way to get there and I was getting ready to have the child at home. But around the same time, this is when I found a letter from my mom. When I read that letter I cried and cried. That's when I started to remember my parents again and realized that they do exist but when I looked at the date it was four years old.

The painful journey of my daughter's cancer

My daughter was diagnosed September 2008. Her first diagnosis was in 2008 and she was diagnosed with a tumor, a fourth degree tumor called ependymoma. It's a tumor that affects children between the age of two and five. It started with a fever and we thought it was a minor fever. It went down, but then she stopped eating. She was eating very little but then after a while she throws up after she eats a full meal. The second day it got worse. Her fever got worse and did not go down, so I decided to take her to the hospital. And then that night at the hospital it got worse so they had to keep her at the hospital overnight to figure out what's going wrong with her.

The next day in the morning, they found something that was growing so they had to do something immediately because it was growing really fast. They finally found out within two hours later that she has a tumor and they had to send her with a helicopter to the U of M to do the surgery right away.

She was two at that time. They did the surgery and the surgery took about eight hours long and then after the surgery was done, they removed all the tumor and put her in the ICU for a couple of days, maybe a week almost. She has to stay in there and they called me to have a meeting and talking about her condition. So when they told me that

she has a tumor and that it might come back, that this type of tumor is very rare and it comes really fast and you have to be really cautious with her in that case.

So after they released us from out of the hospital, we came back for a couple of appointments at the U of M and they explained to me what are the next step. They said that she has to have chemotherapy. They recommended that really highly because they predicted that the tumor will come back really fast and you don't know when it will come back and they figure if she had chemotherapy it will get rid of the cells that are there. But it's not a guarantee that it will cure the tumor. So I wasn't sure what to decide at that moment. It was too much to accept at the time or to believe that my daughter actually have a tumor.

We kept having another meeting and they explained more and they kind educated me a little bit about what can happen and how it can affect her in the future. And the chemotherapy has nine-cycle treatment that will go on for like ten months and I finally agreed to do the chemotherapy knowing that it's only chance of living. They started the chemotherapy three weeks later. For the chemotherapy she had to stay in the hospital for three weeks and she has one week break to go home.

But because we lived so far at the time, she has to have a doctor and a nurse close to her, so they gave us a room at Ronald McDonald's house to live nearby the hospital. It's two minutes away from the hospital on the university compound and then they got us a room there. And usually they give these rooms for families with children who have cancer, tumor, leukemia those kind of illness or diseases and a lot of time they will have a nurse coming check on her.

They had to give her a tube that goes through her chest and it has two different cords, and they use that tube to give her the medicine and to draw blood. So the first chemo, it was kind of hard to take in and I was not really sure what's going to happen. She did fine with the first chemo. Basically what they trying to do is to clean up all the blood and start over with bone marrow or new blood or something. Finally, after the third chemotherapy it got harder. Now she is losing a lot of weight, so tiny, she couldn't really eat at all and she would throw up during the treatment. It just got worse. So I started feeling really bad for what she is going through. And I couldn't imagine how frustrating and painful it is for her.

My son was with me all the time at the hospital because I did not have a babysitter

So at that time, my mind was not really clear anymore, what to think but my son was still a baby at the time. He was probably only eight months and so managing him and her was very difficult, so I have him at the hospital with me also and them two they were like buddies. They will play and I try to keep them together because it helps her to stay

happy and stay active. I kept him around because it made her feel better. Well I didn't even have a choice because I did not have a babysitter to take care of him when I was in the hospital.

When she reached the sixth treatment, it got really hard on her. It got to the point where she was throwing up blood. It was so bad, you kind of basically losing your child. It was really a bad image and that image stuck in my head forever and then I couldn't wait 'til it's all over, when she is healthy and better again.

She did so well and the doctor had a good feedback about her, and then she was done with her last cycle, with all her chemotherapy. They released her and sent her home. The only thing she had to do after that she had to go through physical therapy and speech therapy to take care of all the side effects of the chemotherapy. She started losing some of her speech. She did not lose it but they said that it might have an impact later on, but her balance - she did not have a good balance. She would have to learn how to walk again. But as far as speaking she was caught up to her age.

Moving back to my apartment and going back to work

We finally left and moved to Saint Cloud where I was living at the time. I went back to my apartment and I went back to work. I was taking care of her, helping her with her physical movement, and playing with her brother as much as she can. She started to feel better. But all this time when I was taking care of her, my clothes designing picked up. I was sewing at the time and it helped me paying my bills and rent. The county also had some programs that helped mothers who are going through tough times with their children so once in a while they help me with the rent when I fell behind. The hospital social worker arranged that. I worked as much as I can make some money.

A year passed and Malak was doing fine. We go once a week for a physical therapy and did other exams for her hearing and vision so that she won't fall behind, these are the side effects of the chemotherapy. She started to get better, the doctors were really impressed and surprised to how well she was doing and probably after a short while they did not have to see her anymore so it was having my own daughter again.

She just grew up and learn probably for about three years. She was good. She turned five in May. She was excited for school. She was talking about it. I was really happy for her too. It will be her first year in kindergarten. That September of 2011.

Sending my daughter to spend time with her dad

But then the summer. I was working as a part time in a department store, and I was living in Burnsville. In August she wanted to go visit her dad. And that would have

been the first time she would hang out with her dad and she was excited about it. She keeps asking me questions. Is he going to read for me? Is he going to play with me? All that stuff. And I talk to him about and he was really excited to see her. He moved from Tennessee to Austin, Minnesota with his mother and grandmother. So when she went to visit her dad, she went to Austin to be with him. But apparently, and I found out this later on, that the dad was actually living in Saint Cloud, Minnesota, but his mother and his grandmother were living in Austin, Minnesota. So she was really excited to see her dad and I accepted to let her go.

She was supposed to be gone for three weeks and she comes back, she will start kindergarten in September. So her dad picked her up and she left. Once a week or so, I will call her and check on her and see how she is doing. It seems that everyone was happy to have her and having fun with her. I got a little comfortable and thinking that she is ok, they are happy about her and they love her. And she is in good hands. Three weeks were up and I called the dad so she can be back in Minnesota by Friday. He asked me if he can keep her for one more week. And I said that she has to, that she has to get ready for school. He said please let me keep her for one more week. I agreed. But I said that she has to come back in one more week.

I got a call that my daughter was in the hospital

That week, after we were done talking, two days later, I started to feel weak and I started to have migraine headaches that wouldn't go away and I started to affect my job to the point I would faint at work. I couldn't figure out what was wrong with me, I was having these headaches and I keep telling myself that I need to check on my daughter and see how she is doing. But then then the other side of my head is telling me, she is in good hands, she is with her dad, he is having fun with her, he is even asking for one more week with her. And so that side kept holding back from calling her.

My boss noticed that I was not doing too good and said maybe you need to take off a couple of sick days. At first I did not want to take some time off because I did not know what was wrong with me but I went ahead and took the two days off. I was sleeping a lot and it did not make any sense. I went back to work and that night, I got off work and then at 1 a.m. I got a phone call from the father of my daughter and he couldn't barely talk. First I was thinking why would he call me this late, so when I answered and he couldn't really talk he said, I am on my way to Austin, do you want to come with me? I asked why? He said, "It's Malak, she is in the hospital." I was silent and all my headache is gone. I woke my son and Malak's dad arrived in five minutes.

We got in his car and now we are on our way to Austin. So I did not what to say. I wanted to ask, but in my heart I knew that something is wrong and I know that I am not going to like what I hear. At the same time, I forgot about the fact that she might be

sick because she was doing so well. I did not expect anything to happen. So I was confused and quiet and then I finally asked him, what happened? He said I don't know, but she went to hospital. I asked what hospital is she going to, he gave the hospital information and I started to call the hospital while we were on the road to find out what happened. It would have take three hours to get to Austin and were in the car for 30 minutes. I made a phone at the hospital and they said, "She is not here. We had to take her in a helicopter to Owattana at the Mayo hospital."

The tumor in my daughter's head exploded

Now I started to freak out and yell that she is in the hospital, she is on her way to Owatonna, so we headed to Owatonna. I started asking him to ask him one question and then it gets quiet and another question and it went quiet. I said, "Where were you? How you don't know what happened to her?" He did not answer me and so now we got to Owatonna and now we are the waiting room and after were verified who we were, they told us that she is in surgery and we don't have any update on her yet so wait out here for a couple of hours and in two hours we might have an update on her condition. I was in impatient and I really wanted to know what happened.

Two hours passed and they came back and said, I am sorry, we don't have any answer for you yet but she is in critical condition. I started crying and I did not know what to say. They final came back and they said she had a tumor in her head and the tumor exploded. Her whole entire brain was filled with blood and then I said if she going to live? And they said, "We don't know, some part of her brain is shut down because there was so much pressure in her head." I had to hold myself together and I asked when I can see her. They said not now.

I was scared to see my daughter

It took a lot of hours. We got there in the morning and we couldn't get to see her until noon. They put her in the recovery room. I was scared to go see her. I had to toughen up and I said this isn't the worst to come. I went there, she was laying in there. She looked fine. She looked normal. She was asleep. I grabbed her hand and I called her name, but there is no response. I asked the doctor what's going to happen now, and they said we don't know, we have to give her a couple of hours and see if she is going to wake up. She is in coma. I did not know what a coma was. And they explained to me that a coma sometimes people don't wake up from it. Some people can wake up but they don't know when they are going to wake up. It can be an hour, a day, a week, a month, a year. So I just didn't like the whole feeling at all.

What happened to my daughter?

Now she is in the recovery room, she is sleeping and I am trying to talk to her, rubbing her head, doing to whatever I can. She is not moving or saying anything. A day passed by and now I had to really start asking questions. What happened? He dad said that he did not even see her. He was in Saint Cloud. And I just got really irritated and asked why would you lie to me and said that you are hanging out with her and having a good time? He did not have an answer. So I did not know what my reaction is going to be at that moment. I just cried so hard and I said this girl was talking about how she was excited to seeing you, she had even had a couple of books to read for her. If you couldn't hang out to be with her, why did you have to take her? What was the point? He was quiet. He did not give me any response.

Now I had to go to his mother and asked what happened. And so mom did not know what happened either because she was too busy working. She had a 12 hours shift and Malak was at home with her great grandmother and she does not speak English. And she is new to America. She is in her 80's. And then his mother finally told me. She said that there was an uncle who gave her a ride to work and he was at home. He is the one who actually told her to go check and her granddaughter. She actually does not look too good. She has not been eating, she had fever and she kept throwing up. And I said that moment you saw something like that, you should have taken her to the hospital. But they thought it was not a big deal. They thought she was just a whiny kid. That what was the great grandmother thought. She did not understand that. She kept feeding her and sending her to bed.

Malak actually said to her grandmother that she wanted me. She asked for me. But no one had the nerve to call me or tell me that. All this time, her dad call me and said that they were having fun and he knew what was happening. Maybe he was planning to see her that week and maybe he thought it was a minor thing, but still she had a tumor before and these were the symptoms. So I just fell a loss for words and emotions. A week went by, she is still in a coma. I did everything I could, I held her, I sang to her, I held hands. Even her younger brother was calling her name to wake up. She did not wake up. The doctor said because the tumor exploded in her head, we don't know the possibility of her waking up.

I realized that moment that my daughter is not coming back.

So they put a breathing tube on her .She had a difficulty with the breathing tube. Her throat started to get swollen and blood is coming out of her mouth. You can see tears falling out of her eyes. I couldn't watch. It got really bad and I told the doctor that she is in pain, she is crying. And they tried to adjust her breathing tube and all the mucus were stuck in her throat came out and they had a feeding tube for her and everything start to fail. And I realized that moment that she is not coming back. She is leaving.

Three weeks went by and I had to make a decision. The hospital had a meeting with doctors and nurses and surgeons. Everybody was there. They did a presentation of how big and bad her tumor was and how it exploded and affected the other parts of her brain. The picture they showed looked really horrible. And so I made the decision to pull the plug. After I pulled it, they transferred her to the children's hospital in Chicago Ave. I sat next to her, sang to her and talked to her all that stuff. She did not have a bowel movement, everything stopped. She was dying.

I was holding her for an hour till her heart stopped. I felt that world stopped

That day I knew she was going to die, the night before she was gone, I called her dad and asked him to come and see her before she goes away. And he did not show up, nobody showed up. I don't know, I guess he did not believe more or he thought I was crazy. I told him I can feel this, she is not going to be here tomorrow by midnight. He did not show up. I kept looking at the clock. I did not know that I wanted to slow down or speed up and by 10 or 11 clock, I sat next to her, I was holding her for an hour till her heart stopped. I felt that world stopped. And I couldn't stop thinking about the last heartbeat. I couldn't let go of her, I just held her and held her. Finally, I accepted that she was gone, and then I decided to give her last bath, clean her up, and they changed the sheet. I got her a clean outfit and laid her back in her bed. She was sleeping peacefully. And it was hard to leave. But the nurse told me it's ok you can go. And I walked and the next morning they took her body.

He went to her casket before it went the ground and said everything is going to be ok

Even the next day, it was me and my son and I had a lot of visitors coming. I couldn't talk, I couldn't think. I did not know what just happened. I thought it was just a dream, I will wake up and everything will be fine.

The funeral was a week later. It was very dramatic. I did not cry. I did not have emotions. My face was blank. Some people thought I did not care about my daughter's death. They thought that I did not have any emotion. I looked around people and I saw my daughter's grandmother, I think with her, someone told me that I need to go talk to her, I think she is going crazy. I think she cried to the point that she was on the floor and her nose was bleeding, so I got worried. Everyone was crying so hard. It seems that everyone was crying except me. And then towards the end of the funeral, I just couldn't wait to get home.

We went where they buried her body. I was proud of my son. He did not really understand what's going on but he kind get that his sister is gone. He came and told me

that Malak is gone, everything is going to be okay. He went to her casket before it went the ground and he just pat on the casket. He said everything is going to be ok, Malak. And he came back and told me everything is going to be fine. And that it she went to the ground.

I wanted to take my life at that moment

After the burial I started to find out more information about what happened. I got a letter from the hospital that something happened to her that caused her tumor to explode. I talked to the dad and the grandmother and asked to please tell me the truth about what happened to Malak. I need to know. They just said someone said that she fell down the stairs and hit her head on the door. And she cried of a couple of hours and great grandmother did not know what to do so they put her in bed. And she fell asleep.

But I got another letter from the research or investigation department of the hospital and they said that her tumor did came back, but her head was hit with a car door. I think someone might have accidentally hit her when they opened the car door. It was an accident. She probably was in a lot of pain and she fainted.

When I got that letter, I was so hurt, I couldn't stop crying, I wanted to take my life at that moment. I felt like someone killed my daughter. She could have the chance to live. They could have taken her to the hospital. Maybe if she went to the hospital on time, she could have been ok. That's what I felt at that moment. Someone hit her with a car door and no one is telling me anything. No is telling me what exactly happened. Everyone has their own different story. The only thing that matters: She was crying, they put her to bed and she did not wake up. And when they realized that she is not waking up, that's when they decided to take her to the hospital.

We went back home

I was depressed for some time, I was angry at the same time. These people knew about her medical history, about her leukemia, about her illness and still did not even think to take her to the hospital. And they did not call me. I yelled at her father and said, you could have called me, I would have told you what to do. I was not there to judge him. I said you asked for her, and you did not even get to be her with. The grandmother was busy working and she was not with her. She was left with someone who did not have clue on how to dial 911.

I left the county after the funeral. The hospital had money that they give to the family when you lose a loved one and they asked me what will be your for your daughter. I said I always wanted to take them to Ethiopia to meet my family and I wanted to see my

family for the first time since I left. They got us a ticket for my son and I went back to see my family. I decided to leave and I stayed in Ethiopia for three months.

I left my son with my mother so he can forget about the death of his sister. When I came back I was really depressed. I couldn't think dreaming or thinking about her. It was haunting me. I left again and I went back to Ethiopia and stayed with my son. I came back again, it was still the same and I said how am I going to get over this. I was not happy at all. I got sick the second time I got back in the states. A whole year went by and I said well, I was working two jobs and I spent all my money for my family in Ethiopia to take care of my son. I went back and got my son. I brought back and I started to go on with my life and see what happens.

My son was affect by the loss of his sister, he was always quiet and asks about his sister. It was really hard for me watching him missing his sister. It affected really badly. He wanted to go back to Ethiopia. I have a niece who looks just like her in Ethiopia so he talked about her all the time and he wanted to go back and be with her. I took him back to Ethiopia.

I learned that I have a complete different life now

Nothing is going to change the fact that she is gone nothing is going to bring her back. Even if I have more children, it's not going to be like her. She was my first child. I feel the death of my daughter completely changed me. Everything that I went through and the last thing that would happen are losing my daughter. Maybe God has a plan but I don't know what it is. Because I still don't understand why my first-born is gone, my only girl. I learned that I have a complete different life now. I experienced death. And I am in a different stage of life. And in this new life, I have to see how my life is going to be. It was me and my son and wanted to see how life is going to treat us. What kind of person would he become? What kind of future would he have? And for my life I was not sure what's going to happen yet, if I was done with trying because I gave up my fashion design and quit going to college for sometimes. I told myself then that I just work in a labor job and raise my son, but when my second son came. I was really happy. Things started to change. And I realized that things can't just get better by having more children.

