RACE, AND RELIGION IN THE MAKING OF SOMALI YOUTH IDENTITIES

By

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

K-12 Educational Administration—Doctor of Philosophy

2015

ABSTRACT

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This phenomenological study draws from postmodern, and post-positivist theories to describe and explain Somali high school students' perception and experience of racialization. It explains how the experience of racialization and its impact on embodied perception of self and other are key factors in how Somali youth experience school. Two questions guide this study: 1) How do schooling experiences influence how Somali students are positioned by school staff, peers, and how they position themselves? 2) How do Somali students experience and make sense of racialization. To investigate these questions, I interviewed nine high school Somali immigrant and refugee students about their school experiences. In addition to phenomenology, I also employed ethnographic data collection methods, where I carried out school observation and informal conversation with teachers and school administrators. Connecting narrative accounts of lived experience to racialized identities based on visibility of race and religion. My findings show that Somali youth's interpretation and understanding of racial situations depended on the degree to which they understood and internalized mainstream American discourse about Muslims, and immigrants. This was particularly true for how Somali youth interpreted being Muslim and the meanings they attached to religious identity markers such as the headscarf. My analysis show that the production of racialized identities had more to do with the how Somali students perceive racial situations in their school communities.

This dissertation is dedicated to a remarkable woman, my late grandmother, Aasiya Yusuf Hussein. I am forever grateful for all that you taught me.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to begin by thanking my advisor, dissertation chair, and friend, Dr. Christopher Dunbar, Jr., who mentored me, often advocated for me, and helped me at every step of the way. Dr. Dunbar, I am forever grateful for your advice, support, and friendship and for making me feel that I have a home in academe.

I would also like to thank my dissertation director, Dr. Kyle Greenwalt, who not only challenged me and guided me as I made sense of theory but also read several drafts and provided thorough feedback. Thank you for pushing me to think critically on issues affecting immigrant youth. In your classes and the several conversations we had, you introduced me to ideas and language that helped me appreciate the complexity of educating all children. Thank you for your generosity and friendship.

I would like to acknowledge and thank my committee members Dr. Terah Venzant-Chambers and Dr. Christy Cooper for their feedback, questions, and support from the proposal stage to completion of the dissertation.

This dissertation is reflective of the efforts of many people who have inspired, challenged, and supported me throughout the process. However, the journey that took me to graduate school has its roots in the love and support of my family, dating back several generations. It started with my late maternal grandfather, Haji Axmadey Mohamed Nur (Islaw), who saw the benefit of investing in private education for all his children. Haji Axmadey sent his daughters to private schools, when many of his relatives and friends constantly questioned his decision of investing in daughters' education.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

The image of Somali people represented in the media as the citizens of a nation ridden with famine, civil strife, piracy, and recently terrorism, influences how most Americans perceive refugees and immigrants from Somalia. Within the field of education, the common discourse about Somali students is one of children who may be at risk, have special needs, and are difficult to educate (Bigelow, 2008, 2010), with parents that do not necessarily care for the education of their children. There has been a growing concern about meeting Somali students' needs as large numbers of Somali students continue to receive supplemental language services such as English Language Learners (ELL) and special education programs in their schools.

However, there is a lack of critical studies investigating how Somali students are actually experiencing the structures that are set up to help them. In large urban districts that serve Somali students, one often hears educators sharing stories about their Somali students. In my own experiences as a teacher, I have come across several educators sharing their experiences with Somali immigrants and refugee students. The anecdotes typically showed that these teachers were either overwhelmed or knew little about their Somali students. For instance, in the curriculum and teaching of a master's degree course I was taking at a local university, one of my classmates, a young female teacher, said that "in my kindergarten class, I have a difficult time teaching my Somali students, especially the boys. . . . Everything I teach them gets untaught when they go home. You see their culture teaches them not to obey women".

During my student teaching training in a suburban high school, a lead science teacher made some comments about Somali students in his school:

> I had a Chinese student in my class, who would use his dictionary to translate every word in the entire assignment, until he gets it. But when it comes to the Somali students, I had

one in my class, who told me that his entire family was killed. I thought to myself, "Oh my God, how can this kid pay attention to anything I have to say?" (Mr. Spencer)

However, when I observed his AP chemistry class, there was one Somali female student who was a high achiever. Yet, this teacher chose to ignore that fact and chose to categorize all Somali students in his school based on the above comment. When I asked him about this particular student, he said "you know, she is not typical" (Mr. Spencer).

Recently, in a pilot study I conducted in an urban high school, an ELL math teacher who identifies as Somali, whom I informally interviewed, said that "They [Somali Bantu students] don't care about education, neither do their parents. They come to school to socialize. The truancy rate among them is unbelievable. Girls will get married and have children, then we don't see them after that" (Mr. Ismail). Another teacher in the same school talked about the conversations she had with her class about the Somali immigrant/refugee students and their families, whom she described as "working hard and pulling their resources together to make something of themselves" (Ms. Martinez). Despite the fact that this teacher was one of only two teachers in this school that talked positively about Somali students, she was also drawing from the common narrative told about immigrants. These examples seem to simplify and downplay the challenges of poverty, race, and being a Muslim immigrant in that complicate many Somali students' lives. The everyday experiences of Somali immigrants and refugee students are somewhere in between these two binaries.

Most Somali students I interviewed in my pilot study were mainly concerned with getting along with and being accepted by their peers and doing well in school. For instance, they often discussed their experiences in learning English for the first time in elementary school and the challenges that entailed. One student explained, "In elementary school, I used to be very quiet. I

did not say much. But, in fourth grade, kids used to make fun of me because I started to speak in broken English" (Ali). Despite the fact that this student and several of his friends were taking mainstream classes by the time of this interview, early school experiences still influenced their perception of themselves as students and how they related to school staff and their American-born peers. Meanwhile, in the same school, there was another group of Somali students who were struggling academically and, as a result, were disengaged from school. For instance, a Somali student who received both ELL and special education services, said, "I don't like school; I come to school to eat lunch and have fun with my friends" (Mohamed).

Regardless of academic performance, Somali students in this school were aware of the fact that they were racialized. A student in the 11th grade relayed "some people hide that they are Somali, because they think it is a bad thing. When a Somali guy does something bad, they [the school staff] say, they [Somalis] are all bad. They [Somalis] all know each other" (Ali). As I will show in the second chapter of this proposal, discourse as a system of representation has created school environments in which Somali immigrant and refugee students embody experiences of racialization (Hall, 1997).

In addition, religion, as a visible identity marker, seemed to be another important factor in Somali students' identities and how they experience school. This is particularly true for Somali girls who observe the hijab or headscarf. For instance, many students recalled experiences of violence or marginalization because of their faith. A Somali refugee student shared that "in middle school we used to fight a lot. They [American-born students] did not sit with us and we did not sit with them. We did not talk to each other. We used to fight about our religion" (Ahmed). More than a few of the students shared similar stories of experiencing violence. While some of these students' stories were quite extreme, other students mainly shared

3

experiences of marginalization because of their Islamic faith. Despite their experiences, these students found ways to exist between the secular ideals of school and the religious ones at home. These examples show the nature of Somali immigrant and refugee students' school experiences as multifaceted, complex, and contrary to the ones described by educators. Rather, Somali immigrant and refugee students' school experiences are influenced by the intersection among race, religion, and immigrant status, and Somali students try to negotiate with the social positions these constructs create; as a result, they become ambivalent about the identity markers that define who they are.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study is to investigate the schooling experience of Somali immigrant and refugee high school students. The particular research questions are:

1. How do schooling experiences influence how Somali students are positioned by school staff and by their peers, as well as how they position themselves?

2. How do Somali students experience racialization and make sense of the racialization processes?

As I attempt to answer these questions from the literature, I concentrate on the following questions:

1. What are the social and cultural contexts in which Somali refugee and immigrants' education take place?

2. How do Somali refugees and immigrants negotiate identity and cultural spaces in schools?

3. What challenges do Somali refugee and immigrants face in US schools?

4. What is the role of race, religion, and ethnicity in the education of Somali refugees and immigrants?

Note: in this study school experience refers to issues of inclusion, exclusion, success, and failure.

Summary of Literature and Theoretical Frameworks

Research about Somali immigrants and refugees is in its developmental stage and lacks empirical evidence on many of the issues facing Somali children in public schools, despite the fact that large numbers of Somali refugees and immigrants have resettled in several cities in the US since the mid-1990s. Due to the dearth of research findings, I draw on the broader literature about other refugee and immigrant groups in the US. In addition, when literature permits, I highlight the unique position of the Somali refugee and immigrant experience within the framework of immigrant and refugee research context. Framing the larger research about immigrant education as a backdrop is important for two reasons.

First, studies about refugee and immigrant groups, such as groups from Southeast Asia, Cuba, and Haiti, are significant in providing an understanding of broader issues relevant to dislocated people grappling with problems of adapting to new social, cultural, and language environs. In addition, examining these studies brings forth similarities and differences among and within refugee and immigrant groups.

Second, the broader immigrant literature highlights important factors that describe various integration patterns that eventually explain the successes and failures of refugees and immigrants youth as they interact with a host country's society and institutions. In this view, factors such as social, economic, and cultural issues influence the educational context in which immigrant and refugee (including Somali) children takes place. Hence, it is through race, religion, and ethnicity that social, cultural, and structural paradigms are negotiated and contested as immigrants and refugees engage with local institutions.

Relevance of race and religion. In her study of Somali immigrant and refugee youth in Minnesota, Martha Bigelow (2010) highlighted the need to re-examine "generally accepted theories" about immigrants when seeking to understand Somali youth in the United States (p. 2). The experiences of Somali youth in US schools were similar to those of other immigrant and refugee groups, in the sense that most immigrant youth reported experiences of institutional marginalization due to their race, religion, and/or ethnicity. Bigelow argued that even though these are old issues, for Somali youth "the players and the contexts are new" (p. 1). For instance, in the US context, Somali youth become black because Somali immigrants and refugees come from a society where the concept of race based on skin color as a social category does not exist (Ibrahim, 1991; Forman, 2002). Therefore, their racial identity as "black" is not given but instead is constructed through interaction with the US's racial system. Therefore, as Bigelow emphasized, race and racial relations are areas that exemplify how Somali youth's identity is relational (Hall, 1990).

Race and the processes of racialization not only play an important role in the lives of Somali immigrant and refugee youth in the US, but also situate them in a somewhat unique position. Coming from East Africa, Somali people are black in race and prescribe to Islam as a religion (Elmi, 2010). Hence, in the US context, Somalis are not only black, but they are also Muslim (Collet, 2007). Therefore, as black and Muslim immigrants, Somali youth find themselves in social terrain that has a deep and contested racial history, as well as a more recent experience of Islamophobia (Abu-Elhaj, 2007). The terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001 have led to widely accepted hostile sentiments toward Muslims among the larger US society (Sirin & Fine, 2008). Since the perpetuators of the 9/11 attacks are allegedly men of Middle Eastern (and therefore of Muslim) origin, immigrant

Muslims of all backgrounds are viewed with suspicion (Sirin & Fine, 2008). This is an important distinction because indigenous American Muslims, with African Americans constituting the largest group, have not reported discrimination based on their faith compared to immigrant Muslims (Jackson, 2011). These examples make several things apparent. First, the experiences of Somali youth are unique in that they are distinctly different from those of indigenous American black Muslim youth due to their immigration background. Second, Somali youth's experiences are also different from other immigrant youth because of their "black" race.

In this view, the experiences of Somali immigrant and refugee youth provide the landscape to explore experiences of race, religion, class, and immigrant status, as well as the multiple ways these factors overlap as Somali youth interact with institutions such as schools. Omi and Winant (1990) reminded us that racial dynamics play an important role not only in identity issues; they also determine "the allocations of resources, and frame diverse political issues and conflict" (p. 3). According to these authors, this can be seen in the process in which a group's racial identification and meaning changes over time, hence, highlighting differences in issues of incorporation and assimilation.

Somalis are relative newcomers, making up one of the largest immigrant and refugee groups resettling in the US in the mid-1990s and early 2000s because of civil strife, where hundreds of thousands were either killed or displaced (Abdi, 2007; Elmi, 2010). Hence, the Somali presence mirrors recent changes in the demographics of those immigrating to the US and many other Western countries. In this view, unlike immigrants groups from Eastern and Southern Europe at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, most immigrants who have come to the US since the 1960s are of non-European decent. These recent immigrants have been observed to show different integration patterns compared to earlier European immigrants.