And I felt like having my second son, I started to see a different kind of life. And I started to understand more about life. I came to realize that this world is temporary. We only live for that moment, we born, we die. And I can't imagine where we go but all I can do is try to be a better person and I want to be as good as possible so that one day when my life is taken away, I will die in peace. See how my daughter died, I saw she was in a lot of pain at first. I wanted to make sure that she died in peace.

God is my only way

I wanted to teach these boys to be good people, to have a good life, to be happy and know that God is everything. I want to teach them to be good in their life and everything good possible. I know they are human beings and they are going to make mistakes one day, but hopefully they don't have to go through anything that I went through. If I see that they are happy, that will make me feel better and I feel like things will be ok, and I feel like one day they will understand and do better than I did.

But as far as me personally, I realized that my talent is a gift from God and I don't want to waste it. I know that there is something that I can do with it. It can help a lot of people. Maybe that was my mission. It was hard first getting back to designing because I have to start from scratch, to get promoted and get my designs recognized. I decided to do better designs and become as creative as possible. I want to learn everything that I possibly can to make this happen. And it will happen in God's will.

On the other hand, I paid my debt so I can go to school in the fall. I have to one year to finish my degree. Everything that I had started, now I want to finish it. I realized that I can have a better career and a better life and my kids can live a better life. I've been working extremely hard, asking for people to help me babysit my children so I can focus and work harder. I know this time will pass. I am happy with myself. I passed those hurdles so far. And in just a little more time everything will be good. My sons are doing well. My plan is to work hard to build them a house in Ethiopia so they can grow up there, go to school in Ethiopia and come here in the summer. I want to start saving money for them. Things are coming along.

I think the future is brighter, I feel like I know so much now. I think as long as I keep putting my effort into this, it will turn out okay, because life here in this country, if you want something you have to really work hard for it. Nothing comes to you, you have to go after it till some opportunity comes along but on the way, and you have to keep doing it. And God is my only way.

Reflection on Dakota's Story

Dakota and her family escaped the civil war in Sudan and were resettled in a refugee camp in Ethiopia called Dima. Dakota came to Minnesota at the age of eight, from the refugee camp. She has few vivid memories of the refugee camp. She described the refugee camp a place that was segregated into different tribes. It was not safe because

the tribes were always fighting against each other inside the camp. The violence of the fighting had affected the atmosphere of the entire camp because many people were killed.

Before arriving, Dakota had imagined the United States as a fairy tale, roads smooth as glass, candles floating in the air. She imagined the snow looking like white sand. It was a shock for her to see buildings and many cars when she arrived. She questioned a great deal and was curious about what kind of world America was. She described her life in the village back home as worry free, except when the war started, but the United States was very confusing for her. She wondered what kind of changes she had to go through to adapt to America.

Dakota started learning about America when she was enrolled in school. She recalled that there were some social workers showing them around, but they were still confused and did not understand what to do in order to adjust and adapt to this new country. It took Dakota two years to learn her surroundings, but it has taken her whole life to understand this country. She feels there is so much to learn in terms of social skills, the law, and the rules and regulations. According to Dakota, it all depends on knowing the right people. Otherwise you will get stuck.

Challenges of Resettlement

Dakota faced many challenges when she was enrolled in elementary school. She had difficulty connecting with other students because of the language and cultural barriers. She said the school was divided into small cliques, and that she did not know where she belonged. She also encountered some racism. Dakota was emotionally and

physically bullied by other kids. She decided that the only way to fit in was to misbehave. She started fighting in school in order to gain respect and get accepted. Most of the kids she fought with were African Americans. She said that they wanted someone else to pick on. She was called names because she was different.

Dakota had a better experience during middle school, but the challenge she faced was with the education system. She was placed in ESL and Special Education classes. She did not know what Special Education meant, and felt bad about herself when she figured out what it meant. She was determined to prove herself to the school, so she would be placed in regular classes. She understood that kids who attended Special Education classes would learn less than other kids and she did not want to be at that level. She wanted to graduate from advanced classes. She did not understand why she was placed in Special Education classes to begin with. The school finally moved Dakota from Special Education classes into regular classes. Dakota was excelling in writing and sports. Her achievement in school made her feel better about herself and she started to feel that she was fitting in.

Toward the end of middle school, Dakota started to have difficulties at home with her family. Her family criticized her for forming friendships with her African Americans classmates. Dakota said that her uncle and his wife had negative perception about African Americans and viewed them as bad and violent people. She said they formed these negative stereotypes based on what they saw on television. Dakota her family's critical comments and her relationship with them got worse at home. Dakota's family criticized

her for participating in after school activities. In their opinion, those activities were a waste of time. No matter what she did, they were not happy with her. Her uncle started to become physically abusive to her. He accused her of being sexually active. At that time, Dakota did not know anything about sex. She was not allowed to have visitors in the house and she was not allowed to go to her friends' houses. She hated her life at home.

When she reached puberty, Dakota was forced to take full responsibility of her younger cousins. Her family decided that she was at an age where she could get married, according to the Southern Sudanese culture, and they were planning to get her married. She was 13 years old at that time. Dakota was in charge of cooking and cleaning, taking care of the children, and putting them to sleep. The children's mother was always out of the house, and her uncle had many visitors coming to the house daily, staying until late. Dakota was not able to go to sleep until late at night, because her younger cousins refused to go to bed early.

Dakota was frequently late to school and was always tired throughout the day. The teachers questioned her tardiness in school and assigned her to a counselor. She shared with her counselor that her life at home is not easy; that she is cooking and cleaning all day. The school listened but they did not do anything to intervene.

The physical abuse started to increase at home. Dakota endured sexual abuse at the hands of her uncle and another relative living in the house. To escape the abuse at home, she started to sleep outside of the house every night, coming home in the morning

to get ready and go to school. Dakota's ongoing physical, emotional and sexual abuse at home caused her to consider suicide.

One day, her uncle beat her severely, leaving bruises all over her body. That day the uncle refused to allow her to go to school. Dakota escaped through her bedroom window, ran to the school and reported the incident. The school took action and contacted social services.

Dakota was removed from her home and was placed in foster care. Dakota faced difficulties during her placement in foster home. It was not an easy adjustment for her, so she had to be transferred to multiple homes between her neighbors, foster families and an extended family member.

While living with a distant cousin, Dakota was raped by another relative. That traumatic experience affected Dakota both emotionally and mentally. Dakota was shunned and mistreated by the Southern Sudanese community because she reported the rape to the police. She was under pressure from her family back home to drop the charges against the perpetrator because he was a member of her tribe. Rape is a topic that people do not talk about and her family was pressuring her to get married to her rapist. Dakota refused to listen to her family, but they convinced her not to go to court so the criminal charges against the rapist were dropped.

Dakota moved to multiple foster homes while she was in high school. She started a relationship with a young Southern Sudanese man who lived in Tennessee. Dakota got

pregnant while she was a senior in high school. She had her daughter during that school year. Dakota graduated from high school and then enrolled in college

Dakota's relationship with her daughter's father ended. She became a single mother, caring for her daughter and going to college. She got involved in another relationship and had a son. Dakota had some stability in her life; she was going to college, studying fashion design, taking care of her two children, and working. After a couple of years, Dakota ended the relationship with her boyfriend, the father of her second child. Dakota started to design clothes and her designs got some local attention. She was asked to design clothing for a fashion show and it was a success.

Dakota's baby, Malak was diagnosed with ependymoma, a rare and fatal disease. Malak had to undergo chemotherapy for 9 months. Dakota had to work extra hard, sewing clothes, so she could make money to pay bills. She found support from the hospital that was caring for her daughter. They were able to help her to find a room near the hospital during her daughter's chemotherapy treatment. After a year of care, Malak's health improved. She remained healthy another three years.

Dakota allowed her daughter, who was five years old at the time, to go visit her father who was residing in Minnesota. What actually happened to Malak is still unknown, but while she was visiting her father's family, she had to be rushed to the hospital. She had an emergency operation because the tumor in her brain had exploded. Malak was in coma for few weeks and Dakota had to make the difficult decision of removing her

daughter from life support. Dakota went through a year of pain and grief after her daughter passed away. She saw no hope in life or anything she did.

Dakota travelled to Ethiopia and met her parents for the first time since she left the refugee camp as a child. She was reunited with her parents and siblings, and that provided some comfort in her life. She was still struggling with the loss of her daughter and went through a period of depression.

Dakota returned to the United States and it took her a year before she was able to feel better. Slowly she went back to designing clothes and she buried herself in work. She believed that her daughter's death changed her for the better, both spiritually and mentally. She met a new man and got engaged after a couple of years. She is currently living with her fiancée. They have a son who is few months old. Dakota is now focusing on becoming a better mother for her sons. Her clothing designs started to get noticed nationally. She is planning on going back to school in the fall to finish her college degree.



Figure 2: The little space by the Nile where Dakota used to play as a child

Basma

Basma is a 42-year-old woman who arrived in Minnesota in 2004, with her husband and two children, as a refugee from South Sudan. Basma is studying English as Second Language at the adult education center. She is currently in level five . Level 5 is defined as a high-intermediate English language learning course that assists learners with their reading, writing, speaking and listening skills. Basma was recruited to participate in the research through the Hubb Center.

The initial meeting with Basma was in the conference room at the Hubb Center. Basma was tall, like her fellow southern Sudanese women, and wore her hair in long braids. She came into the room laughing and said that she has a test today, and that this interview might save her from it. I told her that she has to go to class as soon as we finish

our meeting. She laughed again. I introduced myself as the researcher and she immediately asked me if I was from Ethiopia. Basma was surprised to know that I was from Sudan and that I could communicate with her in Arabic. She warmed up to me after the brief introduction. I explained to Basma the purpose of my research and reviewed the consent form. Basma agreed to participate in the research and we scheduled a time for an interview at the Hubb Center.

I met and interviewed Basma in the conference room at the Hubb Center. Basma was smiling as she entered the room. She looked mischievous and I asked her what she was plotting today. She said, “We have another test and I told the teacher that I have an interview and that I might not come to class.” Basma laughed and continued, “They always give us tests in this place. I am tired of tests.”

Telling the Story

Basma is a warm person with a great sense of humor. She spoke softly and slowly and frequently laughed and smiled during the interview, as she narrated her experiences in Sudan, Egypt and the United States. She had great pleasure and laughter when she told the story of how she passed the driver’s license written test with a stroke of luck. Basma continued to laugh as she narrated her stories of resettlement in the United States. She appeared to be a free-spirited woman who finds humor in everything; I felt it was her coping mechanism.

Basma’s story

We left Sudan in search for a better life

Before I came to America, I was an unemployed, I did not work. I went to school. I finished high school and I applied for college. I was there for a year and then got married and did not complete my education. You know how life in Sudan. Three fourths of the women don't work. They don't have the opportunity. They just sit at home and become dependent.

I studied economics. I did not finish college. At that time we decided that we have to leave Sudan. My husband had a good job in Sudan, but then things deteriorated. My husband worked for the UNICEF. He lost his job and it was hard for him to find another job. This is when we decided that we had to leave Sudan. We wanted a better future for our children. At that time I had two children. I couldn't finish college, so it was hard for me to get a job. We left Sudan in 2001. We went to Cairo to find a better life than Sudan.

Life in Cairo was very hard

Our life in Cairo was very hard. You can't find a decent job except for domestic job like housekeeping. And for my husband and many other Sudanese refugees, it was hard for them to find a job. Actually my husband came at the beginning of the third year and joined us in Cairo. But since he came a bit late, it took a while for the UN to process our application for resettlement.

I was there alone with the kids in Cairo. I worked as a housekeeper and I was the breadwinner for my family. I worked with this lady and I was taking care of my family. The UN has also helped us a little. They used to give us a little money every other month so it can help us with rent and other living expenses. We kept doing this for three years and few months. We passed the resettlement process test and then we came to the US in 2004.

I did not send my kids to school because Egyptians are racist

Working as a maid is hard. It was my first time working and it was first time working in people's houses. It was hard for me to domestic work but I did not have any other option because I needed the money. My kids were young and I was not able to enroll them in kindergarten or school. I was worried and scared of Egyptians. They did not respect us refugees. Even kids were bullied and abused. Refugee kids get attacked in the street. So I preferred for them to stay at home 'til we come the US.

At that time, my son was four years and my daughter was five years and six months. I also had my niece who was eleven years old. I was alone and my husband was

not around, so I left the kids at home. I used to leave early in the morning and I come back late at night.

The people that I worked for were good to me. But I worked with foreigners. At the beginning I worked for an Egyptian family but I quit my job. They were very rude and mean so I quit. I worked for this foreign woman who is a teacher and she was the principal of an English school. I worked for her 'til I came to the US. You know Egyptians had this jealousy when they find out that you are going to the US. They feel very envious of why Sudanese get to go the US and they don't.

Coming to Minnesota

I chose to come to Minnesota because I have a relative who was here in Minnesota before me. So he is the one who told me that Minnesota is a great state for kids' education, and the crime rate is very low. He said it will be safe for me and my family if I came to live in Minnesota near him. He said it's cold and everything, but it's better than other states.

After three months, when I got to Minnesota, I applied for a job. I stayed with my cousin for a month and the World Relief helped us with little money as a welcome gesture to the United States. We then started looking for an apartment, and they said they will help us pay for rent for the first three months.

We were able to find jobs in the first few months

Before we completed three months in Minnesota, my husband was able to find a job. At that time, we did not have a car, so he took the bus to work. He then got his driver's permit, and I got my permit too. And we started learning how to drive.

We bought a car but it was not in our name because we both did not have driver's license. We had a relative who bought the car for us and once we got our driver's license we transferred the title of the car to our name. I was scared of driving so I did not get my license right away.

I then met this lady in church and I told her that I need a job. The lady said that she will help get a job and said that she will come and interview me at home and chat to see how good I can speak English. She came to my house and we chatted and when she went back to her house, she called me and told me that I can understand your English well. The lady said that she will go to the office and help me fill out an application for a job.

It was a group home for disabled people. So I filled out the form for the job and I had interview with the supervisor agreed to hire me. She said that you are good. You don't have a problem and you are able to write a little bit. So I worked with them since 2005 and I left my work last year in 2013.

My husband worked for a company where they do assembly. So I worked in the group home for eight years and after that I left. You know sometimes when there is a new staff, they come with attitude. I felt that the new staff wanted to create a conflict. So I said, why would I destroy my record with problem? So I told my employer that my husband is working a night shift and I can't work at night and I gave them a 2 weeks notice and I left my job.

I stayed at home for two months and then I applied for another job. They hired me right away when they saw that I had an experience working with disabled people. They called me the next day after I submitted my application for an interview. Actually, no, they gave me an interview on the same day I submitted my job application. After two days they said they will hire me. I started working with them till now. I work in an assisted living. They hired me based on my experience of working with disabled people for eight years. I liked my job. It's better than working for the pervious company.

My expectation was women are not going to stay at home

When I came to the Minnesota, I expected to live a good life. I wanted to get an education and find a good job and I wanted my children to get a good education and have a future. My expectation was women are not going to stay at home. You have to work. You have to work so you can support your family. I was so lucky to get a job right away.

It was really difficult. Communication was very difficult. Communication with people with disabilities was very hard. They don't like to chat. It took me a month or two to learn how to communicate with them. I am quick learner. If I see one of the staff doing something, I can pick it up and do it too. It's not very difficult.

It was my first time using a computer. I was just pressing buttons

But when I went to get my driver's permit. That was difficult because I studied in Arabic and the manual was in English. I couldn't understand a word from the manual but I decided to take the test and I passed by luck. I just guessed the right answers. I passed on the first attempt of taking the test. My husband told me that I should take an ESL classes before trying to take the permit test I told him let me at least try. The little bit of English that I learned in Sudan helped. I actually didn't tell him that I was going to take the test because he wouldn't accept that so I waited for him to go to work and I went to the DNV, took the bus to Snelling to the DNV.

When I walked in they asked me what I wanted and I said I want to take the permit test. They showed me the way to the computer. It was my first time using a computer. I was just pressing buttons. I only got two wrong. The guy said to me congratulations, you have a permit. I was shocked. He gave me the form and I put my information, my address, phone number, color of eyes and height. I was able to write it down. I came home and I told me husband that I got my permit. He did not believe me at first. And then when he saw the paper, he asked, "How did you do it?" I said I tried and I made it and I did not have a cheat sheet. (laughing) We struggled but we continued to do what we need to do to survive here.

Friends from the church helped us a lot

When we first moved here, we were looking for a place to live. The World Relief helped us but not so much. Friends from the church are the ones who helped us find a home. The church helped. The day we moved, we did not have anything except the few items we brought from Egypt. We had bed sheets, few pots and our clothes. (laughing) I brought some pots from Egypt. We had clothes but nothing else. The day that we paid the security deposit for our apartment, the church helped us move. The brought us furniture, mattresses, and beds for everyone.

I am very social and can connect easily with people. I like meeting people. I don't have any issues. But sometimes, I get scared talking in front of white people. I get scared that I say the wrong thing and they misinterpret it. I like to chat but I have to be careful that I don't say the wrong thing. Even now, I have to be careful, I don't want to say the wrong word. That's why I am here in school so I can learn more and more.

When I first moved here, I felt lonely because I missed my family. It was very hard, very hard. I can't explain how hard it is. There are voids that only family can fulfil. I needed my family. I don't know.

Balancing between work and family and school is very difficult

Working overnight was also hard. I never worked overnight in my life, so it was challenging. And I was pregnant and I had another child at home so it was difficult to balance between work and home. I work all night and in the morning there is a lack of sleep because I had to attend to my child who is screaming in the morning. If you slept an hour and two and then go back to work at night. Now it's better because they children are grown. I have 5 children. Two were born in Sudan and three were born here in Minnesota.

My educational goal is that I want to become a nurse. I want to complete my GED and go to college. I want to be a nurse in the hospital. I couldn't get my certificate from Khartoum after we left and now that Sudan is divided it's almost impossible to get my high school diploma. There is no way. Even if I was able to get it, my diploma will not get accepted here in the US. They will do an assessment before you get accepted in college. I also went to a trade high school in Sudan. I went to Atbara and I spent two years there and then moved to Khartoum and I went to Omdurman Technical high school. I completed my high school there and then I went to college to Ahlia University to study economics, but I only went there for one year. I was not luck to finish my education in Sudan.

I am in level five at the adult education center. I have two levels left. Education here at the center is good but the questions are very tricky and very similar that you can't see the difference between one question and another. Or sometimes there is a small thing that is confusing, like you don't understand the meaning and it makes me so confused. I get stuck. (laughing) I am trying 'til I get to level seven.

Balancing between work, school and home is very difficult. That's why I am only in school two days a week. If I took full time load at school, I cannot manage because my kids need help with their homework. And if I went to school daily, it will be difficult to go from school to work and my kids will neglected and I can't even relax that's why I chose to go to school as a part time. Because every time I go to school, I don't forget but when you are at home, I tend to forget. I am managing now since I go to school part time. My youngest child is four years old and the oldest is 17 years. She helps me with the homework. She is in high school and she will graduate in two years.

When I came here, I learned that you have to be careful not to do anything illegal. I am careful not to get in trouble. I learned in this country, you have to struggle; you have to be a hard worker.

Missing the Sudanese culture

And our traditions are great that teach you respect and many other things. But I miss those traditions of respect. We have cultures like dancing and being in one community, do social visits and be together, but here we don't have that. We are not united. Here in this country we learned how to separate from each other. Everyone to their own. We did not grow up being like that. We grow up being united and caring about each other. We grow up loving each other. We did not have this sadness and loneliness back home because we are always surrounded by others. Your neighbors back home are like your family, but here we don't have that. I did not like that. It had an impact on me because I grow up surrounded by a loving united community. I don't have that here.

I want to be independent

My difficulties now is paying bills. Money is an issue. It's not enough. It's a struggle to get money and it's a struggle on how to manage it. I can't save anything. Every time I open the mail there are always bills, bills. I am afraid to open the mail, I sometimes leave it alone. My husband is working. We are thinking about living in a big house but we can't, because we can't afford it. I am living in a three bedroom house but I have five kids and I need the space.

I live in a rental and I can't apply for Section 8. The problem is that if you applied for Section 8, that if you make money, it won't be different than the rental because it is based on your income. So it does not make a difference if you are renting or you are in Section 8 because you end up paying the same. The problem with low income housing is that it does not work for us. When my daughter turns 18 and started working, right away, she has to move out of low income housing because she is working. (This is after she turns 18.) So my income, her income and her dad's income will be calculated to determine how much we should pay if we lived in a low income housing. So the rent will increase. I want my child to learn responsibility and be independent so I want her to work and save some money of her own. If we lived in a low income housing, that will not work, it will strict my kids and I can't work long hours. So if we have extra money, we will not be able to help our extended family members back home. I don't want to live depending on government assistance. I want to be independent.

I applied for assistance when I first came to the Minnesota. But I started working right away after three months so they stopped everything except for medical insurance. But food stamps, whenever my husband makes extra cash from working overtime, they cut from the food stamps assistance because they say, "You make more money." And if I worked more and I have food stamps they will do the same for me, they will cut the benefit. So I have to report and fill out forms all the time, so I needed a peace in my life, so I stopped getting benefits from the government. I don't like attitude, paperwork. I want peace. (laughing).

Life is good

I would describe my life right now that I am hard working woman. I am good woman. I go to school, go to work, take care of my family. I am fine. (Laughing) Life is good. I am ok. Let me repeat again over and over. I am working and I am staying with my kids, I don't have any problem. I do whatever I want to do. I am happy. If you know how to drive and you are working, you have no problem in this country, but all those things you don't have, you will be in trouble. How you manage your life is important. Of course I have lost a lot when I came here. I don't know from where to start or what to say.

A family emergency in Sudan

I went back to Sudan last year. I went to Juba. It was my first time being in Juba (Southern Sudanese cannot go to Sudan (north) after the country separated in 2011.)

I went to South Sudan because I had a family emergency. My brother had a mental problem. He used to live in Khartoum and after he was forced to live in South Sudan, it was difficult. He was not even living in the city in South Sudan. He lived in the village. And the village is so different for him. He had a good living in Khartoum being in the army force, but he was forced to leave and he had a hard time adjusting to a new environment in South Sudan. It really affected him. He stayed in the hospital for six months and I took care of his medical bills. I worked hard so I can help him financially.

There are some security issues in Juba, as far as safety. Like in the evening, the city is dead. There might be some criminals when it gets dark. I remember when I went to my mother in law's house in Juba and at night we were chatting and all of sudden I heard a loud noise. It was gunshots. I was scared and I thought about my children back in the US. I was really terrified. I think it's better now. I was thinking about going back again this year to go and check on my brother, even though I know he is fine but I want to see him with my own eyes. But I couldn't afford traveling.

Fear of getting old in the US

I want to move back to Sudan close to retirement because I don't want be in a nursing home here in the US. (laughing). I don't like it. Even though I work in a nursing home, I don't like to be in one. Because you will be lonely. You are alone. Depression and sadness will kill you. You are alone at home, watching TV, and when it's time to eat food, they call you. They take you to eat food, and then you get bathed and put you in bed and no one visit you. No one comes to visit you. Do you think it's like Sudan where people come and visit you? No, people here don't come and visit. They are so busy in with their own lives that they don't come visit their elders at the nursing home. They come to buy them diapers or soap and whatever they need and that's about it.

In assisted living, there a lot of people who are living together with their partners in their own apartments but there are others who reached dementia. In the nursing home it's tough but the assisted living is a bit better. You don't have to do anything but to go eat when they call you to eat, but at the same time, I will not have that money to save for my retirement to be in a nursing home. Where is it? We don't have it. So why not build a small house in Sudan with the money you have and the moment you feel that you are getting old, go back and live there, and leave your kids here.

In Sudan, maybe you will rent [hire] people to come and take care of you. You can access your retirement money back in Sudan through the embassy if you are American. You will get your social security money in Sudan. If you get \$500 a month, it's a lot of money in Sudan. You can spend it on getting someone to serve you. If someone mistreat you, you can fire them and get another one (laughing). You can get someone to bath you and take care of you with your own money. They can cook for you and clean your house and you will still have enough money to take care of other things.

I don't want to retire here, that's the worst part. You know African Americans don't send their elders to nursing home. They don't want their parents to be treated badly.

I got my strength like that. I had no other option but to be strong. I was raised to be strong since I was a child. We learned since we were kids how to be resilient. Our life since were kids was really difficult. We came from a very poor family, we had to learn to be strong and be independent. We struggled since were kids. We never had money. Everything was so difficult and that's why we learned that we have to reach our goal in our own and learn how to be independent. We had to find a way for yourself and find a future for yourself.

You have to find things that will move you forward in life. We came from a big family. We were 8 brothers and sisters. (laughing). I am thankful to God that all of us turned out well. We worked hard to secure our future and we did. I have a sister in Virginia, two in Egypt, one in Norway, and we have brother who is a pastor in Juba and William has a high rank in the army in Juba. Everyone is doing okay except the young brother who was mentally ill, but he is doing good now. Those skills helped me a lot to overcome the difficulties I faced here in the US.

Reflection on Basma's story

Basma was born in South Sudan, but grew up in the north of Sudan. She grew up in poverty and her family struggled financially. She graduated from a trade school and then enrolled in college. She got married and then dropped out of college for financial reasons. Basma never worked. She said it was difficult for her getting a job in Sudan and that the majority of women do not work and cannot find jobs. Her husband lost his job and the family faced hardships making ends meet. Basma decided to go to Cairo in 2001 with her two children, in search of a better life.

Basma faced difficulties in finding a job in Cairo. She did not have a college degree and she had no work experience. In the end, Basma decided to work as a housekeeper, in order to support her family. She also applied to the United Nations for resettlement as a refugee. Basma and her children lived in Cairo for three years. Her husband reunited with them a few months before the United Nations approved their application for resettlement.

Basma's life in Cairo was not easy. It was her first time away from her family and her country. She found a job as a maid with a family in Cairo. The experience was difficult for her because people in Sudan are not respected, and are looked down upon as domestic workers. Her gender role also changed; she became the breadwinner of the family.

Basma was unable to enroll her kids in Egyptian school because she was fearful of Egyptians' racism. She said she could not guarantee the safety of her children with Egyptians because they were violent towards refugees in Cairo. At that time her children were four and six. She waited until she resettled in the United States and enrolled them in American public schools. Basma brought her niece who was eleven years old to Cairo. The niece looked after Basma's young children when she went to work.

Basma chose to come to Minnesota after her resettlement application was approved. She had a cousin who lived in Minnesota and told her that it was a safe state and that schools are great for the children.

Basma and her family received assistance from the World Relief Resettlement Agency in the first three months following their arrival. Her husband was able to find a job in an assembly factory, after two months. Basma was able to get a job, too, through a member of the church. She was able to work in a group home for people with disabilities. Basma worked in the group home for eight years.

Basma understood that women in the United States work and knew that she had to work, too, to have a better future for her family. She had the goal of going to school so she could have a better job and a better life.

Challenges of Resettlement

Basma felt and continues to feel lonely in her new home. She said there is a void in her life that only family can fulfill. She misses her siblings and her relatives back in Sudan and it has made her resettlement experience difficult in Minnesota.

The World Relief Agency did not help Basma's family much. The agency stopped its assistance three months after the family's arrival. The church then stepped in and helped Basma's family with all sorts of resources. The church furnished the entire apartment for Basma and her family. Members of the church donated new mattresses, kitchen utensils and toiletries that lasted the family a long time.

Although Basma was able to get a job quickly when she moved to the United States, she had difficulty communicating at work. It was hard for her working with people with disabilities because she had no prior experience or training. She portrayed herself as a quick learner and indicated it was easy for her to figure it out. Her work

schedule was difficult because she was working a third shift and was pregnant. It was hard for her to work all night and come home in the morning to take care of her children. She was not sleeping well. She said it is better now because her children are older. Basma gave birth to three more children in Minnesota. Her eldest is 17 and the youngest is four.

Basma has great social skills and is able to connect with people easily, but she had a fear of talking to white people. She said she was afraid of saying the wrong word and being misunderstood.

Basma's high school diploma was not recognized in the United States, so she has to take her General Equivalency Diploma (GED) in order to go to college. After she finishes her ESL classes at the Hubb Center, she is planning to complete her GED and then go to college to become a nurse. Basma said she is struggling in school because the questions are tricky and confusing. She feels stuck and unable to progress, but she is not planning on quitting. She is unable to go to school full time, because she has to attend to her children at home and go to work. It is difficult to find balance between these responsibilities. She cannot advance another level in the Hubb Center because she goes to school only twice a week.

Basma is struggling to manage her money and pay her bills, and she has been unable to save. They want to move to a bigger house because they have five kids, but they cannot afford it. They are not eligible for public assistance because she and her husband's combined incomes do not qualify them for public housing assistance. She

received public assistance for the first three months after arriving in Minnesota, but it stopped after she began working.

Basma feels that her life is better than in Sudan. She is working, going to school and taking care of her children. She said as long as she is working, she has no problem. Basma is not planning to live in the United States forever. She is fearful of getting old in the United States and being lonely. She does not want to live in a nursing home, isolated from family. She is planning on retiring in Sudan, among her siblings and relatives, if and when her homeland is safe.

Basma attributed her strength to cope and adjust in the United States to her upbringing. She said she grew up in poverty and everything was a struggle for them growing up, so she and her siblings learned to be resilient. These survival skills she learned as child helped her to overcome the adversities she faced in the United States.

Theresa

Theresa is 95 years old. She was born and raised and lived the majority of her life in South Sudan. Theresa and her family came to Minnesota as refugees in 1996, after they escaped the civil war in Sudan. Theresa was recruited to participate in the research through her granddaughter, Shary, who later became a participant in the study and was interviewed as well.

First Meeting: I went to meet Theresa in the home she shares with her daughter and grandchildren. I arrived at her home in the morning and sat in the living room. Theresa walked into the living room after few minutes. She was walking very slowly and

holding a cane. She looked many years younger than her real age. Theresa's granddaughter, Shary, had previously requested to record the interview of her grandmother because she wanted to have a record of her grandmother's life story. Theresa does not speak English or Arabic very well so Shary was interpreting her grandmother's responses. Theresa spoke in Ma'adi, the language of the Ma'adi tribe.

After I explained my study and went over the consent form, Theresa agreed to participate in the research, but refused to sign the consent form. I explained to her that I could not start the interview without her signature. Theresa still refused to sign the form. Shary explained to her that the form will not hold her liable for anything, but Theresa was still very skeptical and refused to sign the consent form. Shary then went to speak to her uncle who was living with them and asked him to explain and translate the consent form to his mother so she would feel comfortable signing the form. The uncle came into the living room and sat next to his mother and they spoke for five minutes. Theresa then asked for a pen and signed the form. Theresa agreed to be interviewed on the same day

Telling the Story

Theresa spoke in her tribal language during the interview. She had a soft, deep voice and spoke slowly. She had a sophisticated mannerism in the way she narrated her story. She maintained eye contact with me when she spoke, while her granddaughter was interpreting. It felt like one could understand what she was saying by just reading the expression in her eyes and her body language. She used hand gestures while she was talking. She smiled when I gave her a compliment that she looked great for her age. She

replied, "I always get that comment. Everyone thinks that I am much younger than what I actually am."

When I asked her about how many kids she had, she spoke briefly about the youngest, Shary's mother, and extensively about the oldest, Ben, who left to the United States in the 1970's and disappeared. There was no mention of the four middle children that she had. Theresa said that she could not help being sad about her oldest child, as she does not know what happened to him. There was a minute of complete silence in the room after she spoke about her son Ben. It is apparent that she is still hurt and affected by his loss.

When I asked her about how she escaped from her village during the civil war, she laughed and asked, "How do you run?" But she narrated the rest of the story with a sad tone because her husband was shot and killed while they fled the village. When I asked when she arrived in the refugee camp Theresa, for the first time during the interview, responded in heavily accented English, "I arrived to refugee camp in 1995."

She laughed when I recognized and repeated a word that she said in Arabic and it was the same word that they use in her tribal language. She then spoke few words with me in Arabic, leaving her granddaughter, who does not speak or understand Arabic, very confused.

When I asked her about how she expected in her life to be in the United States, she laughed and said, "I broke my hip three days after I arrived." She went on and told the story about how she slipped in the parking lot, but she did not display any emotion of

anger or sadness. She accepted what happened to her and moved on. She narrated the rest of the story about the accident in Arabic.

Theresa took pride when she told the story of how she passed the citizenship test in English without the assistance of an interpreter.

She was appreciative and thankful of the services and financial assistance that she continues to receive in the United States from the State. It was evident, during the interview, that her faith and spirituality played a big role in her adjustment to her new home. She concluded the meeting by thanking God for the blessings she had in her life.

Theresa's story

I lived well in Sudan

In Sudan, I lived well and I sewed my things and I did crafts and I did very well. I had a good life. I lived in Opari. I was born there and was raised there and I was married there. I went to school for seven years in an Italian missionary Catholic school and the village that I went to school at was called Loa. In Loa went to school for five years and in Isoaki village for two years, where the Lotuko tribe lives in Sudan.

It is really hard to me to remember my age. I use World War II as reference to remember events. I also use my height. At that time I was 10 years old and how tall I was next to everyone else and World War II was happening. I was just starting school when World War II started. I was ten years old when I started school. I finished the primary school.

My father had a high rank in the police and he had four wives and my mother was the first wife. My mother had five kids, four boys and myself.