8

Scholars have often highlighted the absence of a more linear path of integration into white, middle-class America among recent immigrants in comparison to their earlier European counterparts (Haines, 1996). As a result, researchers studying immigrants often base this distinction on existing racial and economic conditions. This implies that since European immigrants were white, they had easier transitions in comparison to current immigrants. While this may be true to a degree, European immigrants also faced integration challenges (Thandeka, 1999). However, the presence of race and religion as visible identity markers complicate the integration experiences of immigrants and refugees like the Somalis.

Meanwhile, the integration challenges that Somali immigrants and refugees face are manifested in processes where refugee children acquire the English language and negotiate ethnic, religious, and racial identities, as well as cultural spaces in their schools. On the one hand, Somali refugees and immigrants construct new ways of being in their new environment through institutional encounters. Nevertheless, they engage in processes of forming social capital distinctive to Somali immigrants and refugees in the US (Bigelow, 2010). On the other hand, despite the differences and their unique position, it could be argued that, similar to other immigrants of color, Somali youth are more likely to follow what scholars refer to as segmented assimilation as an integration pattern (Portes & Zhou, 1993). Under segmented assimilation, immigrants employ a partial and selective pattern of taking on certain aspects of the host nation's culture in order to gain social mobility, while maintaining many aspects of their own cultural practices. This is in direct opposition to a complete assimilation to mainstream culture as had been observed among earlier European immigrants. The implication is that immigrants of color experience the impact of race differently than European immigrants, who were/are able to join

the mainstream social and cultural milieu and have the opportunity to invoke an ethnic identity by choice (Waters, 1994).

Despite the demographic change among people immigrating to the US since 1960s, it is only recently that researchers looking at immigrant and refugee youth began to consider the importance of race in the acculturation process (Bigelow, 2010; Lee, 2005; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Rong & Brown, 2002; Rong & Fitchett, 2008; Waters, 1994). Despite this recognition, there is a gap in the literature as it pertains to the process of racialization or, in other words, how race is experienced by immigrant youth of color. Therefore, this study will contribute to the field by utilizing race and racialization processes as a way of understanding the schooling experience of Somali immigrant and refugee youth. As I will explain in Chapter 2, identity construction among immigrant and refugee youth does not happen in a vacuum. Racialized identities, or any type of identities for that matter, are as relational as they are contextual. Therefore, any study that investigates the schooling experience of Somali immigrant and refugee youth has to consider context in which identities are created (contextual identity), but also how socially ascribed identities become embodied experiences that are acted upon and lived in the day-to-day lives of subjects and their relationships to various others (relational identity).

In order to understand processes by which racialized identities become embodied, I draw from theories of identity construction that are rooted in postmodern and post-positivist paradigms. I specifically borrow from the works of Alcoff (2006), Merleau-Ponty (1968, 1964), and Omi and Winant (1994), among others. However, I understand that the specific theoretical and methodological frameworks used in this investigation also influence how this study is read. Therefore, before I discuss what this study can and cannot achieve, I will briefly summarize methodology.

Summary of Methods

I conducted a phenomenological study in a K-12 charter school in an urban school district in the Midwest. Ninety percent of the student body is Somali and the rest comprises students from West Africa, Iraq, and Southeast Asia, as well as students of African American heritage. This study intended to investigate the processes of schooling experience of Somali immigrant and refugee students. The study paid particular attention to experiences of racialization among Somali students. This phenomenology study connected narrative accounts of lived experience to the racialized identity negotiations of Somali immigrants and refugee students. Data generated from field notes, field text, and research text (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) was analyzed in accordance with hermeneutic phenomenological methods, which takes into account the whole-part-whole-nature of the phenomenon under study. For 10 weeks, during winter and spring quarters, data was collected from numerous sources, 4–5 times per week: (a) classroom observations; (b) school social activities observations, i.e., lunch breaks, hallways, extra curricula activities, sports events; (c) semi-structured interviews with nine 11th- and 12th-grade students, each interview lasting an hour to a little over an hour; and (d) informal conversations with five teachers and three school administrators. Even though this study was mainly about understanding student experiences, talking with teachers and school administrators helped me to interpret students' experiential accounts. Although I elaborate on phenomenology as a methodological tool in Chapter 3, there is a need to situate the interpretations and presentations of the findings in this study as one of several possible ones based on my positionality as a researcher.

Positionality

In their 2000 text *Narrative Inquiry*, Clandinin and Connelly stated, "Our research interests come out of our own narratives of experience and shape our narrative inquiry plotlines" (p. 121). This is relevant because I am also a Somali female who fled the civil war in my country of birth. My own experience of displacement as a teenager, and my work with Somali refugee youth, contribute to my interest in investigating the experiences of Somali youth, particularly as it is related to schooling.

I was born in Mogadishu, Somalia, under the rule of the late dictator Siad Barre. I remember the secret service police coming to our house while I was growing up and arresting my father for his political views. This happened three times in my early teens. At the time, the country was very unstable, and everywhere people were anxious and worried. Several people disappeared, their bodies to be discovered later, after being taken by the secret police. Despite the chaos in our lives, my mother insisted that my siblings and I go to school and carry on with our lives as usual. When I was 14, my father was released for the third time. My family and I had to leave our home, relatives, and friends because of the ensuing civil conflict in Somalia. After many years of uncertainty, we finally migrated to the United States, where once again we would have to start building our lives. However, this time the difference was that we came with very limited material resources and had to support ourselves by taking menial jobs while we continued with our studies. Hence, experiences of displacement, uncertainty, poverty, racism, and marginalization influence the epistemic lenses that shape how I view the world.

Dahlberg, Drew, and Nyström (2001), spoke of the subjectivity of the researcher in phenomenology:

Researchers are living contextualized people. Researchers have lifeworlds. Accordingly, researchers have conciousnesses and are intentional, that is, when we approach the world, it has meaning. The researcher's intentional consciousness is integrally involved in the account of any phenomenon. If such intentionality is neglected in the phenomenological research, then the labors of what we call phenomenological research are nothing more than the sorting, classifying, and describing what scientist have done since Aristotle. (p. 233)

Our research interest spawns from our own lived experiences; therefore, the topics we choose to investigate are intimately connected to our being in the world. By starting with my own experiences of being displaced, I am not only making a connection to my research topic; I am also demonstrating that meanings inherent in the experiences and the lifeworld of the youth in my study are possible meanings for my own displacement experiences as a teenager. At a personal level, this work is more than descriptions and classifications of the findings. Rather, in this study I seek to understand the meanings embedded in the lifeworld of immigrants and refugee youth by showing my own historical connection to the experiences of the youth.