I use events rather than my age, so I am not sure about exact dates. I was married in April in 1945. I have my legal age, the one that's been used to process my immigration papers and that's the best you can go off, but I myself don't know when I was born. My age here in the US says that I was born in 1940. I don't think this is accurate. I am older. I believe that I am 95 years

Everyone who finds out about my age think that I look younger than what I am actually is. Even a girl in Nairobi said the same thing to me, that I looked younger than my age, the girl who filled out my paper work to come to the US.

I have six children. Now I have five. I have a son whose name is Benjamin who came first to the US, but he has been missing. We don't have any information about him. He came in the early seventies to the US and I have no idea. I can't help not to be sad. I am leaving it to God but I know I am meeting my son in paradise.

In Sudan, I taught at the missionary. I taught Catholicism communion class. It was the only job I had when I was in Sudan

Escaping the violence in Sudan

I came to the US because of violence. So I was in Juba, there were shootings, essentially a riot. The SPLA were shooting in Juba and everyone got scattered. I ran back to the SPLA and they helped me to get to Nairobi. They were shooting, but there was somebody else there, but I don't know what other group. The fires starting because people started to shoot from everywhere, but the SPLA is the one that helped me escape.

It was in 1992 when the shooting took place. After the shooting we ran. (laughing) If something came, we ran. My husband also ran, but he was killed. Everyone was scattered, but there were not kids. They were older. My youngest was in her twenties. We were able to escape. I did not go back to Juba 'til 2010.

Fom Juba we ran and ran into Kenya. I was in refugee camp in Nairobi. Effo was the name of the camp. I was in Effo for three years. Before arriving at the camp, I was in the bush hiding and living 'til we were able to get to the refugee camp. My husband's children were with me. I had seven kids with me. So my husband children, one of them had two kids.

I was in the refugee camp and one of my children sponsored me to come the US. It was through refugee resettlement. We were sponsored by World Relief. It was the organization that helped us to come the US.

Everything worked out for me in refugee camp, because I have my kids in the refugee camp, so they helped me a lot. The kids who were with me, they sold coal in the refugee camp to make a living. They fed me. My child who was in the States send us money. I did not work in the refugee camp.

I broke my hip after 3 days of arriving to Minnesota

I just wanted to see America. I was curious. I know that Benjamin is here and I wanted to see where he was. And my other child who was sending me money was here as well, so I was very eager to go.

The World Relief arranged a place for us to live when we moved here, for the eight of us who came to Minnesota. Few days after I came, I fell in the snow and broke my hip. That's what happened to me when I came here, I broke my hip. I fell. I was eager to work but then after I fell I couldn't do anything. It was a bad winter in Minnesota in 1996. I was wearing my shoes from Sudan and I slipped. I fell in front of the church.

The woman who was taking us to the church is the one who took me to the hospital and she paid my medical bill. I did not have my paperwork, I did not have anything. I just fell three days after I came to Minnesota and broke my hip. My papers were not yet processed yet, but that woman helped us a lot. Her name was Evelyn.

I went home after the hospital and that was pretty much my life. I had a cast and I was between the hospital and home for a month and half before the cast was removed. I am still struggling with this injury and taking medication for it 'til this day. I tried to find a job, but I couldn't work. I was disabled.

I went to school and learned to speak a little English. It's hard for me to speak English, but I can understand better. I can write, too. I went to school in Fargo at Wilson's school. They offered ESL classes.

When I was lost, I learned how to read the street signs and when I couldn't figure it out, I call somebody to help me. This is how I learned to speak a little English. I also wanted to get the citizenship. That's why I learned to speak a little, so I can pass the citizenship.

I have everything in Minnesota

Everything that I wanted was here. There is peanut butter, there was okra, and everything was there for me. I never felt that it was a bad place for me to be. Being far away from Sudan was not difficult. As far as my family, if they wanted to call me they can call me and if I wanted to call them I can call them. Even if I stayed home in Sudan with my kids, my kids would have grown and got married and left me. So for me, this is fine. What I expected was similar to what would have happened if I was in Sudan. And now I am living with my youngest daughter and my son. I never expected that.

I got health insurance. I got some financial assistance to pay for rent. I still get it because of my age. I have my granddaughter who is very familiar with the state

paperwork system and she helped me with what I can maintain. I get disability and I get assistance and I get insurance. I also get food stamps. If it's free is it bad? (laughing). Any free is good. I am thankful even for a free five dollars. I am not struggling financially.

I learned English to pass the citizenship test

I learned English to pass the citizenship test. What else would be the point of learning the language? I learn English enough so I can find my way if I got lost. So I can find my way back home. English is hard. If I was here as young woman it would have been a different story but I am old. I speak four tribal languages in Africa. That's enough. I will learn English, little by little. I studied it for two years. I learned what I need to learn to pass the test and I took the test. And it was me and the test giver and they asked me questions and I replied, and I did not have any interpreter. I was also tested on the spelling. They gave me five spelling words and I was able to do it. I did it all by myself.

My teacher threw a party for me when I passed the test. Everyone once in a while, I read for a bit a line here and I speak a little so I don't forget. My bible is in my tribal language and that's what I read every day and I want to hold on to that.

There is no difference between home and here

What I found that there is not much difference between home and here. It's all about people. If you have a good head and you have a good heart, you live your life in the same routine anywhere you go. So being here and being there it's same. I feel like it's not where you are in the world, but it's about who are you as individual. I am the same person when I was in Sudan and I am doing the same thing here in the US. I read my Bible. I live my life doing the same thing that I was doing back home and I don't have a culture shock. I go to church; it's a big part of my life. People here helped me to go the church and that's all I needed to do. For me it's another experience and not a culture shock

I am able to maintain my life in Minnesota

I am able to rebuild my community here. In Juba there is a church, there is a father, nuns and all that. In America, I have the same thing. There is a church, a father, a nun and all that. I maintained my life and the Catholic mission is a big part of my life. I still have it and I am still good.

I can't say it's better or worse because I have the church in both place. One will be worse than the other if I did not have that, but I had it in both places. I am very happy. I always have someone to take me to church every Sunday. A family friend come and

picks me up and takes me to church and, as long as I am able to go, I am content. When I broke my hip and arm, it was hard because I was not able to go to church. And I couldn't sit up and I couldn't do anything. But now I feel much better that I can do all that.

I am able to understand the sermon in English. I am pretty good with my Latin and if the mass is in Latin I can understand it well. So it's mass and when they use Latin I get it. If the songs are in Latin, I can get it too.

Learning to cope with disability

What was really difficult is that getting injured right away. I was full of hopes and dreams when I came to the States, but that injury has changed everything. I never experienced winter before and from there I was not able to do anything for myself. I was not able to learn how to drive or to work or do anything on my own. I couldn't go even go to the store on my own. I never experienced being so dependent in my life before, and that was hard. So it wasn't necessarily the place, but the experience of being helpless in a new place. And the real difficulty is coming to a place of acceptance and faith was a big part of my life. And in that space, I thought about how I believe if God is going to do something, He is going to do it. I really had to accept it because that was God's plan for me. That was the most difficult thing for me is that acceptance.

I can't count all the blessings that God gave me

I always had people. I have my children. My kids take me to children or my grandchildren can take me to church so I have everything. I am not alone. I have an eight year old granddaughter who is always around.

I am still learning how to switch the TV but I have a granddaughter who switches it on for me whenever I need to watch the TV. I just look at the computer, I don't have any business with it. I know how to use the oven and the microwave. Things that are convenient. I know how to turn on the shower. I also know how to use the washer and dryer.

I am able to live independently. I lived in Fargo for six years and I lived alone and I went to school and I take the bus. I did most things on my own and I lived in my own. I push a little cart to the store. I get what I need and people did not bother me. I know how much to pay for what I bought. I use food stamps and cash. I can manage. I did it alone for six years. I came to Minneapolis when my granddaughter was born.

I want to move back to Fargo when my granddaughter turns nine. I have family and relatives in Fargo. I am going to live alone but I will see my children whether here or

in Fargo. I have children and my grandchildren in Fargo, too, and I also have my child and grandchildren in Tennessee that I visit, too.

I can't count all the blessing that God gave me. I can't count all the things that God has given me. He can hear everything that we are saying and right between the space between. That's how present God is to me.

Reflection on Theresa's story

Theresa was born and raised in Sudan. She started her story by saying that she lived well and worked. She did the things that she liked to do. Theresa cannot remember her age or dates but she uses major events, like World War II, as references to remember certain things. She went to school at the age of ten. She finished her primary education and got married. She couldn't remember at what age she was married. It was also confusing for her because she was given a different date of birth on her immigration paper, but she said that she is much older than the age given to her on her paperwork.

Theresa was married at a young age and had 6 children. Her oldest left Sudan early in the 1970's and came to the United States, but he disappeared and no one heard from him again. Theresa believes that he died and that she will meet him in paradise. Theresa worked in the missionary, teaching communion classes throughout her life in Sudan, until the war broke out.

Theresa and her children fled her village when the second civil war started. Her husband was killed during the war. She and her children, who were adults at that time, were able to escape, but they were scattered. Theresa hid in the bush for several months before she arrived to the refugee camp in Kenya called Effo. She was accompanied by her husband's children and their children.

Theresa stayed at the refugee camp for one year before her resettlement application was approved to come to the United States. Life in the refugee camp was not hard for her because the children who accompanied her from Sudan took care of her.

Theresa did not have any expectations about the United States before her arrival. She was just curious about the country and wanted to see it. That curiosity came from the fact that her eldest son, Ben, lived in America. She also had another daughter who lived in America. That daughter is the one who sponsored Theresa and completed the paper work for her to come to the United States through the resettlement agency.

Challenges of Resettlement

Theresa's main challenge in her resettlement in the United States occurred three days after her arrival. Theresa slipped and fell in the snow after she exited a car in the church parking lot. The shoes she wore were from the refugee camp in Kenya and did not have any support. She broke her hip. Theresa's immigration paperwork was not processed yet, so she did not have any health benefits to cover her medical costs. A member of the church Theresa attended on the day she fell paid her medical bills. Theresa's arm and the side of her body were in cast for 45 days. Theresa was disabled and was not able to work. She still takes medication because of that incident. Theresa was planning to work and learn how to drive before the incident. The incident left her completely dependent on others and that affected her a lot. Church plays a big part in her life, so she was extremely upset when she couldn't attend Sunday services after the injury.

Theresa believes that her injury is the only thing that affected her transition to her new environment because it made her dependent on others. It was her biggest challenge. She said that process of accepting her disability was difficult, but her faith in God played a significant role in accepting it. She said, “It’s God’s plan and I have to accept it.”

Theresa lived with her daughter when she resettled in Minnesota. The World Relief Agency facilitated a place for Theresa and eight other family members who accompanied her from the refugee camp in Kenya. She received financial assistance to pay her bills. She also received other forms of assistance because of her permanent disability.

Theresa took English as a Second Language classes in Fargo. She can understand English, but she can’t speak. Theresa’s motivation to enroll in English classes was mainly because she wanted to become an American citizen. She had to pass the citizenship test, which was in English. She does not see any point for her learning English except when she gets lost and wants to find her way back home. English is hard for her to learn because of her age. She believes that she would have learned it better if she was younger. She studied English for two years. Theresa was satisfied that she could understand the Sunday sermon at the church, which was in English. She can read the bible in her tribal language and that’s what matters to her.

Theresa described her life after resettlement as pleasant. There was food, medicine, and everything else that she needed. She never felt the United States was a bad place to be. Theresa did not have any strong ties with Sudan. She said if her family from

Africa wants to contact her, they can call her. Theresa believed that her daughters would have left her eventually when they get married and she would have lived alone in her village in Sudan. In America, she is living with two of her children and is surrounded by her grandchildren. She is not lonely.

Theresa sees no difference between her life in Minnesota and back when she was living in Sudan. She said if you have a good head and a good heart, you live the same routine anywhere. She feels that it is not about where you are in the world but how you are as an individual. She goes to church, reads her bible and is surrounded by a community, just the way she lived her life in Sudan. The United States, for her, is another experience, but certainly not a cultural shock. This is because she is able to rebuild her community in Minnesota. There is a father, nuns and the church, and she is able to maintain her life. Theresa cannot say that her life is better or worse in the United States, because she has the church in both places. She is very content with what she has. She is satisfied as long as she has someone to take her to church every Sunday. She is not lonely.

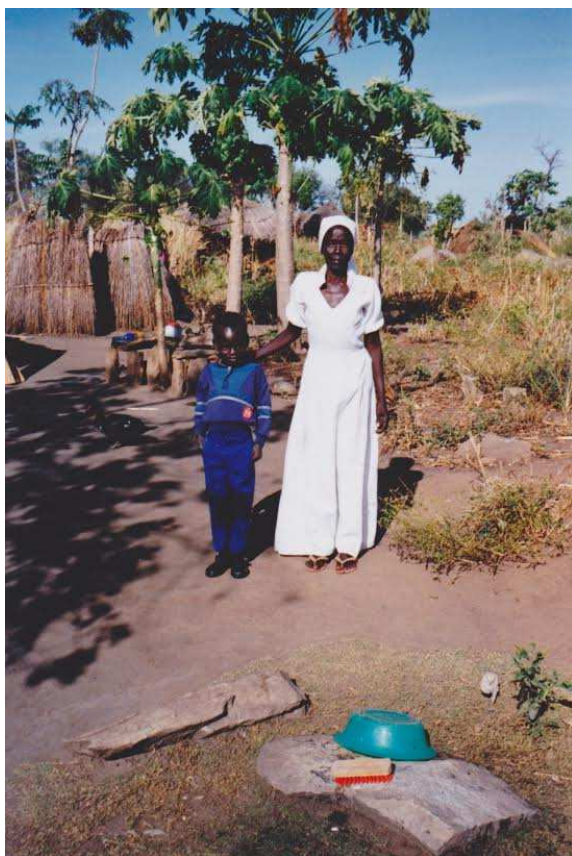


Figure 3: A picture of Theresa in her village in South Sudan

CHAPTER FOUR: PART 2

Pulling the threads together: The themes that emerge

The interviews of the seven Southern Sudanese women refugees revealed a range of reactions and experiences in navigating and resettling in their new home, Minnesota. The variation of the women's ages and backgrounds, and the circumstances of their experiences, produced a variety of themes. Although each narrative is different, common themes emerged from the data. The most prevalent themes highlighted during the interviews were the cultural conflict and its impact on resettlement; the challenges the women experienced in adapting to their new homes; the impossibility of returning back home; the traumatic experiences pre and post resettlement; and coping and sources of resilience. The five themes presented address the research questions:

What is the nature of the experience of Southern Sudanese women refugees in attempting to strike a balance between demands of culture, family life and their education in Minnesota?

What are the challenges facing Southern Sudanese women refugees who seek access to education or career training?

What are the barriers and limitations that prevent Southern Sudanese women refugees from getting educational career training?

Cultural Conflict and Differences disrupt family and cultural mores

The societal and the cultural norms of Minnesota are significantly different from those of South Sudan. The seven respondents had never been exposed to western values and cultural societies before. This great difference led to many challenges during their years of resettlement. The findings from the interviews indicated several reactions from the seven women in adapting and integrating and affected each woman differently. Most of the participants experienced cultural shock and some of the younger participants experienced intergenerational conflict and cultural clashes with their families. The narratives also indicate that the younger participants were able to adapt faster than their adult family members.

Intergenerational Conflict/Cultural Clash

The respondents who came to the United States at a younger age faced challenges, not only in navigating their new lives in Minnesota, but also in the culture of their origin. Kate came to the United States at the age of eight and was faster than her family in getting familiar with the American culture. This resulted in conflict between Kate and her mother. Kate's mother does not speak English and she depended on Kate to translate everything. Kate started to explain to her mother what was acceptable or not acceptable in the American culture. The mother did not feel respected when Kate was telling her what to do. She felt that her parental authority was undermined by the role change as she became dependent on Kate to navigate the new culture.

Kate's swift adaptation to American culture caused her to distance herself from her Nuer community. As a teenager, she started to openly challenge the authoritarian tone of the adults in her community and it got her in trouble. Kate explained:

And so there is a whole thing of fighting between the cultures. In your culture they think you are too American, and the other culture, they don't think you are enough and so it was difficult to balance those two. I just had a mindset of American child. I think when I was a teenager, I was battling the most, being an American teenager and been a Sudanese teenager are totally two different things. And at that time, I get in trouble maybe talking back to people, standing up for myself. I wouldn't like it when people speak to me in a certain way and then I would be defiant and speak back and they say it's because you've been American, acting American. That was very difficult for me to explain, that's not right for someone to talk to people or yell at people like that.

For Dakota, who came to the United States at the age of eight, her cultural clashes started when she began forming friendships with people from different ethnic background in school. This was problematic for her uncle. He had objections to her friendships with African Americans. He had formed negative stereotype of African Americans as criminals, based on what he saw on television.

When she reached puberty, Dakota's uncle and his wife forced her to take care of household duties. She cooked and cleaned and took care of her uncle's children. Dakota was in disbelief when they talked about preparing her for marriage. She was 13 years old.

She knew that it was the Southern Sudanese culture, but was not expecting that it would be the case while she was living in the United States. She said:

When I left Africa, I know they probably have stupid rules for girls, but I did not have to go through that in Africa because I came really in a young age.

Dakota breached the cultural rules of the tribe when she reported her rape to the authorities in Minnesota. She was publicly shamed and isolated from the Nuer community in Minnesota, and from her family back in the refugee camp. To them, Dakota had violated the patriarchal norms of the Southern Sudanese culture in which women are subordinates to men. Dakota explained that the way rape is handled in her village is either for the victim to marry the perpetrator or for the rapist to be subject to a fine in the form of cows. Dakota rejected the cultural rule of her tribe and the reaction from the community was very severe:

I was known as this girl who does not know her culture anymore, who is just lost, and I started to get more rejections and they used to say that you are not one of our people anymore. You are betrayal and all that stuff. I was no longer considered. Even all my family in Iowa, I was no longer part of them. Nobody would even talk to me, nobody would even – they would call me a lost girl in America. Or like she is no longer Nuer. She no longer knows her people. She is a nobody.

Dakota was under pressure from her family back in her village to drop the charges against the perpetrator, so she finally gave in and did not go to court and the charges were

dismissed. This is indicative of the difficulty refugees face in accepting that the laws of their host society are different.

Basma and April felt the loss of their collectivistic identity in the individualistic culture of the United States. They both expressed their feelings and loneliness and isolation in their new homes and yearned for communal living, and for the collectivistic responsibilities of their culture. They both drew a contrast between the two cultures and the challenge of adapting to the new environment. April explained:

When I came here, I felt that I wanted to go back home because in my country it's ok you just walk if you want to go to friends or visit your aunt and uncle. You sit outside and talk, but here, when I came and my daughter went to work and her husband, and the kids go to school, I just be alone in the house and I think why I am alone. And then I get mad all the time and I say I wanted to go back

April also explained that raising eight children is easier in Sudan because it is done collectively with the assistance of other family members:

We have a lot of people in the house, and then his brother's kids, his sister's kids, they all come to our house, and then our kids, it's like big house. We take this one easy. We cook a lot of food. This is cooking, this is cooking [Everyone cooks.] The kids are eating. It's easy.

Basma shared the same sentiment and explained:

But I miss those traditions of respect. We have cultures like dancing and being in one community, do social visits and be together, but here we don't have that. We are not united. Here in this country we learned how to separate from each other. Everyone to their own. We did not grow up being like that. We grow up being united and caring about each other. We grow up loving each other. We did not have this sadness and loneliness back home because we are always surrounded by others. Your neighbors back home are like your family, but here we don't have that. I did not like that. It had an impact on me because I grow up surrounded by a loving united community. I don't have that here.

There was no shock or impact for Theresa. She indicated that she was able to build her community here. For her, as long there is a church, father, nuns and her family, she is content. She explained:

What I found that there is not much difference between home and here. It's all about people. If you have a good head and you have a good heart, you live your life in the same routine anywhere you go. So being here and being there it's same. I feel like it's not where you are in the world, but it's about who are you as individual. I am the same person when I was in Sudan and I am doing the same thing here in the US. I read my Bible. I live my life doing the same thing that I was doing back home and I don't have a culture shock. I go to church; it's a big part of my life. People here helped me to go the church and that's all I needed to do. For me it's another experience and not a culture shock

Challenges in Adapting to New Lives

The findings of this study indicated a number of difficulties that hindered the integration of all seven women into their new lives in Minnesota including language barriers, educational and employment challenges, lack of resources, and racism and discrimination.

Language Barriers

The language barrier posed a great challenge for all seven respondents when they arrived in the United States and continued to be a barrier for four of the respondents. All the respondents spoke minimal English when they first arrived in Minnesota. This was an obstacle for all the women, including younger respondents.

April came to the United States in 2003 at the age of 41. She spoke very limited English. The language barrier limited her social relations to her family in the United States. She did not go to school right away because she was caring for her youngest child. In 2007, April was finally able to enroll at the Adult Education Center and she was placed in Level Three. April is now on Level Five and is still having difficulty understanding the American accent. April explained:

In school here, it's ok. American English is so hard if you did not put your attention to understand you don't catch the words. The way they call, you think it is something big or something different but you don't understand

April said that she would benefit from a tutor, but there is only one tutor for many students. She wanted to hire a tutor to come to her house and teach her, like back home, but she cannot access that here. April's understanding of English has improved slightly. She said it is easier than before.

For the second respondent, Kate, the language barrier was a huge obstacle for her and her family when they came to the United States. Kate was eight at that time and was enrolled in Minneapolis Public School. She had difficulty navigating peer relationships because she could not understand the other students and they did not understand her. This made it very hard for her to adjust in school. She said:

I thought it was hard in terms of adjusting, adjusting to a new culture or getting along with people who can't really understand in a way. I sometimes felt like my teachers kind of brush it off. If I had a question, or I was struggling, even students were picking on me, they just don't do anything. I got punished a lot for that. It's a lot of misunderstanding, I felt like it was a huge barriers. The language barrier was really huge.

Lori, who is now 29 years old, came to the United States at the age of 16 and was placed in English as a Second Language (ESL) and special education classes when she enrolled in school. She managed to learn basic English, but had difficulty comprehending more complex vocabulary. She was able to graduate from high school, but the English language continued to be a challenge. She enrolled at the Adult Education Center and

was placed in Level Five. Lori explained that the language difficulty has had negative impact on her during job interviews. She said:

I am not good in interviews and that's my challenge. I am not able to understand the questions of the interviews. They asked me big vocabulary questions.

Basma came to Minnesota 13 years ago and when she arrived, she barely spoke English. She enrolled in the Adult Education Center and she is now on Level Five. She is still struggling with English and is finding it difficult to advance to the upper levels at the center. She explained:

I am in Level Five at the adult education. I have two levels left. Education here at the center is good, but the questions are very tricky and very similar that you can't see the difference between one question and another. Or sometimes there is a small thing that is confusing, like you don't understand the meaning and it makes me so confused. I get stuck.

Theresa came to the United States in 1996. She was 74 years old and did not speak any English. Theresa took English as a Second Language classes in Fargo. She can understand English, but she cannot speak. Theresa's motivation to enroll in English classes was mainly because she wanted to become an American citizen. She had to pass the citizenship test, which was in English. She does not see any point in learning English except when she gets lost and wants to find her way back home. English is hard for her to learn because of her age. She believes that she would have learned it better if she were younger. She studied English for two years.

Employment and Educational Challenges

In answering the research question in regards to barriers for career and educational training, the respondents identified different concerns and challenges. Three of the women have identified language difficulties as a major obstacle in school and employment. Limited English proficiency emerges as barrier for Basma, April and Lori who are enrolled in Level Five at the Adult Education Center. Basma and April wanted to become nurses, but they feel they are stuck in Level Five and cannot move forward. For Basma, being a mother of five prevents her from going to school on a full time basis, so she attends twice a week. She explained:

Balancing between work, school and home is very difficult. That's why I am only school two days a week. If I took full time load at school, I cannot manage because my kids need help with their homework. And if I went to school daily, it will be difficult to go from school to work and my kids will neglected and I can't even relax that's why I chose to go to school as a part time. Because every time I go to school, I don't forget but when you are at home, I tend to forget. I am managing now since I go to school part time.

April worked as midwife back in Uganda, but her work experience and educational credentials were not recognized in the United States. She was told that she had to go back to school and get a certificate from a United States educational institution in order for her to become a midwife. She was unable to go to school because she had to care for her youngest son, so she stayed at home and started school three years after

resettling in the United States. Currently April is in Level Five, but the language difficulty and family obligations are a hindrance for her in advancing in her levels and enrolling in college to get the midwife certificate.

Lori's mental disability is an obstacle for her to get a job or to remain employed. She wanted to work as nursing assistant and even though she has the nursing assistant certificate, she is not able to pass the job interviews because of the language difficulty.

Dakota could not finish college because she was caring for her daughter who had cancer. After her daughter's death, she went through a year of depression and stopped attending school. She is now a mother of three boys and is working full time. She also struggled financially to pay for school, but she was able to pay off some of her debt and is planning to send her children to her mother in Africa so she can finish school.

Shary was in college for few years but dropped because she struggled with adapting to college life and she experienced discrimination. She is planning on going back to college when she has the financial and legal resources to return. Shary explained:

I would like to be when I go back to school is a better financial situations with more networking been done so I can feel more secure when I got back into an institution.

Lack of Resources and Support Services

Five of the participants complained about the lack of resources and the difficulty of obtaining resources to help them during their resettlement. Kate expressed dissatisfaction with the resettlement agency that helped them initially to migrate to the

United States. She said that four months after arriving in Minnesota, once they moved to Faribault, they never heard from the resettlement agency and their services stopped. This left the responsibilities for integrating and navigating their new home entirely up to Kate and her family. In addition, Kate complained that there were no interpreters to assist her mother who did not speak English, leaving the task of translation and interpreting to Kate.

Basma shared a similar experience with the resettlement agency. Basma stated that the assistance and service they received from the resettlement agency stopped three months after she and her husband started working. They were forced to navigate the resettlement alone.

As a single mother of eight children, April was not able to find the resources to care for her children when she decided to go to school. She had to wait for two to three years so that she could enroll in the Adult Education Center. She also found it challenging that the Adult Education Center did not have enough tutors to help her one-on-one with her English. She said that she would benefit from an in-home tutoring service but such a service was not available. April also indicated that she has no health insurance. She does not qualify for medical assistance because of her wages as personal care attendant. She said that county does not put into consideration the bills that she pays and other financial obligations.

Lori indicated that although she has an employment counselor, she still lacks assistance in finding a job or someone to coach her for job interviews.

Dakota said that she lacked support when she was caring for her terminally ill child, and that it was a difficult process to go through alone with a very limited support system.

Mistrust and Fear of Public Institutions

Five of the seven participants expressed fear and mistrust of public institutions. Kate described that she and her family had a fear of police during their resettlement in Faribault, Minnesota. Kate's mother warned her daughter about racism in America, saying that they would not be treated equally because of their skin color. Both Basma and April expressed fear of breaking the law during their interviews without giving any explanations of this fear. Shary, the youngest of the respondents expressed her mistrust in public institutions a few times during her interview. She will not reenroll in college until she has legal representation in case she faces any sort of discrimination or violation.

Shary said:

I will be in a situation if this institution were to treat me wrongly, my voice should be heard which would guarantee that they will treat me right. So when I do go back to school, I want to have legal representation, some of those things I want to be able to afford to have someone there.

Theresa was adamant about not signing the consent form for this study and continued to refuse even after her granddaughter explained to her the content of the consent form. Theresa finally signed the form after her son intervened and convinced her that the consent form was harmless and would not hold her accountable for anything.

Racism and Discrimination

Discrimination and racism were other challenges respondents encountered in attempting to adjust to the new culture in Minnesota. Three of the respondents experienced racism during their resettlement in Minnesota as children and it affected their social integration in the schools. These respondents felt that they were treated differently because of their race. Shary spoke extensively about her experiences with discrimination and racism in Minnesota, which she witnessed at a very early age. When she enrolled in the elementary school in the first grade, she was placed in ESL classes. She never understood why and was confused because she felt her English was strong. As an immigrant, she felt the neglect and discrimination of the school system.

Shary also attended a predominantly white school in the suburbs as child and, being one of the few minorities in school, she experienced many challenges because of her race. Shary has a very dark complexion and is very tall. Shary's height and features made her feel like an outcast in her classes. One of Shary's vivid memories in elementary school is when her classmates asked her to pretend to be a slave in a game that they were playing. She did not like it, but she did it because she wanted to form friendships with the other children. In high school, Shary tried out for multiple roles in a high school play, but she got the role of the slave. Speaking in regards to her high school experience, Shary explained:

I was in high school I tried out for a play, "You Can't Take It with You," and in this play, there was a backward southern servant and I tried for this play for

multiple roles and that was the part that I got. And I remember my drama teacher pulling me aside and telling me, "Hey, I wanted to make sure that you actually accept this part before I tell anybody else that you got it." It was like making sure before they tell anybody that I got the part that I was willing to accept it so that when they tell people they say, that she accepted and not, "We cast her as a servant." Do you know what I mean?

Dakota experienced racism in elementary school. She was eight when she arrived in Minnesota and did not speak English. She said that she was isolated because no one wanted to be friends with her. Dakota was bullied and teased to the point that she had to get into fights in order to defend herself. She was taunted by other kids, especially African Americans. She explained:

Most of the fights came from African Americans. They hated Africans. They can't stand Africans. I think it was their advantage to finally have a different race to pick on. The way I dress, the way I look. It was like nothing they have seen before. They will call you like anything they can think of.

Reflecting on the same issue, Kate had similar experiences to Dakota in elementary school when she first came to Minnesota. She was bullied in school and found it hard to adjust. She said most of the bullying came from African Americans. Kate said:

There was a lot of bullying from students in Minneapolis. Most of the bullying comes from African American students. I felt that was weird. They used to pick on

us a lot. They call us monkeys and stuff like that. That was very difficult to deal with. I think in my mindset I got it will be a different setting. I knew they were obviously Black, and also from Africa too, so I thought we will get along actually better than I would with Caucasian kids, but that was not the case.

The Impossibility of Returning to Sudan

A common theme shared between five of the seven participants was the desire to return to and live in Sudan at some point in their lives. They did not see it as a possibility because of the continuous violence in the region. Kate, Basma and April indicated that South Sudan is not a safe place for them to live. Although the civil war has stopped and the country gained its independence in 2011, the country continues to suffer from violence as tribes are fighting amongst each other over the power and control of the government. Basma and April have expressed their fear of getting old in Minnesota and would like to retire in Sudan at some point in the future. The fourth participant, Lori expressed interest in going back to South Sudan to visit her siblings, but she does not have the financial resources to do so. The fifth participant, Dakota indicated that she would like to send her children to live in Sudan but she cannot live there because it would be difficult financially. Shari and Theresa have no interest in moving back to Sudan because the majority of their family members are in Minnesota.

Traumatic Experiences, Pre and Post Resettlement

The theme of trauma characterized the lives of the respondents since they left their homelands and resettled in Minnesota. This theme captured different types of trauma that the participants experienced before and during resettlement. From witnessing the violence of the civil war, to the separation of families and loss of lives and land, each of the seven women respondents experienced at least one or two traumatic experiences, which impacted on them differently.

April encountered multiple traumatic events before she resettled in Minnesota. April witnessed violence in her village when the civil war started. She and her family fled their homes and hid in the bush until they were rescued by the United Nations and relocated to a refugee camp in Uganda. Life inside the refugee camp was unsafe because it was targeted by Ugandan guerilla fighters who killed and stole from refugees inside the camp. April explained:

They came attack people in the refugee people, they kill people and they take everything out of people. They even took my two kids. And then I struggled and cried and I ran to the army barracks to tell the army and they army considered my talking so that the army can help me.

April was able to rescue her two children with the help of the Ugandan army. She then moved from the refugee camp into the city.

April and her children were able to resettle in Minnesota, but her husband's application was denied. April lost her husband four years after she resettled in Minnesota.

He was diagnosed with cancer and April went back to Uganda to spend time with him. He died shortly after April returned back to the United States. April was unable to attend her husband's funeral.

Kate's traumatic experience of escaping the civil war in Sudan was one of her earliest memories. She was young at that time, but she was able to remember details of the escape. She recalled how she and others had to cross a river and how she was carried on one of the women's shoulders because the river was high and she could not swim. Kate and her siblings had to walk for five days, crossing the border of Sudan, until they reached the refugee camp in Ethiopia. Kate explained:

During that time, I had left with several siblings. I fled with two of my siblings and walked for about five days till we got to the army base and we lied and said that we were our uncle's kids because we knew that he was in the army, working for the army. And they got us to a different camp where we met our parents there, and then we walked to Ethiopia to the refugee camp. I think we walked for about three or four days to the refugee camp and there was a lot of kids so they had to stop a lot.

Kate faced another tragedy while she was in college. Her eldest sibling was killed during his visit to Sudan and nobody knows who killed him or why. She suffered from anxiety and it affected her schoolwork. In the end she took a semester off to deal with her grief and anxiety.

For Lori, her traumatic experiences started by her mother's abandonment at the age of six. Lori also endured severe poverty, physical and emotional abuse from the relatives she lived with prior to her arrival in the United States. Lori's diagnosis of schizophrenia continues to be a challenge in her resettlement as she is having a hard time connecting with relatives, going to school and finding a job.

Among the respondents, Dakota is the one who shared, in detail, the multiple unspeakable traumatic experiences she endured in resettlement, from being separated from her parents to sexual and physical abuses by her uncle. Dakota also lived in multiple foster homes and struggled in adapting in these American homes. In addition to sexual and physical abuse, she dealt with abandonment by family members and the Nuer community, and her daughter's prolonged illness and death.

Theresa also suffered from multiple traumatic experiences. Theresa witnessed the violence of the civil war in Sudan. She and her family fled the village but unfortunately her husband was killed during their escape. Theresa and her children were able to escape, but they were scattered. Theresa hid in the bush for several months before she arrived to the refugee camp in Kenya.