For 10 years, I have worked with the Somali community in Columbus, Ohio, in different capacities, including as an interpreter, a volunteer, and an educator. My first encounter with Somali youth came through volunteering as a tutor for immigrant bilingual high school students. Twice a week, for two years, I helped Somali and Spanish-speaking students in an urban school with their math and science assignments. The tutoring sessions took place during school hours, so I was able to observe what school was like for these students. I was struck how school was different from my own experience in Somalia and later in Egypt.

Many of the students I worked with struggled through school, especially the Somali students, who had limited formal educational backgrounds and were grappling with standard high school subjects. Almost all of my Somali student tutees spent their childhoods in refugee camps. However, in spite of the academic challenges many faced, these students were also resilient and did their best using the resources that were available to them. During this time, I became aware of the privileges inherent in my own social class background despite the economic struggles my family had to endure as immigrants in the US. Like many of the students I tutored, I am also a refugee immigrant. However, my schooling was never interrupted; in fact, my parents made it a priority for us to get a quality education while we lived in Cairo, Egypt.

In *Narrative Inquiry*, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) asserted that "people are looked at as embodiments of lived stories" (p. 43). This view is contrary to the conception of people in formalist inquiry, in which people are understood to represent a social category. Meanwhile, in narrative inquiry, notions such as race, gender, class, and power do not categorize a person into definitive social positions; rather, they provide realities and tensions that need to be stated and recognized by the researcher (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). We have to be aware of inherent formalistic views and meanings associated with these terms and their impact on our thinking as researchers. Social categories never give a complete picture of who we are as people; rather, they often cover as much as they reveal about us. In other words, social categories shed light on certain aspects of our life but can never fully explain an understanding of who we are. In this light, Clandinin and Connelly suggested that as we think about our own narrative inquiry, it is important that we are reflective about our "autobiographical views and narratives" because these form the views, attitudes, and ways of thinking we bring to the research site (p. 46). This is relevant because initially I was interested in experiences that rested on the intersectionality of

race, class, gender, and religion on the schooling experience. However, during the pilot study, I became aware of the possible tensions such a framework may pose for the phenomenological approach I wanted to conduct. Hence, the tensions that need to be addressed as I narrate from the border may include, on the one hand, my gender, race, class, and immigrant identity. On the other hand, these tensions become even more complicated as one considers the fluid and multiple nature of identity within the postmodern paradigm in which this study is situated. In other words, reflexivity helps us to come to terms with the multiple selves we bring to the research setting. For instance, Shulamit Reinharz (cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2008) explains that "we not only bring the self to the field. . . .[We also] create the self in the field" (p. 278).

As in any social setting, my presence in the field influenced power dynamics and relationships, despite my efforts to overcome them. However, in phenomenology, the researcher's embodied consciousness—or to quote Dahlberg et al., (2001), "our residency in the lifeworld"—made it the case that we are "in the position of creative contributors to the meaning of the world" (p. 95). For instance, being positioned as a first-generation Somali immigrant who observes the hijab had some advantages and disadvantage. The advantages were that being an immigrant provided an insight into the lived experiences of Somali youth and helped me in building rapport with informants. Conversely, the disadvantages were that my position influenced how some of the participants responded to me personally and to my research questions. This dialectic positioning of the researcher provided a platform for temporarily suspending (Dahlberg et al., 2001) my own experiences of being displaced and an observer of the headscarf, so I was freshly open to the experience of the participants. Hence, the socio-historical as well as the epistemological positioning I brought to my research influenced—if not guided—not only the research questions I sought to investigate, but also the relationships I built

and negotiated throughout the inquiry, and, finally, the interpretations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008)

and presentations of the stories of the Somali youth that my study engaged (Clandinin &

Connelly, 2000).

What this Study Can and Cannot Do

This study is phenomenological and it explores the schooling experiences of Somali immigrant and refugee youth in an urban charter school in a Midwest City. The findings describe a detailed account of the lived stories of these students. But, more importantly, the results carried "participant signature," a term used by Clandinin and Connelly (2000, p. 42) to emphasize the significance of balancing participants' and researcher's voices in conveying the stories of informants. In addition, the term suggested that it was more important for the results to help illuminate possible identities and experiences of the participant than to focus on the specifics of what they have said or done (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The results from this research were contextual and relayed the experiences of a group of Somali students in a particular space and time. Therefore, one cannot draw inferential conclusions about all Somali youth based on this study. However, because this is a phenomenological study, it can provide educators and researchers a way of understanding what it means to be a Somali immigrant/refugee student in an urban school context.

Significance

This study is important for the following four reasons. First, this research will add to a small but growing body of research about Somali immigrant and refugee students. It will fill the current gap in the literature by looking at the lived experiences of Somali students in schools. It will provide educators and researchers an understanding of how school contexts influence processes in which Somali students' identities are constructed and the implications that follow. In other words, the study will highlight not only the lived identities of Somali students but also discourses that impact positively or negatively on Somali students being in the world. This is important because there is a growing interest in the education of the immigrant and refugee

17

student population here in the US and this study can contribute to the larger literature about immigrant and refugee education.

Second, this study will provide educators and researchers a general sense of how Somali students perceive and position themselves in their school community. It explores issues of inclusion, exclusion, and marginalization. This is important because, by focusing on student voices, this study gives an insight to the daily experiences of Somali immigrant and refugee youth. While student voices are an important element in both practice and policy, it is my hope that this research will also provide a platform for the Somali youth involved to reflect and become aware of their own experiences so that the meanings they draw from their experiences are directed toward more fulfilling ways of being in the world.

Third, by showing the nexus between social identification and school experience, this investigation reveals how teachers and school administrators understand and position the Somali students in their schools. This is important because it can help educators become aware of their role in students' school experiences. My hope is that the results from this study will help teachers and school administrators' efforts to validate and accept their Somali students' identities as legitimate.

Finally, the findings from this research will provide policy makers, both at the school level and at the district level, relevant information regarding the Somali immigrant and refugee students' school experiences. This is important because often school and district policies, which were meant to benefit all students, become exclusionary once they are implemented. This study will shed light on how school and district policies influence students' daily experiences at school.