Although all of these women faced tremendous and significant traumatic experiences, only two sought professional help. Lori accessed mental health because of her diagnosis with schizophrenia. She sees a psychiatrist twice a month to monitor her medication and a nurse comes to her house administer her daily dosage of medication.

Kate went through therapy after the death of her brother and then her best friend to deal with her anxiety and depression.

Coping Mechanisms and Sources of Resilience

The findings from the narratives of the seven women participants showed they utilized several sources of resilience to cope with the challenges and adversities they faced during resettlement.

Spirituality as a source of resilience: The dominant theme in the narratives of the majority of the women as a source of resilience is the role of religion and the support of the church community. Five of the respondents indicated that their strong belief in God helped them through the tough times they faced in their lives.

Church community support as source of resilience: The church community played a pivotal role in helping the majority of the women and their families to resettle and navigate their new homes in Minnesota. The church community provided financial assistance, transportation, friendships and support to five of the participants and their families when they arrived in Minnesota.

Family support as a source of resilience: Shary, the youngest of the respondents in the study, reported that her supportive family is a major source of resilience that helped her during her difficult experiences in school and college. Theresa, Basma and April migrated to Minnesota with their families and it helped them cope during their adaptation in their new resettlement.

Inner strength as source of resilience: The narratives of the seven women participants indicate extraordinary courage and tremendous inner strength and endurance in adapting during their resettlement. The traumatic experiences of these women, pre and post migration, played a significant role in shaping and building strength to meet the challenges of resettlement.

CHAPTER 5: REFLECTING ON THEORY IN THE CONTEXT OF THE REFUGEE WOMEN'S LIVES: TRANSFORMATIVE THEORY OF LEARNING

As discussed in Chapter II, Mezirow's theory of transformative learning is used to provide a framework to understand the life experiences of these seven Southern Sudanese women refugees in Minnesota. The transformative learning theory is an applicable lens to study the experience of Southern Sudanese women refugees during their resettlement process, since it is concerned with understanding the significance of experience as a guide to action. Mezirow (2000) defined transformative learning as:

The process by which we transform our taken for granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives , habits of the mind, minds-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action. P. 7

The transformative theory of learning explores the manner in which the seven participants have subjectively interpreted meaning and realities in the context of learning to adapt to and integrate into their new home, Minnesota. Mezirow indicated that individuals learn when their perception of reality is not in harmony with experience. The disharmony takes place when people experience life crises, e.g. divorce, loss of a job, promotion, or relocation (Cranton, 2000). The core of the learning process is centered on critiquing one's own assumptions and beliefs. Morrice (2012) indicated that the process of migration affects an individual's frames of reference, former accrued knowledge, and

understanding, thus compelling and driving them to learn new culture, values and rules: “Becoming a refugee is therefore a source of deep learning as they confront unexpected changes in their life plans and the need to reshape their lives and reconstruct their identities.”

Mezirow’s transformative theory has three themes: the centrality of experience (disorientation dilemma), critical reflection and rational discourse (changed meaning perspectives) (Taylor, 1998). Mezirow identified 3 forms of reflections; content reflection, process reflection and premise reflection. Content reflection is the process of thinking and reflecting about the experience. Process reflection is the process of dealing with the experience and employing problem solving strategies to deal with the experience. Premise reflection is comparing and examining the new experience with previously held assumptions, beliefs and values. It is the process of deciding whether the experience fit with former beliefs, or will require a change in the mindset. The final component after analyzing and reflection on the experience is to take action. The transformative learning theory identifies how these women make meaning of their adaptation in a new culture.

The findings from the data indicated that the seven women have experienced transformative learning. The phases of the transformative theory of learning are evident in all the narratives of the women participants. All participants experienced disorientation dilemmas that challenged their adaptation to and integration into their resettlement in Minnesota, but they dealt with it differently. Some of the participants had a premise

reflection on their experiences that led to change of their perspective transformation, and others were able to demonstrate content and process reflection on their experiences, deciding on problem solving strategies without the change of reference.

The common disorientation dilemma that the seven participants faced when resettling in Minnesota is the cultural shock and learning to adapt in a new environment without language skills. In addition to learning to adapt to a new culture, other participants faced multiple crises that forced them to assess and reflect on their experiences and learn how to deal with the disorientation dilemmas in their lives. April and Basma struggled from feeling loneliness and isolation. April had to deal with accepting a lower status of employment in her new home, since her education credentials and experience were not accepted. Dakota, Kate and Shary encountered discrimination and racism in school. Dakota also struggled with physical and sexual abuse during her resettlement. Lori was confronted with physical abuse and mental disability. Theresa had to deal with her permanent physical disability that resulted from an injury that occurred three days after her arrival. The seven participants engaged in self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt and shame. Reflection was a critical component of these women's perspective transformation. Mezirow defined perspective transformation as:

The process of becoming critically aware of how and why our assumptions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand and feel about our world; changing these structures of habitual expectation to make possible a more

inclusive, discriminating, and integrative perspective; and finally make choices or otherwise acting upon these new understandings (Mezirow, 1990).

Critical reflection and the changed meaning perspective are strong in many of the participants' narratives, revealing how these women transformed from lower to higher levels of competency in adapting and resettling in Minnesota. These women willingly or forcefully learned to employ reflective and non-reflective approaches in order to adapt in their new environment. They learned reflectively through questioning and resisting some of their own cultural values, and through self-reflection and an inner desire to reinvent oneself. And they also learned non-reflectively through observation, social interactions with friends, co-workers and members of the church community and participating in formal education by enrolling in schools and adult education centers.

Three of the seven participants migrated to the United States as adult refugees. April, Basma and Theresa's past experiences and knowledge formed their frames of reference when they first resettled in Minnesota. Their narratives identified content and process reflection to learn how to deal with their disorientation dilemmas without changing their frames of reference.

April and Basma struggled with the loss of their culture and extended family in Africa, but then realized that the feeling of loneliness and isolation had to be addressed. They both revised their meaning schemes. They learned to adapt by allowing themselves to socialize with members of the church community and were able to build friendships. From their observation, participation and social interaction, they were able to

see their new lives differently, recognizing that they are fortunate to have their immediate family members with them in Minnesota and that they are able to build their lives and future in their new homes. When April recognized that she would not get the midwife job, her plan of action was enrolling in the adult education center and get her General Equivalency Diploma (GED) so she can go to college to become a midwife. She found a job as packager and, through socialization and interaction with her co-workers, she learned to adjust:

When you go there the first day, you don't understand, you will be like what am I doing here? Who am I going to talk to? But some people near you and you guys communicate with you and you be friends.

Basma's plan of action was also enrolling in the adult education center, since her educational credentials in Sudan were not recognized and also to address her language difficulty. Both Basma and April's narratives reflected informal and accidental learning. April indicated that she learned about the laws of the new society by listening to other people:

I learned about this from people talking. Some people like talking even like me and you're talking and someone sit there and you think that someone is not listening to our talking but they listen to our talking. That word will give him experience and learn.

Theresa, the eldest of the participants, reflected on her life in Minnesota and found no contradiction between her life back home and her new life in Minnesota. The

two most important components of Theresa's adaptation were the family and church support that she had also had back in South Sudan. She said, "It is not hard being in a new place but the experience of being helpless in a new place," referring to her disability as a result of her injury three days after arriving in Minnesota. Theresa's spirituality helped her to revise her meaning schemes in regards to her physical disability:

And the real difficulty is coming to a place of acceptance and faith was a big part of my life. And in that space, I thought about how I believe if God is going to do something, He is going to do it. I really had to accept it because that was God's plan for me. That was the most difficult thing for me is that acceptance.

Kate and Dakota came to Minnesota and resettled with their families at the age of eight. Their experiences led to a significant change of perspective transformation. Resettling in Minnesota as young refugees, Dakota and Kate were able to acculturate faster than their families through participation in schools, and interactions and friendships formed with their classmates. The fast acculturation of the two as teenagers, led the girls reflect on their own culture and begin to see it with different eyes. As they began to question and challenge their own culture, it became a source of disorientation.

Dakota's experience of physical and sexual abuse by her uncle and a member of her tribe led her to take action, reporting the crimes to authorities, thus rejecting the patriarchal dominance of her culture and the position of women as subordinates to men. Kate refused to conform to the authoritarian control granted to the elders in her community and took action, alienating herself from her culture. She immersed herself

into the American culture with American friends and showed individuality and resistance to the parental and hierarchal authority of the tribe.

Kate experienced grief and anxiety in college after her brother was killed in South Sudan, and it intensified after the death of her best friend. In reflecting on her experience, Kate indicated that she was overwhelmed mentally and emotionally, and it affected her school work. She felt helpless and did not know what to do. Kate was able to recognize that she needed help and the school counselor was able to direct her to therapy. She took action and made the decision to quit school for one semester so she could address her anxiety and grief. She indicated that she learned a great deal about herself at that time, and learned to cope with grief and loss through therapy. She was then able to go back to college and finish her degree.

Dakota reflected on her past traumatic experiences and her interpretation was that they contributed in building her inner strength and resilience and her ability to transform. Dakota reflected on her life when she was a teenager, how she rejected the idea of God and religion and questioned why she had to go through her tragic experiences of physical and sexual abuses. As an adult, Dakota experienced a profound change in her meaning perspective a year after the death of her daughter. She revised her meaning scheme and perspective about God and spirituality:

Everything that I went through and the last thing that would happen are losing my daughter. Maybe God has a plan but I don't know what it is. Because I still don't understand why my first-born is gone, my only girl. I learned that I have a

complete different life now. And I started to understand more about life. I came to realize that this world is temporary. We only live for that moment, we born, we die. And I can't imagine where we go but all I can do is try to be a better person and I want to be as good as possible so that one day when my life is taken away, I will die in peace. See how my daughter died, I saw she was in a lot of pain at first. I wanted to make sure that she died in peace. I wanted to teach these boys to be good people, to have a good life, to be happy and know that God is everything.

Dakota is constructing her life by focusing on believing in God, believing in her inner strength, and in her gifted ability as a fashion designer. She is determined to focus on raising her children well, finishing her college degree, and building her career as a fashion designer.

Shary, who came to the United States at the age of three, recounted multiple experiences of discrimination that changed her frame of reference. Critical reflection was an important step in Shary's learning process. Shary changed her frame of reference and learned to cope with discrimination and racism by changing the way she viewed herself. She recognized that people would appreciate her as a beautiful woman only when she decided that she was beautiful. Shary's self-awareness directed her to question her experiences in the world and whether her race and color of skin is the underlying factor behind those experiences:

My experiences in the world, the first thing I have to ask, is it because of my color? That could be more determining than what is actually is, because of your

color. I think a lot of time it's because of my color and just my attractiveness level and how I interact with both men of color and white men relatively equally and that could be threatening to people. I think that's part of it as well. I think if I looked like I did and didn't speak like I did, would women feel this threatened? No. Probably not.

Lori's mental health diagnosis is a continuous source of disorientation. Her schizophrenia has affected her ability to obtain and keep a job. Lori's interpretation of her experience with schizophrenia is that it is not a hindrance and that she still can pursue her dream to become a nursing assistant. There is no indication of a change of meaning perspective in Lori's narrative, but despite of her mental illness, Lori was able to transform and become able to live independently, with the assistance that she received from the government. She expressed that she gained a sense of maturity that allowed her to be able to live on her own and take care of herself. Lori's plan on action to deal with her mental health challenges is that she should keep a positive attitude. She expressed that this is her way of surviving and adapting.

Discussion: The study findings in context

This qualitative study examined the life experiences of seven Southern Sudanese women refugees who are currently living in Minnesota, who they are, how they adapted to a new environment, and what they have become. The study addresses the lack of empirical research focusing on the voices of women refugees, and the gap in literature in regards to Southern Sudanese women's life experiences in resettlement.

Themes emerged from the data

Five major themes identified in the data addressed the study questions:

What is the nature of the experience of Southern Sudanese women refugees in attempting to strike a balance between demands of culture, family life and their education in Minnesota? What are the challenges facing Southern Sudanese women refugees who seek access to education or career training? What are the barriers and limitations that prevent Southern Sudanese women refugees from getting educational career training?

The five themes identified were: The cultural conflict and its impact on resettlement; the challenges of resettlement; the impossibility of returning back to Sudan; Traumatic experience, pre and post migration; Coping mechanisms and sources of resilience.

The findings of this study supported and corresponded with the literature. However, the use of the narrative methodology allowed the women refugees the voice to provide context-specific knowledge beyond the generalized explanation of the refugees' experiences in the literature, thus adding a rich picture of this marginalized group and their perspectives and unique experiences to the literature. It is important for anyone who works with refugees, including policy makers, service providers, and educators, to pay attention and listen to these voices and take into account their perspectives in order to develop best practices when working with Southern Sudanese women refugees.

This section discusses findings of the study and focuses on new insights that add to the empirical literature concerning Southern Sudanese women refugees. This section

also highlights important issues concerning Southern Sudanese women refugees in Minnesota that need to be addressed.

Cultural Conflict and its Impact on Resettlement

As the literature discussed, adjustment to a new culture is a difficult process for many women refugees (Sullivan and Deacon, 2009; Martin, 2004). The findings of this study indicated that adapting to a new culture impacted the respondents in different ways. The participants of this study experienced cultural shock when they first arrived in the United States. As defined by Winkelman (1994), cultural shock is a complex experience that might cause stress and a feeling of loss and confusion when migrants come into contact with a different culture. The younger participants initially felt isolated in school because they were not able to communicate with other students and were from another country. Some of the older participants in this study have experienced loneliness and depression due to their loss of their collectivistic culture and traditions and of the support system of their extended family and friends. All participants of this study have lived in the United States for more than ten years. The lengths of the participants' periods of resettlement in the United States have increased their adaptation and acculturation into the American culture.

The analysis of the findings of this study indicates that the participants who came to the United States at a very young age acculturated and learned the English language faster than their adult family members. This rapid acculturation occurred when the participants started attending American schools, were exposed to mainstream culture, and

formed friendships. The swift acculturation caused intergenerational conflict between some of the young participants and their families.

The Sudanese culture is collectivistic, and children are not allowed to engage in questioning or arguing with their parents or other elders in the community. Kate and Dakota adapted quicker to the individualistic society of their new home and started to challenge and rebel against their own culture and the values that they were expected to adhere to. Consistent with these findings, Calder (2014) indicated that young refugees are exposed to different sets of values and influences which can lead to a different social reality than their families. Matsuko (1990) argued that “inconsistencies between family and education institutions generate conflicting sets of moral values.” (343). Rick and Howard (1992), in their research examining the relationship between level of acculturation and perceived intergenerational differences, indicated that high acculturation led to higher perceived intergenerational differences.

The intergenerational conflicts of the participants of this study are parallel to Vietnamese and Hmong youth experiences during resettlement in the US. Matsuko (1990) indicated that young Vietnamese experienced significant differences between their own cultures and American values. They found the autonomy and self-determination of their American peers more appealing than having little or no choice in their own culture, so they were influenced by their new society. Rick and Edward’s (1992) study on Hmong refugees indicated that intergenerational difference is the result of children adapting faster than their parents to the host countries.

The experience of the Dakota, who was a victim of sexual and physical abuse in post resettlement, directs us to pay attention to sexual and domestic violence within the Southern Sudanese refugee communities and the cultural influence in addressing these issues. Dakota opened up about her horrific experiences of rape and physical abuse by her uncle and another member of her community. As a child refugee who came to the Minnesota at the age of 8, Dakota was able to adapt in the new resettlement faster than the other members who accompanied her from the refugee camp in Ethiopia. Growing up as teenager in an American society, she questioned and challenged many things from her culture that did not make sense to her. Dakota made a courageous decision to report her physical and sexual abuse to authorities. This decision caused her to be shunned and ostracized by her community because she violated the cultural norms of silence when it comes to rape and sexual assault in the Southern Sudanese culture. Tankink and Richters (2007) indicated that sexual violence is a taboo subject in the Southern Sudanese refugee community. Sexual violence is connected to guilt and shame and often women revert to silence as a coping mechanism for the fear of being shamed, rejected and isolated by their community. Silence is a survival strategy but also a cultural censorship. The Southern Sudanese refugees continue to abide by the cultural norms of their homeland in the host country. Tankink and Richters (2007) argued:

The new cultural elements of the host country have not changed the public explanation and meaning given to the sexual violence that women have experienced. Therefore, it is extremely difficult for women who have experienced

sexual violence to integrate their personal traumatic experiences into the public narratives of the refugee group they belong to, in order to find a meaning for what happened to them. P.207

Another participant, Kate, stated that many girls in the Southern Sudanese community in Minnesota are sexually molested and raped by either family members or friends. She said no one talks about it because it is taboo. It should also be noted here that blaming the victim is not confined to immigrant communities and also acts as a barrier for victims of sexual violence in immigrant communities and in the society as a whole.

The Challenges of Resettlement

The participants of this study identified several challenges they faced in resettlement. The challenges which emerged from the data analysis are consistent with the previous literature (Martin, 2004; Stiemel, 2010) and include trauma, lack of language skills and vocational skills, cultural differences, a lack of resources (Willis & Nkwocha, 2006; Jackson, 2007), and racism and discrimination (Hadely & Patel, 2009).