Layout of Dissertation

This dissertation is about the stories of Somali youth's experiences in school and community. In these narratives, we learn about Somali immigrant and refugee youth's everyday experiences as they navigate the social and cultural contexts of their schools and in the communities they live in. But more importantly stories depicted here tell bigger stories of human relationship, and stories of being and becoming in the world that we share with others. The nine students in this study shared rich and nuanced stories that depict the complexity of being an immigrant and adolescent. Despite my effort to portray student stories in the most authentic way, yet, as a researcher, I had to ground the accounts by finding common themes that spoke to all students' experiences. Hence, in this process of thematic formulation, some stories demanded to be heard more than others. This, however, does not mean that the untold narratives were less important than the stories narrated here. For instance, the same student might have shared multiple stories in which some were narrated, while others were not. One the one hand, all stories were relevant in the context they were told, on the other hand, only stories that spoke to the themes presented here became relevant. The idea is that I used themes to reveal not only common thread among the stories but also to introduce participants.

So, under each theme, there are subthemes represented in direct quotes from students. This allowed me to engage each story thread fully. Meanwhile, I had to constantly remind myself that this reading of the stories and the meanings drawn represents one of many views and understanding. Hence, by any means the stories and their interpretation, presented here, are not the only ones possible. As I explained above, even though, at the center of this dissertation is the lifeworld of Somali youth. This dissertation follows the conventions of the discipline, where I had to contextualize student narratives. Hence, this document contains six chapters. In chapter

19

one, I introduce the topic of Somali youth experiences in school. I also provide the purpose and objectives of this study. In addition, I present a brief summary of the literature, theoretical frameworks, methodology and I finally discuss limitations and significance of this research.

In the next chapter, under review of literature section, I provide a layout of the context in which the education of Somali youth takes place, paying specific attention to the role of race and religion in educational context. In addition, I review literature about Somalis and other immigrants including Muslim youth, where it is relevant. After that, I explore theories of racialization, as well as theories of embodiment. I pay particular attention to the notion of experience borrowing from Gadamer (2003). Finally, I link notions of experience and racialization to Somali youth's identity development, borrowing from Alcoff's (2006) notion of identity as Horizons. In chapter three, I explain the rational and process of phenomenology as a tool for inquiry. I mainly focus on phenomenology as a method, however, I briefly engage the philosophical tradition in which phenomenology is rooted. Also, I present narrative inquiry as a way to capture experiences of the Somali youth in this study. In the rest of the chapter three, I walk the reader through how I collected, and analyzed student stories, as well as, how I thought about the context in which student stories were told.

Considering the context in which student stories were narrated from, it became necessary to address the role of participant in phenomenological research for the following reasons. In this study I employed ethnographic methods of interviewing and students observation. Since phenomenology is interested in dwelling on the experience under study, I chose narrative inquiry as a method for collecting student experiences. While this was helpful in providing students the space to engage their stories in depth, it also created a context in which the distinction between students and their stories became less clear. Hence, a section about participants is not presented

in this document. The rationale is that by focusing on experience leads the reader to know about the narrators of the experience.

In chapters four and five, I present findings, or Somali youth stories reflected in four themes. The first two themes explored under chapter four, where I talk about how early experiences of racialization shapes students' perception of themselves and others, which become necessary in how they understand and interpret racial situations in their schools and in their communities. The themes in this chapter speak to the multiple ways Somali youth negotiate their visible identity markers in school context, where their difference was marked by race and religion. In chapter five, I continue presenting student stories. The two themes in this chapter speak to how visibility of religion was contested and sometimes embraced by the youth. For instance, many of the stories in theme three and four engage how Somali youth understood and navigate racial situations both in schools and in their communities.

Finally in chapter six, I provide an overview of the study. I revisit the research questions that guide this study as well as the theoretical lenses that grounded the interpretations of the findings. Under findings and interpretations, I present my own interpretations of the interview analysis. Based on the interpretations, I provide implications both for practice and for theory. For instance, under each major finding, I have a subsection for implications and another named consequences for theory. Under implications I explain what the data means in school context and how this data advances the field of immigrant education. Furthermore, under consequences for theory subsections, I present how the findings from this research can help future research in extending theories of visibility and embodiment in schools. And finally, I end chapter six with a section titled "continuing questions for research", where I suggest ways in which this study could be extended.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

This chapter is about foregrounding the literature on Somali immigrant and refugee students. I specifically focus on the experiences of Somali immigrants and refugee students in high school. This literature review has two sections. In section 2.1, titled "Literature Review," I write about how race and religion shape the context in which Somali immigrant and refugee education takes place. In section 2.2, named "Theoretical Framework," I explore theories pertaining to racialized identities that influence students' perceptions and interpretations of their school experiences.

Literature Review

Literature surrounding immigrant and refugee youth's education is embedded within a larger literature that examines the education of working class youth and children of color, mainly African-American and Hispanics (McBrien, 2005; Ngo & Lee, 2007). Many of the studies that looked at immigrant and refugee children often included students from a wide range of countries of origin, racial identities, and religious backgrounds. Studies that examined the experience of Somali students are nominal in number. For this reason, this review draws mainly from the broader literature surrounding the educational experience of other immigrant and refugee groups. With the exception of the work done by Martha Bigelow (2008, 2010) research about immigrants and refugee education often lacks critical view on the importance of race, religion, and immigrant status to the education of immigrant and refugee youth. Hence, I review literature on race and religion in the education of immigrant and refugee students and think about how they apply to Somali students' educational experiences.

Religion: an important identity marker. Despite the structural barriers in schools, research underlines that refugee and immigrant students experience discrimination at the

personal level because of their religious belief and practices (Carter, 1999). This is particularly true for Muslim students, who have reported heightened incidents of discrimination in schools from their peers and teachers after the September 11, 2001 attacks on the US (Abu Al-hajj, 2007; Asali, 2003; Bigelow, 2008, 2010; Birman, et al., 2001; Collet, 2007). In her research among Somali youth in Minnesota, Bigelow (2008, 2010) portrayed challenges faced by these students in their attempt to practice their faith. As she noted, "although praying, fasting and trying to follow an Islamic moral code are difficult to do in school in the West, perhaps the most contentious Muslim practice is the veiling, or wearing *hijab*" (p. 30). On the one hand, Bigelow (2010) was forthright in describing how wearing the hijab has become synonymous with Somali identity in urban areas in the Midwest. On the other hand, she reported (2008) that Somali teenagers who wear the hijab "are characterized as terrorists or *Bin Ladens* at school or at their community" (p. 31), thus causing the marginalization of Somali girls who observe the headscarf in schools.