Although the participants have lived in Minnesota for over a decade and were able to adapt and integrate in resettlement, language literacy continues to be a barrier for four of the participants of this study. April, Basma, Lori and Theresa are still facing difficulty learning the English language. Theresa, who is now 95 years old, indicated that she is too old to learn a new language; while April and Basma, who are in their fifties and forties, respectively, feel that learning the English language is challenging. They feel stuck in Level Five at the adult education center, unable to advance to upper classes, thus

limiting their employment opportunities and making their goal to go to nursing school very difficult. Both April and Basma are unable to move out of minimum wage jobs.

Hou and Beiser (2006) indicated that age plays a factor in language acquisition and proficiency, and that language acquisition requires short-term memory, a skill that declines with age. They also indicated that lack of interaction and exposure with members of the dominant society plays a role in language proficiency. Thus younger migrants have daily exposure to the dominant culture through schools, whereas adult migrants do not have the same number and quality of interactions. Basma and April indicated that they cannot attend school full time because of their family obligations and responsibilities. Basma lacks daycare for her children, so she cannot go to school fulltime, whereas April expressed that she needs a one-on-one tutor to help her with the language. Lori is the third participant who is enrolled in the adult education center. She expressed her struggles with job interviews because of the language difficulty and currently unable to get an employment. It is unknown if Lori's challenges with getting a job are due to the language difficulty, her mental illness, or both. Despite the language challenges, April, Basma and Lori have the desire and motivation to continue their education, recognizing that it is the only means for improving their lives and their futures.

Additional challenges for these women emerged from the data, adding new information to the literature concerning post resettlement experiences of Southern Sudanese women refugees: the discrimination against refugees in the educational system

and refugees' fear and distrust of public institutions. The narratives of some of the participants highlight the discrimination of refugees in American educational institutions.

Shary reported that she was placed in ESL when she was in first grade although she came to the country at the age of three. Another participant, Dakota reported that she was placed in special education without any assessment or evaluation. She spent years in of her elementary education in special education classes even though she did not have any learning or psychological disabilities. They both had to fight their way out of being placed in ESL and special education to get enrolled in regular classes. The discrimination against refugees in the American school system has been documented in the literature.

In a study to identify the educational needs and barriers for refugees students, McBrien (2005) cited Trueba et al. (1990) and indicated that refugees and immigrant students are perceived as having low intelligence and reading disabilities. School staff members have misdiagnosed some of the students without following appropriate assessments. The teachers believed that refugee students are less intelligent than the natively born Americans, ignoring the fact that refugees come with different values and learning styles. Another study (Gersten & Woodward, 1994) indicated that in communities where recent immigrants are present, schools faces serious issues due to the shortages of experienced special education and general teachers and the failure of the teachers to identify if their current curriculum meets the needs of the students, or if the students are experiencing difficulties due to learning disabilities or to a language barriers. Schools then place immigrant students in special education classes as a solution.

Artiles and Ortiz (2002) discussed that limited English proficiency is sometimes misunderstood as a disability. They indicated that instruments to assess languages other than English have poor psychometric properties and assessment personnel lack proper training in evaluating second language learners. This is because most of the assessment personnel have been trained to assess in English and no training on cultural and linguistic assessment, and understanding the characteristics of the English language learner. Artiles & Rueda, et.al (2000) as cited in (Artiles & Ortiz (2002) argued:

English language learners were more likely than English speakers to be placed in high incidence disability categories. Moreover, those receiving the least language support were more likely to be placed in special education programs; for instance, learners receiving all of their instruction in English were almost three times as likely to be in special education resource rooms as those receiving some native language support. P. 9

The findings of this study indicated the participants held distrust in public institutions for various reasons. Three expressed their fear of police or of breaking the law. As a teenager, Kate had an unpleasant interaction in which police officers called her and her friends “niggers”. In addition, Kate’s mother continued to warn her about how people of color are treated in the United States and that she should be careful. Basma and April also expressed their fear of breaking the law without giving a reason behind the fear. Some studies have explanations for this fear. Piltaway, Muli and Shtier’s (2009) study examining the resettlement and integration experience of refugees and migrants

from the Horn of Africa in Australia indicated that fear of the police is linked to refugees' countries of origin where the police were agents of persecution and torture. The sight of a police officer with a gun is an indication of an enemy, and the first reaction of the refugees is fear. Another study is consistent with Muli & Shtier, arguing that refugees' oppressive past experiences with the police in their home countries led to the migrants' distrust of the police, in addition to their fear of deportation (Davis and Hendrick , 2007).

One participant, Theresa objected to signing the consent form for this study. It took a few attempts from her son and granddaughter to finally sign the consent form. Johnson, Ali and Shipp (2009) explained this heightened fear and indicated that the consent form is a form of self-identification that refugees might fear. They argued: "The practice of obtaining written consent may be problematic in certain refugee communities, as orally-based cultures may assign higher value to verbal consent, and the presentation of a multipage document may be irrelevant, inscrutable, or perceived as intimidating."

P.234

One of the participants, April was very fearful after the interview and contacted her teacher at the adult education center expressing concern that her information could be shared by the researcher with authorities in Sudan. The teacher and I assured her that her real name would not be used in the research and that her privacy would be protected.

Shary's distrust of public institutions came a result of her negative experiences during her elementary school years, and then in college. She expressed that she would not go back to college to finish her degree unless she had legal representation. Shary stated,

“I would rather never get a diploma and live my life and do my work with the level of education that I already have and I know that I have than walking into an institution again without certain things in place.” Shary indicated that public institutions mistreat people of color everyday but it is hard to prove it. Her claims are supported by Suarez-Balcazar (2003) and others who argue that incidents of ethnic and racial discrimination exist in American universities. Students from diverse race groups are victims of racism or stereotyping by other students, faculty members, campus police, and administrators. Feagin (1992), in a study of racism and discrimination against Black students in White colleges, cited Keller (1989) and indicated that campus subculture discriminates against Black students while the deans and faculty remain unresponsive.

Traumatic Experiences and Coping Mechanisms

The traumatic experiences participants experienced are consistent with the literature (Ben-Sira, 1997; Peltzer, 1999; Neuner et al., 2007). The participants have experienced trauma due to witnessing the violence of civil war, loss of family members and their homes, social isolations, mental and physical disabilities, and sexual, emotional and physical abuse. Consistent with the literature (Khawaja, et al., 2008), the participants of this study adopted several sources of resilience in response to the significant traumatic events, pre and post migration, and the challenges they encountered during their resettlement. Faith in God and the church played a major role in promoting emotional stability and assisting with adjustment during resettlement. The church community played an important role in assisting the women refugees and their families to integrate,

build bridges and form friendships in the new resettlement. The church community provided both financial and emotional support for the women refugees.

This finding of this study indicates that, although the participants have suffered tremendous and significant traumatic experiences, only two of the participants sought professional mental health assistance. Kate voluntarily sought mental health services to deal with anxiety and depression after the death of her brother. Kate went to therapy after her college counselor suggested it. Whereas Lori had what she has described as a “mental breakdown” and was forced to be admitted at a psychiatric unit for few months to address her schizophrenia.

The issue of refugees not accessing mental health services is discussed by Donnelly, et al. (2011), indicating that the migration process causes depression, schizophrenia, post-traumatic stress disorder, suicide and psychosis, but some refugee women believe that the health care system does not address their mental health needs.

Others believe that it will benefit them, but the lack of interpretation services and the language barrier were obstacles for refugees accessing the services. Li & Browne (2007) as cited by O’Mahony and Donnelly (2007) indicated immigrant women with significant mental health issues have difficulty accessing mental health services due to language barriers and difficulty in understanding the host country’s health care system. O’ Mahony and Donnelly (2007) cited Bigby (2003) who argued that Asian Americans are skeptical of using mental health services because of the inappropriateness of the services, social stigma, a lack of financial resources, and the difference of western mental

health treatments from their own. Mollica (1988) as cited by Friedman (1992) indicated that in addition to the cultural barriers, women refugees have a fear of being diagnosed with mental health disorders because it might affect their immigration status.

Kate believes that although Southern Sudanese refugees might have a stigma using mental health services, she indicated that these services were not suggested or offered to the Southern Sudanese refugee community when they first resettled in the Minnesota. She made this statement:

There are things that should have been implemented in working with refugees. They should have been more aware of the fact that refugee, the term refugee means their country is not safe enough for them to live in, so they should be aware of the fact that they are in traumatic situation. And that they are adjusting to this culture and I felt they were not cared for. Like, there should have been more hands on, at least provided mental assistance. That was the one thing that was not focused on throughout the whole experience. I've seen a lot of refugees. No one comes to America and talks to psychologist. And I haven't seen that at all. One of the things that their mind is going through a lot of different things, and that they need some sort of relief and guidance to adjust and move on. That was never addressed at all.

Kate suggested that the resettlement agencies might have a challenge in providing mental health resources because there is a stigma against mental health in the Southern

Sudanese community but she believes that if the agencies reached out to the refugee communities and communicate and educate them about the resources, they will respond.

The previous studies on Southern Sudanese women refugees experiences in resettlement, provided an emerging picture of the resettlement challenges in general but there was a gap in the literature of conclusive studies in regards to the lived experiences of Southern Sudanese women refugees and how they conceptualize their own experiences, if they have managed to cope despite of their traumatic experiences, and how they are balancing the demands of their families and culture and how they are fulfilling their own goals of career and education.

The findings of this study supported and corresponded with the literature. However the use of the narrative methodology allowed the women refugees the voice to provide a context specific knowledge beyond the generalized explanation of the refugees experiences in the literature thus adding a rich picture of this marginalized group and their perspectives and unique experiences to the literature. Mezirow's transformative theory explored the manner in which Southern Sudanese women refugees subjectively interpret varying meanings and realities in the context of adapting to a new environment. Transformative learning is evident in the narratives of the participants. All participants experienced disorientation dilemmas that challenged their adaptation and integration in their resettlement in Minnesota. The participants' experiences led to their personal growth and changed meaning perspectives. They learned to adapt to their new environment reflectively and non-reflectively. Through critical reflection some of the

participants questioned their cultural conflicts and its impact on their adaptation process. They questioned, challenged and resisted its negative impact on their resettlement and were able to change their frame of references in order to adapt into the new culture. The participants also learned through observation and social interactions with friendships formed in school, work, church and adult education centers. The finding of the study concludes that despite the traumatic experiences and challenges, the participants of this qualitative study have demonstrated their determination to live and create better lives for themselves and their families.

Listening to the participants' stories is an important requirement increasing awareness and planning appropriate policies and strategies to address their needs in resettlement and provide adequate level of assistance upon arrival in the US. It is important for anyone who works with refugees from policy makers, service providers, and educators to pay attention and listen to these voices and taking to their account their perspectives in order to develop the best practices when working with Southern Sudanese women refugees.

In the following chapter, the limitations, implications of the research and the writer's reflection on the study are discussed.

Chapter 6: Limitations, Implications, and Reflections

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section identifies the limitations of the research; the second section details the study implications and implications for future research and the last section is the writer's reflection on the study.

Limitations of the Study

This qualitative research can provide some understanding and explanation about the experience of some Southern Sudanese women refugees in Minnesota. Although the participants came from different age groups and backgrounds, the findings of this research cannot be generalized to all Southern Sudanese women refugee populations, or any other ethnic refugee group.

The second limitation was the use of an interpreter during an interview with one of the participants. The participant did not speak English, so her granddaughter acted as an interpreter. This might have caused some concern as to the reliability of the information provided.

A third limitation of this study was the inability of this researcher to connect with refugees who had arrived in the United States less than two years prior to the study. The women interviewed had lived in the United States for over a decade. This made it difficult for some of the participants to recall specific incidents during the earlier months and years of their resettlement and to capture some of their day-to-day challenges.

Implications of the Study for practice

The participants related the importance of the resettlement agencies in supporting them and providing financial assistance and resources during their first few months after arrival. However, this assistance ended too fast, leaving them and their families to address the challenges of resettlement with very limited or no resources.

The Southern Sudanese women refugees came from a war torn country where they witnessed and experienced violence, grief and trauma in their hometowns and in the refugee camps. Resettlement agencies should prioritize developing a policy to address the mental health and psychological needs of refugees entering in the United States.

Refugees should be provided with culturally appropriate mental health resources. It is important that the mental health providers be culturally competent and knowledgeable about the refugees' backgrounds and culture and trained in understanding the cultural barriers associated with accessing mental health in the Southern Sudanese refugee community.

A refugee support system should be put into place to support refugees after the resettlement agencies terminate their services. A coordinated approach must be developed between the resettlement agencies and community organizations that work directly with refugees. They should aim to develop a holistic strategy to provide the women refugees needed job training, language skills, awareness of the American system and culture and their rights, and such supports should continue for at least a year from the time of their arrival. This coordination should include the Southern Sudanese refugee

community in Minnesota, allowing them to have a voice in decisions that affect them, express specific issues that are affecting them, and determine the best approaches to meet their needs.

Implications for the Adult Education Community

The needs of this group of women refugees present some important challenges for the adult education community. These challenges are not confined to any one refugee population, but the needs of these Southern Sudanese women do present some unique challenges as they seek to find their way in American society. Adult Education programs find themselves in the forefront of this acculturation process.

The study concluded that language literacy continues to be a barrier for the participants who are enrolled in adult education centers. These participants have been in adult educational programs for many years, but are making limited progress in advancing to upper classes in an attempt to get their General Educational Development (GED) diplomas. This is limiting the participants' opportunities to attend college and/or avail themselves of better employment opportunities. This study is proposing the following recommendations to address the women refugees' educational challenges at adult education centers and also assist them in their integration process:

- Training Adult education professionals on the socio-cultural aspects of the refugee population.
- The lived experiences of refugees should be a key element of curriculum development and pedagogy.

- Efforts must be made to assess the refugee students' learning styles.
- Setting goals and assessing progress should continue throughout the educational process.
- Programs must adopt effective tools for teaching refugee learners in the adult education setting.

Training Adult education professionals on the socio-cultural aspects of the refugee population.

It is important for adult education professionals to have an ongoing training, awareness, and education on the sociocultural aspects and relevant background of the Southern Sudanese women refugee population who are enrolled in their institutions. Adult education professionals should be trained on refugees' traumatic experiences and how they affect their learning and integration. Educators should also be trained on appropriate communication methods and interactions with refugees. These ongoing trainings are important in order to understand the refugees' needs and provide adequate and appropriate learning environments, and identify appropriate resources and support to smooth their transition.

The lived experiences of refugees are a key element of curriculum development and pedagogy

This study recommends that adult education centers should create a culturally appropriate educational curriculum that includes the refugee learners' experiences in a systematic way; a curriculum where refugee learners can learn materials relevant to their

lives. Skilton-Sylvester (2002) argued that “the actual lived experiences of students need to be a key element of curriculum development and pedagogy and that focusing on generalized roles—although perhaps seeming like a step in the right direction—does not necessarily allow for the creation of curriculum and pedagogy in which long-term investment in participation can be nourished”. P.24

Teachers should recognize and respect the past experiences of the adult refugee learners. Understanding these past experiences will serve as a tool to construct meaning from new information learned, add value to the class and engage students in active learning.

Respecting the refugee adult learner as an adult will make the learner feel valued as an individual. Freire (2006) advocated that the content of language lessons should be based on the learner’s cultural and personal experiences. He argued that teachers should respect the students’ knowledge and be humble about limitation of their own knowledge. Freire indicated that educators should not undermine and reject the learners’ knowledge attained from their life experiences and brought with them when they come to school.

Assessing the refugee students’ learning styles

Teachers in adult education centers should assess the refugees’ learning styles and strategies, and be aware of the variety of learning styles. Teachers have to thoroughly explore how their refugees students are experiencing learning and the challenges and complexities they face in adult learning contexts.

Setting goals and assessing progress

The refugee learner, with the help of the teacher, needs to discuss and develop realistic learning goals and develop a timeline to complete each goal. The teacher should provide feedback on a regular basis on the progress made on each goal. Mezirow (1997) emphasized the important task of the adult educator in recognizing the learners' objectives and goals. It is the educator's role to assist the learners to reach their objectives so they will be more autonomous; meaning that the learners are able to understand the skills necessary to become critically reflective of their own assumptions and to connect with others in a dialogue to validate or challenge their own beliefs, thus becoming socially- responsible thinkers.

Adopting effective tools for teaching refugee learners in adult education setting

Problem posing, dialogue, and listening are approaches developed by Paulo Freire, who was a radical educational reformist. These approaches are drawn from learners' cultural and personal experiences as a method for language learning. Freire's principle is that education is not neutral, whether in a formal or informal setting. The relationship between the educator and the learner does not take place in emptiness, because everyone brings their culture, beliefs, experiences, and survival skills with them. Education begins with people's experience and it either reinforces or challenges the existing social forces that make them submissive or subservient (Shor, 1987). Freire proposed that teachers should see themselves as co-learners who are interested in learning

about the culture and values of their students and to stimulate, empower, and accept the values of the learners. Learners enter the process of learning not by obtaining facts, but by constructing their reality in social exchange with others (Shor, 1987).