Birman, Trickett, and Bacchus (2001) carried out research to assess Somali students' experiences in a middle school in a Maryland community. The Somali students in this study relayed that their peers constantly teased them because of their religion. For Somali refugee and immigrant youth, religious and racial discrimination were intertwined (Bigelow, 2010). Bigelow argued that Somali youth were racialized in ways that relate, not only to their black skin, but also because of their religion and nationality. This is so because Somalis are characterized as visible ethnics (Kusow, 2006); hence, they are subjected to multiple othering mechanisms. The Somali male teens that Bigelow (2010) worked with reported that the police constantly profiled them because they were black and Muslim. Several studies about Muslim youth reported high rates of

profiling and scrutiny from the police and national security agencies (Maira, 2002; Sirin & Fine, 2008).

Sirin and Fine (2008) conducted a large scale study using mixed methods that sought to understand how the events of September 11, 2001 and the ensuing national security policies affected first- and second-generation immigrant Muslim youth. In addition, this study sought to understand how these experiences further shaped an emerging Muslim identity in United States. The authors' findings showed that the so-called War on Terror and the Patriotic Act encourages an Islamophobic discourse that subjects Muslim youth to discrimination in public spaces, including educational institutions. For instance, 60% of the Muslim youth in this study reported that schools were the places where they felt the most discrimination. Sirin and Fine emphasized an increase in anti-Muslim sentiments following the years after September 11, 2001. For instance, while "a full 80 percent of Americans thought that racial profiling was wrong before 9/11, nearly 60 percent now favor racial profiling *as long as it was directed at Arabs and Muslims*" (Maira, cited in Sirin & Fine, 2008 p. 2). One implication is the racialization of religion, where various ethnic groups from different lands of origin are lumped together so that they can be monitored. Drawing from Suárez-Orozco's work, Sirin and Fine (2008) highlighted the various ways these discourses subjected Muslin youth to "*moral exclusion*" (italics added) that caused social and psychological challenges (p. 2). On the other hand, Muslim youth were also subjected to scrutiny by their parents and community members (Sirin & Fine, 2008; Zine, 2012).

De Voe (2002) argued that Somali parents in Britain used Islam to define, and to some extent regulate, the range of activities in which their children could participate. Similarly, Zine's (2012) ethnographic work among Muslim girls of Somali, Pakistani, and Arab descent in a

gender-segregated Islamic school in Toronto showed that Muslim girls faced challenges as they moved between "patriarchal forms of regulation relating to their body and dress within the Muslim community," while at the same time they had to deal with "negative stereotypes and gendered Islamophobia within mainstream society" (p. 232). In addition, Sarroub (2005) reported similar findings about a group of Yemeni-American high school girls in an Arab enclave community in Dearborn, Michigan. Meanwhile, Muslim girls often used this double oppression to their advantage by invoking religious values in school to resist teachers and invoking secular values at home to resist parents (Keaton, 2006; Sarroub, 2001; 2005). However, from Muslim parents' perspectives, everyday cultural practices within schools were of concern, especially as their children reached high school (Haw, 1998). These issues manifested themselves in physical education, swimming, sex education, and provisions for halal school lunches (Azmi, 2001; Collet, 2007; Griffith & Haw, 1996; Haw, 1998).

In these studies, Muslim parents' perspectives were ones that were rooted in ambivalence. On one hand, they valued the education offered by Western institutions and perceived it as a mechanism for social mobility. On the other hand, they were vigilant about its secular effect on their children (Collet, 2007). The literature about second-generation Muslim youth in the US and Canada highlighted the constant sanctioning gaze from parents and other community members. For Somali youth, the community gaze not only sanctioned their behaviors but also racialized them (Bigelow, 2010) when youth adopted the local style of dress and speech (Forman, 2001; Ibrahim, 1999; LeetOtley, 2012; Shepard, 2008). This suggests that in urban contexts, Somali parents and elders in the community equate black racial identity with performative hip-hop identity, which the youth appropriated in school and in the neighborhood. For instance, a common worry among Somali parents and elders was Somali boys sagging their

pants (Bigelow, 2010; LeetOtley, 2012; Shepard, 2008). The implication here is that they align black identity with the behaviors and attitudes of poor, working-class, African-American, youth subculture (see also Rong & Brown, 2002; Rong & Fitchett, 2008; Waters, 1994). And, Somali parents and elders, like other immigrants, tend to distance themselves from poor indigenous blacks in their neighborhoods. However, the parents' role in the racialization of children has also been observed among European Americans.

In one phenomenological study, Thandeka (1999) demonstrated the role of parents in the racialization of children. She argues that European Americans are socialized to become white from a young age by their parents and caregivers. She explained:

> [T]he social construction of a "white" requires us to make distinction between a person's core sense of self before and after its identity is defined as white. Before the white identity is established, this core sense of self is not white. Its personal racial identity is, in effect, nonexistent because the socialization process has not yet been undertaken by its white community of caretakers, legislators, and police officers. . . . (p. 85).

The author explained the historical processes connecting racism to classism at different historical eras in America. Through the concept of white shame, she explained how the upper-class manipulated workers of European descent into believing that becoming white led to economic gains. Instead of offering fair wages and improving work conditions, the elites assuaged white workers' plight by passing legislations that segregated the races, hence, giving whites preferential treatment in public spaces. This, Thandeka argued, halted any class solidarity among workers of different races and solidified the role of race as a social construct in America.

However, Thandeka explained that becoming white required European immigrants to let go of their peasant ways of life and become highly regulated industrial workers. This meant that

the European immigrants had to distance themselves from their cultural and language backgrounds, which were deemed backward by their employers, often causing them to be ashamed of who they were. Yet, the biggest loss that European Americans suffered as a result of becoming white, explained Thandeka, was the loss of their "core self" (85). This suppression of the self alienated these individuals from their natural human tendency to relate to others in their world. The author's findings were based on individual experiential accounts of childhood moments by which individuals became acculturated as whites. The study drew from interviews with ordinary European Americans as well as from the writings of famous ones. A common theme was childhood memories in which individuals recalled not being allowed by a parent or a caregiver to invite or play with an African-American friend. In these accounts, the individuals often recalled shame and fear of losing their parents' love and being shunned from their communities if they continued their association with their black friends. In this view, a major aspect of white shame was distancing oneself from African-Americans. A similar phenomenon was observed among current immigrants including black immigrants such as West Indians (Waters, 1994), Ethiopians (Sorenson, 1991), and Somalis (Bigelow, 2010), despite the fact that these immigrant groups are identified as black by the larger society because of their skin color.

This suggests that, once in America, immigrants realize the role of race and the importance of racial identity as it pertains to social hierarchy. In this way, association with African American, blackness is a function of economic disadvantage, which the newly immigrated avoid at any cost. This is different but similar to the white shame invoked by white parents and caregivers on their youngsters. Devoid of whiteness, the new black immigrants instead invoked their ethnicity to differentiate themselves from African Americans (Rong & Fitchett, 2008; Rong & Preissle, 2009; Waters, 1994), whereas European Americans had to shun

their ethnicity in order to become white. Since the new black immigrants cannot identify as white because of their skin color, ethnicity and ethnic pride is heightened instead. Hence, when Somali youth demonstrate signs of associations with African American youth subculture, their parents shame them for identifying with blackness. Also, in the literature Somali parents and elders associated African American blackness with not being Muslim (Bigelow, 2010; Shepard, 2008). Because of this, some Somali youth resisted African American racial identity, despite the fact that they adopted black youth's subculture of dress and speech style associated with hip-hop music. Regardless of whether Somali youth embrace or resist African American identity, they are reconfiguring what it means to be black, Muslim, and immigrant. They do this by challenging their parents' traditional views of being Muslim (Bigelow, 2010).

Somali youth's experiences as a religious minority in schools are further complicated by their racial position. While the above studies propose that Somali youth were racialized by the elders in their community as well as the institutions of the host country, no studies have investigated how these two factors interact in racializing Somali youth. This research will address that gap. Next, I will explore the role race plays in the context in which education of Somali students take place.

Role of race. Race is essential in understanding how schools are structured, how they are operated, and how they subsequently impact educational outcomes for children of color (Delpit, 1996; Ladson-Billings, 2005; Valenzuela, 1999). More importantly, race and race relations play an important role in discourse surrounding (national) identity (Lee, 2005; Valenzuela, 1999), normativity, and power (Castagno, 2008). Immigrant youth and their families arrive in the US with little understanding of how race and racial relations play out. The understanding that the US is the land of equal opportunity as long as one is willing to work hard

28

quickly fades as parents learn that race is where ideas of meritocracy and social mobility

confront the realities of poverty and oppression. Somali youth, like other immigrant groups,

often find themselves negotiating between their parents' cultural practices and the culture of their

schools and peers (Bigelow, 2010; Forman, 2001; Ibrahim, 1999; Shepard, 2008). Adults in the

Somali community are reported to resist racialized identities (Bigelow, 2010; Kusow, 2006).

According to Bigelow, adults in the Somali community often defined their Somali identity based

on nationality, ethnicity, and religion, rather than race. The tendency to refute conceptualizations

of race as a social categorization was common among immigrants who did not experience racial

oppression in their homelands (Kusow, 2006; Langellier, 2010). This is because, even though the

concept of race is a familiar and salient one in Africa due to the trauma of colonialism, not

everyone experiences racial discrimination in post-colonial Africa to the same degree as in the

US context. Meanwhile, regarding racial identity among immigrants, one explanation offered in

the literature is that even though both race and religion are important in informing "the kind and

nature of identity embraced by immigrants, but also whether or not the immigrant occupied a

minority or majority status in their homeland and moreover, how such status interact with those

in the host countries" (Ajrouch & Kusow, 2007, p. 91).

Similarly, other black immigrants such as Ethiopians (Sorenson, 1991) and West Indians

(Waters, 1994) have shown similar tendencies of espousing an ethnic identity while distancing

themselves from a black racial identity. Ajrouch and Kusow (2007) explained that an immigrant

group's inclination to socially reject a racial identity is curbed by encountering the reality of

governmental institutions that do not meet the social and economic needs of a singular ethnicity,

but rather categorized all peoples of African heritage together (see also Sorensen, 1991).

Meanwhile, Kibria (1993) reminded us that what is more important is how racial and religious

identification tended to change over time and with subsequent generations. In this regard, contrary to their parents and other adults in their community, Somali youth often redefine and negotiate what it means to be a Muslim Somali youth in school by appropriating and identifying with the cultural expression of African Americans (Bigelow, 2010; Forman, 2001; Ibrahim, 1999).

For Somalis, the choice of whether to assume a racial or ethnic identity depends on the length of residency in the US. For instance, both Langellier (2010) and Bigelow (2010) showed that first-generation Somali youth immigrants are more likely to adopt an ethnic identity rather than a racial one, compared to second-generation Somali groups. Similar observations have been made among other immigrant youth groups (Ngo, 2010; Lee, 2007; Rogen & Brown, 2002; Valenzuela, 1999). Fassin (2011) explained that racialization is embodied. It is a process that is accumulated through bodily experiences of being discriminated against because of one's race (see also Alcoff, 2006). In this view, first-generation immigrant youth have less experience of persistent racialization. Another explanation offered by sociologists is that first-generation immigrant and refugee youth have often experienced physical and psychological trauma prior to arrival in the US and have a "dual frame of reference" (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001, p. 87) compared to second-generation youth who lack such frame of reference and want to be treated similar to other native-born students (see also Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Portez & Zhou, 1993).

Research shows that a high quality teacher-student relationship promotes student achievement (O'Connor & McCartney, 2007). Yet, Bigelow (2008) relayed that the Somali high school students she interviewed reported that their teachers portrayed them as troublemakers and were often quick in referring them to the principal for disciplinary problems—all because of their

race. This further problematized school success among Somali students. The literature reviewed here indicates that many first-generation immigrants may resist racial identity despite the fact that they encounter and are subjected to discriminatory racial relations. However, Somali, like other black immigrants and refugee youth, quickly learn and recognize the reality of race relations through daily interactions with racial discourses at school, throughout their communities, and in the wider society. And, although adopting the local youth subculture of indigenous black youth may temporarily temper the impact of marginalization, Somali youth are discriminated against not only because of their race but also because of their religion and ethnicity. They are often under the suspicious gaze of a society that sees them as homegrown terrorists and a potential threat to national security. Conversely, they are also subjected to the sanctioning watch of the elders in their community who see them as confused and over-Americanized (Bigelow, 2010). In this regard, Somali youth embody the experience of multiple and intersecting modes of marginalization.