Problem Posing: Problem posing is a significant tool for strengthening and developing critical thinking. It is an important tool to use in adult education settings, particularly among immigrant and refugee ESL learners or workers who do not have much power in their lives. Most ESL learners come from poor socioeconomic backgrounds and have had little access to education in their home countries. When immigrants and refugees come to the United States, they work mainly in low skilled occupations. There is always a sense of disconnect from their fellow American co-workers due to cultural and language barriers in their new environment. Through problem-posing interactions, learners are able to see issues and critically examine them.

Dialogue Teaching: Freire suggested the dialogue method as a way to reduce the learner's lack of participation and teacher talk in the classroom. The teacher starts with a problem-posing discussion, sending a clear signal to the learners that their participation is expected and required in the classroom. This requires a certain skill from the teacher in knowing when to intervene and when to refrain from intervening. This dialogic inquiry in the classroom will require the teacher's curriculum itself to be dialogic. It suggests that the teacher actively seeks to know his/her learners by conducting research on the learners' communities, to explore and understand the group dynamics, the social relations of communication, and the language learners use in their communities in relation to their

gender, race, region, age and ethnic origin. In creating a supportive and social democratic environment, learners will experience participation in a dialogic interaction that allows them to discuss and reflect in issues that concern their lives. (Shor, 1987)

Listening: Listening is part of an ongoing process which involves both the teacher and the learners. In listening to the students, teachers are able to identify themes for content areas that have high emotional effect. General categories involve work process, relationships at work, cultural difference or any other concerns or issues that involve and influence the learners. Listening to the learners can uncover the hidden voices that learners bring with them into the classroom. Teachers need to assist the learners in expressing their concerns in the classroom as they have the power to remove the learners' barrier to learning.

The listening process is not limited to the classroom; most of the learners voice their concerns through informal conversations outside the classrooms or during breaks. The concerns of learners can be discussed in class as a lesson. After recognizing the issues identified by the learners during the listening phase, the teacher's role is to structure the class for a group discussion around these issues. Freire suggested what he called codification which is followed by an inductive questioning strategy. The codes symbolize the students' reality back in the classroom, and are a demonstration of the issues identified by them. The purpose of the code is to allow the learners discuss their emotional and social response in reaction to the issues in a focused form. Codes can be in many forms including written dialogue, story, photographs or a skit. For the codes to be

effective, they should represent the significant issues identified by the students; they should focus on one problem at a time and they should not be too complicated; they should come in an open- ended format without suggested solution. The resolution should come from the learners themselves, mediated by the teacher. The purpose of the codes is to encourage critical thinking. (Wallerstein, 1987)

Implications for Future Research

The participants of this research have been in the United States for over a decade. To understand their adaptation and integration patterns, a longitudinal study tracking their adaption process from the time they arrive in resettlement can provide a more in-depth understanding.

This study indicated that the participants enrolled in the Adult Education Center spent a number of years in the center making very slow progress in advancing in the educational levels. They have experienced difficulty learning the English language and challenges in advancing. The body of literature would be strengthened by an empirical study on adult refugee learner experiences in adult education centers to identify their challenges in the classroom and assess the educational curriculum to determine reasons for their failure to advance into higher levels.

Reflection of the researcher on the study

My refugee background and work experience with refugees drove my interest in this study. As a former refugee from Sudan, I understood that resettlement is a complex and challenging process that takes time. When I came to the United States, I had a college

degree that was recognized in the United States and strong English language skills, but I still faced challenges. These challenges made me think about Southern Sudanese refugees who escaped the civil war and resettled in the United States. I knew that these women had experienced trauma and violence prior to their arrival in the United States. I was also aware that these women would likely have limited education due to the high illiteracy rates in Sudan and South Sudan. I knew that many would not speak English. I wondered how and whether these women were able to overcome these challenges in order to resettle.

I worked in a nonprofit organization that conducted workshops for professionals who serve refugees, focused on best practices in working with East African refugees. Little was actually known about the background of these refugees and there was a significant gap in knowledge about their resettlement experiences. My objective was to increase the awareness of this marginalized group comprised of Southern Sudanese refugee women, as well as the awareness of their needs as they resettled in Minnesota. I aimed to share the experiences of women refugees with service providers, educators, and policy makers in order to further develop best practices for working with Southern Sudanese women refugees.

I selected to conduct research using a narrative method because it allowed the women a voice to provide details on how they view themselves and their experiences during resettlement, and how they make sense of the new society they are living in. The narratives of the participants inform the readers about the refugees' experiences, thus

bringing awareness and understanding of how resettlement policies affect the lives of refugees.

Atkinson (1998) argued that in researching life stories, the personal narrative is a strong approach to gain subjective perspective of the topic of study, and that it assists the researcher in understanding someone's life from their own point of view. The practice of storytelling is also a significant social and cultural practice in Sudan and South Sudan. This practice proved helpful to the refugees in opening up and sharing their experiences.

To control my bias as a researcher, I wrote my own experience as a refugee in Minnesota and reflected on how my experiences and values as an African woman refugee in Minnesota influenced my research interest. I then bracketed my personal views of Southern Sudanese women refugees' experiences in Minnesota. Reflexive journals were an effective strategy that facilitated reflection and allowed me to examine my own personal assumptions in order to be aware of my subjectivities. Reflexive journals were also a useful approach for continued tracking of all research project decisions.

Frank (1997) as cited in Ahern (1999) argued that, "Reflexivity involves the realization that researchers are part of the social world they study." (p. 408) Porter (1993) as cited in Ahern (1999) also argued, "this realization is the result of any honest examination of the values and interests that may impinge upon research work." (p. 408) I documented my preconceptions and prejudices before and during data collection and data analysis.

One of the main preconceptions and concerns for this writer is the power differential, being from the North of Sudan, and the reaction of the participants. The civil war between the North and South has lasted over 30 years in which many Southern Sudanese were brutally murdered and forced to leave their lands to escape the violence of the war. In my mind, I assumed that there might be some reservation and/or hostility towards interacting with someone from the North, but I was proved wrong. The participants were receptive to meeting someone from their country.

Being a refugee from Sudan allowed me to establish connections and build trusting relationships with the participants. My ability to speak Arabic was very helpful in communicating with three of the refugees who had difficulty expressing their thoughts and ideas in English. The positive experience and interaction with the women refugees from my country has been consistent with the literature. Birgman (2006) as cited in Marlow et al. (2014) indicated that researchers from the same background as refugees are considered cultural insiders that are able to access certain cultural communities, something that could be challenging for an outsider.

Another assumption I held before conducting the interviews was that the women refugees were all receiving some sort of government assistance. This assumption proved to be wrong as five of the participants are financially independent and not receiving any medical, housing or cash benefits from the government. Two participants are receiving assistance for their permanent disabilities.

There was one participant who was skeptical after our second interview and was concerned and fearful as to what exactly the information would be used for, and if the government in South Sudan could obtain it. I had to contact the participant and was able to reiterate her anonymity and the confidentiality of her information. We met for a third time to go over her core story for verification and she was comfortable and very relaxed during the interview.

The interviews with the women refugees were a humbling experience. The stories of these women were powerful and inspiring. Despite the hardships and trauma these women endured prior to their resettlement, these women have been able to rebuild their lives and achieve peace and stability. Adapting to a new culture posed significant challenges to these women. They encountered obstacles including cultural shock, language barriers, employment and educational challenges, racism and discrimination, and a lack of support and resources. They lived through traumatic events including loss, grief, physical and sexual abuse, mental illnesses and disability, but in the end found a way to cope and integrate. They were able to move on with their lives in a positive manner, demonstrating tremendous resilience and strength, to overcome the challenges and make their lives and their families better.

After the interviews, the respondents expressed that they had enjoyed sharing their stories and experiences. Dakota felt it was therapeutic for her to speak about her traumatic experiences with physical and sexual abuse, loss and grief. April was very pleased when I gave her a copy of her core story. She was excited to see her story written.

Shary indicated it was hard for her read her core story, but she was very pleased to take part in the study and share her experiences. Theresa expressed her gratitude for being interviewed. Kate was glad that this research allowed for the women's voices to be heard and expressed how important it is that their experiences become part of the literature.

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APPENDIX A- Recruitment letter

You are invited to participate in my research study. The information on this letter is to help you decide whether you would like to participate or not to take part.

As part of my doctoral dissertation, I am conducting a study that will examine the life experiences of Southern Sudanese women refugees in Minnesota as they navigate the resettlement process and examine how they balance the demands of their culture, the demands of their families and their needs to obtain education or work. The information you provide will help to answer the following questions: What is the nature of the experience of Southern Sudanese women refugees in attempting to strike a balance between demands of culture, family life and their education in Minnesota? What are the challenges facing Southern Sudanese women refugees who seek access to education or career training?, and What are the barriers and limitations that prevent Southern Sudanese women refugees from getting educational career training?

My goal is bring increasing awareness of the particular needs of Southern Sudanese refugee women. This will also assist service providers, educators, and policy makers in developing best practices when working with Southern Sudanese women refugees. It is important in working with refugees to listen to their voices and taking into account their perspectives.

As a participant, you will choose the time and the place that is convenient for you to conduct the interviews. You will have the freedom to terminate the interview at any time you wish to discontinue. You can refuse to answer any questions or talk about any

topic. You need to be certain and confident that your identity would not be revealed in the research without your permission. Confidentiality will be maintained by changing your name to non-identifying name. Your personal information including interview notes, transcripts, pictures, field notes and digital recording will be accessible only to me and my advisor and it will be stored in a locked cabinet. All data will be destroyed after the completion of the research.

If you agreed to participate, I would like you to review the University of Minnesota Human Subjects Consent form and sign that form. Thank you again, for your time.

Sincerely,

Reem El-Radi, Doctoral Candidate in Adult Education
Department of Organizational Leadership Policy and Development
University of Minnesota

APPENDIX B-CONSENT FORM

You are invited to participate in a research study to examine the life experiences of Southern Sudanese women refugees in Minnesota as they navigate the resettlement process and examine how they balance the demands of their culture, the demands of their families and their needs to obtain education or work. You are selected in this study because (a) you a Southern Sudanese women refugee 21 years or older; (b) has entered the United States with refugee status, (c) is able to communicate in English or Arabic; (d) has been living in the United States for longer than one year, and (e) is coming back to school or in school to get an education or some sort of credentials related to language skills or career preparation

Please review this form carefully before you agree to participate in the study.

Please feel free discuss this study with the researcher and ask any questions

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to examine the life experiences of Southern Sudanese women refugees in Hennepin County as they navigate the resettlement process and examine how they balance the demands of their culture, the demands of their families and their needs to obtain education or work

Who is conducting the study?

The investigator for this study is Reem El-Radi who is doctoral candidate at the Department of Organizational Leadership Policy and Development at the University of Minnesota

What will be involved if I take part in this study?

You will be interviewed 2-3 about your experiences as a refugee in Minnesota.

Each interview will last approximately between 60-90 minutes.

Procedures:

1. Describe your experience of resettling in the United States.
2. What type of resources that was available for you when you came to Minnesota?

Where and when will the study take place?

You will decide on the time and location that is convenient for you.

What information will be collected?

You will be asked questions about your experiences as a refugee in Minnesota and the challenges you faced during your resettlement.

Will the interview be audio recorded?

Yes. The interview will be audio recorded to maintain accurate record unless you object.

Yes. I authorize the researcher to audio record my interview during my participation in the research study:_____

No, I don't authorize the researcher to audio record my interview during my participation in the research study:_____

Is there any risk to me?

There are no risks associated with your participation in this study. You might encounter a minimal risk since the interview process may unearth sensitive issues. You have to right to stop the interview or refuse to answer any question.

Can I withdraw at any time?

Your participation is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

Will all the information be kept confidential?

All information you provide will be confidential. Your will not be identified in any publication or reports of this study. Your personal information, transcripts, audio/digital recording will be stored and locked in a cabinet. All data will be destroyed after the completion of the research

Whom can I contact to ask questions about this study?

If you have any questions or comments about this study, you can contact the researcher, Reem El-Radi, at (612) 245-1650 or at elrad005@umn.edu or the research advisor Rosemarie Park at (612) 625-8981 or parkx002@umn.edu.

Whom can I contact for additional information?

If you have questions concerning your rights as a research participant, have general questions, concerns or complaints or want to talk to someone other than the researcher, you may call the University of Minnesota Human Subjects Protection Program office at 612-626-5654. If you would like to contact the Human Subjects Protection Program by email, please use the following email address irb@umn.edu, or ibc@umn.edu

Your signature

If you agree to participate in this study, please sign below.

Name: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX C-INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about your life back home before you came to Minnesota.
2. Did you work or go to school when you were in Sudan?
3. How many years of formal education have you had? Where were you educated?
4. When did you come to the Minnesota?
5. Why did you come to the Minnesota?
6. How old were you when you came to the United States?
7. How long have you lived in Minnesota?
8. What did you expect when you came here?
9. Tell me about your life in Minnesota. How did your life change when you came to Minnesota?
10. Describe your experience of resettling in the United States.
11. What type of resources were available for you when you came to Minnesota?
12. Which resource was the most helpful? Tell me why?
13. What are the challenges when you first moved here?
14. Tell me about your experience at work in Minnesota?
15. What are some of the challenges you faced at work?
16. What are your education goals? Why are these your goals?
17. Have you participated in any formal education in the United States? For example, have you attended school or taken classes in the community?
18. Tell me about your experiences at school in Minnesota?
19. What are the challenges you faced in school?
20. What things have you done or learned to do in order to adjust to life in the U.S. for yourself and for your family?
21. What things have you learned not to do since coming here?
22. Would you describe your life as better or worse since coming to the U.S.?
23. How is it better? Explain and tell me a story reflecting that.
24. How is it worse? Explain and tell me a story reflecting that.
25. What things have made it more difficult to adjust? Can you give me an example of this?
26. What are the things that made it easy to adjust? Can you give me an example of this?

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April 21, 2014

Reem D El-radi
Org Leadership, Policy & Dev
Room 110 WullH
3345A
86 Pleasant St SE
Minneapolis, MN 55455

RE: "The experiences of Southern Sudanese women refugees in attempting to strike a balance between demands of culture, family life and their education in Minnesota. A qualitative study."
IRB Code Number: 1402P48421

Dear Ms. El-radi

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) received your response to its stipulations. Since this information satisfies the federal criteria for approval at 45CFR46.111 and the requirements set by the IRB, final approval for the project is noted in our files. Upon receipt of this letter, you may begin your research.

IRB approval of this study includes the consent form dated and recruitment materials received April 15, 2014.

The IRB would like to stress that subjects who go through the consent process are considered enrolled participants and are counted toward the total number of subjects, even if they have no further participation in the study. Please keep this in mind when calculating the number of subjects you request. This study is currently approved for 10 subjects. If you desire an increase in the number of approved subjects, you will need to make a formal request to the IRB.

For your records and for grant certification purposes, the approval date for the referenced project is April 4, 2014 and the Assurance of Compliance number is FWA00000312 (Fairview Health Systems Research FWA00000325, Gillette Children's Specialty Healthcare FWA00004003). Research projects are subject to continuing review and renewal; approval will expire one year from that date. You will receive a report form two months before the expiration date. If you would like us to send certification of approval to a funding agency, please tell us the name and address of your contact person at the agency.

As Principal Investigator of this project, you are required by federal regulations to:

*Inform the IRB of any proposed changes in your research that will affect human subjects, changes should not be initiated until written IRB approval is received.

Driven to DiscoverSM



*Office of Accountability
Research, Evaluation and Assessment*

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Reem El Radi
University of Minnesota
Organizational Leadership, Policy and Development
Willing Hall, Room 330E
86 Pleasant Street SE
Minneapolis MN 55455

October 31, 2014

RE: "The Experience of Southern Sudanese Women Refugees in attempting to strike a balance between demands of urban family life and their education in Minnesota"

Dear Reem El-Radi:

The Research Committee is pleased to inform you that your research proposal has been reviewed. Your proposal to conduct research in SPPS has been accepted. It was very interesting to see that you are using a culturally responsive methodology of narrative inquiry and analysis. I want to share one comment from one of the reviewers of your proposal: "My comment is mainly 'food for thought' for the researcher: I know that vitally important and very necessary attention is paid in the proposal to the difficulties, barriers and hardships the women have endured and continue to face, but it would be lovely to also look at the spiritual and cultural strengths these women hold and utilize to survive, persevere, heal, and move forward." You will receive a hard copy of this notice in a few weeks. Please submit a copy of your final report to us. We look forward to reading it.

A copy of your completed research paper is due to this office upon completion of the research paper, anticipated date is due by November 1, 2015. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at (651) 767-8116.

We appreciate your interest and the time in submitting your research proposal to Saint Paul Public Schools.

Sincerely,

Marian Heinrichs, Ph.D.
Research Committee Chair
REA Manager of Program Evaluation