Conclusion. This review illustrates the complex contexts in which the education of Somali immigrant and refugee students takes place, despite the fact that many of the earlier studies that inform this review are drawn from the broader immigrant and refugee literature. The few studies about Somalis demonstrated the ways in which paradigms of class, race, race relations, and religion play compounded roles in shaping the educational experience of Somali immigrant and refugee children. Yet, the works that are reviewed here, with the exception of Bigelow's (2008, 2010) research, ignored the intersection of race and religion. Thus, this study will fill the gap in addressing the need to examine the effects of race and religion in the education of Somali youth in a post 9/11 context. As both the works of Bigelow (2008, 2010) and Kusow (2006) highlighted, Somalis embody the unique experience of being black, Muslim,

and immigrant. Hence, research about Somalis demands a re-examination of the social positions created by the juncture of race, race relations, religion, gender, and immigrant status, and the impact that these elements have on the education of Somali immigrant and refugee youth.

Theoretical Frameworks

In this study, I investigate ways in which Somali immigrant and refugee high school students have experienced the racialization process. In the following, I explore and review theories of identity representation and construction that are used to support current educational practices and discourses. I take two steps in achieving this. First, I draw from the works of post-structural and postmodern theorists to examine how subjects are socially positioned. Second, I examine the construction and representation of socially ascribed identities, such as race and racialized identities, as well as frameworks that highlight the processes by which socially ascribed identities become embodied.

As I elaborated upon in Chapter 1, research about Somali youth suggests that they are racialized by both school institutions and by the elders in their own communities (Bigelow, 2010). Similarly, other studies show that Somali youth are marginalized in schools because of their race (Bigelow, 2008; Ibrahim, 1998; Forman, 2001) and religion (Bigelow, 2010). Racialized identities are important in understanding Somali youth experiences in school and the kinds of identities they negotiate in school spaces. Hence, the question becomes why socially ascribed identities that are based on race and religion become important. In other words, why do we need to name and theorize what Marleau-Ponty (1968) called the "flesh of the world" (p. 138-139), or in other words, why do we need to theorize our way of being in the world? This is relevant because, as I will elaborate later in this section, socially ascribed identities not only position us in relation to others, but they also constitute our existence in the world and our everyday experience of the world and ourselves. This is important in relation to the Somali experience in the US because US racial categories may seem unnatural to Somalis and "black" is a term that Somalis might resist. One reason for this could be that Somali social categories are

based on a clan system. This brings us back to Merleau-Ponty's (1968) notion of flesh as an "'element' of Being. Not a fact or a sum of facts, and yet adherent to location and to the now" (pp. 139–140). Hence, we can understand that the concept of flesh, in this case, is more concerned, not with the facticity or existence of racial categories, but the lived experiences of race that is linked to the current social location of Somali experience (i.e., in the U.S) and not to that of Somalia. This is an important distinction between the experiences of Somali immigrants and refugee youth and that of their parents, a point that will be elaborated later in this section.

The ubiquitous nature and impact of race in everyday life are manifested in macro- and micro-interactions between people and institutions as well as among people; they also produce domains where race is perceived at the preconscious level (Alcoff, 2006) and where racial knowledge is tacitly accumulated within the body (Fassin, 2011). Based on this understanding of race and racial relation, I next explore the process of racialization that results from social conditions and experiences (Fassin, 2011) among Somali youth in US public schools. I do this by first explicating how racialization works through socially ascribed identities where identities are constituted and power relations are taken up. This approach highlights the social conditions in which racialization takes place and by which racial identities are assigned. Next, I consider how racialization becomes embodied through intersubjective interaction with the world, where the experience of being racialized accumulates over time in the bodies of subjects. Finally, I propose how these embodied experiences impact the ways in which Somali youth interpret and understand their schooling experiences.

Race and racialized identities. In the normative mind, the concept of race is closely linked with phenotypic differences (Edles, cited in Joshi, 2006), yet race as an idea has no biological basis, according to these authors. Omi and Winant (1994) coined the term *racial formation* to explain "the socio-historical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed" (p. 55). These authors emphasized that "race is an unstable complex of social meanings, constantly being transformed by political struggle" (p. 55). They explained that "race is a concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflict and interest by referring to different types of human bodies" (p. 55). According to this view, the creation of racial categories is historically coupled with the development of racial, and cultural and hegemony that propagated other forms of differences, inequalities, and oppression (Omi & Winant, 1994).

Contemporary race theory surpasses the essentialist and nominalist understanding of the concept of race. In other words, race is not fixed, concrete, or objective (Omi & Winant, 1994), with members of racial groups sharing a common interest and historical fate (Alcoff, 2006). In this regard, race is neither an illusion nor a mere ideological construct that could be eradicated by anti-racist social projects (Alcoff, 2006; Omi & Winant, 1994). The concept of race can instead best be understood through the notion of *contextualism* (Alcoff, 2006). This view emphasizes the decentered nature of the complex social meanings that are continuously altered by political struggle. In addition, it also acknowledges the fact that race is not only a socially constructed phenomenon, it is also cultural representation, or as Alcoff explained, "historically malleable, culturally contextual and reproduced through learned perceptual practices" (p. 182). While race may have no biological reality, it most definitely has a lived reality with real social

consequences. This conception of race leads us to examine how it works both in social and in cultural spaces and the implications that follow as it pertains to Somali youths' lives.

The ascription of racialized identities. The process of racialization starts with ascription of a social classification based on the concept of race, which is rooted in early modernism, or what Foucault (as cited in Alcoff, 2006) referred to as the classical episteme. According to Foucault (1995), during the early modern era knowledge was understood mainly through classification, which is the ordering and forming of tables based on essential difference. Arguing via Foucault, Cornell West (1982) argued that the current understanding of race was mainly influenced by the utilization of classifications and orderings based on hierarchies that were common in the study of natural history. This classification depended on comparative physical differences that were carried over to differentiate people in terms of identity and differences, equality and inequality, and beauty and ugliness (see also Alcoff, 2006). Hence, these new practices not only produced new forms of knowledge but also new forms of power. For instance, modern conceptions of "race and racial difference emerged as that which is visible, classifiable, and morally salient" (Alcoff, p. 180). However, it could be argued that social identities function only for the purpose of description and recognition and are divorced from any hierarchal imposition (Fassin, 2011). Considering the social and historical legacies of how racial ascription has been used to oppress and colonize certain groups of people, we can see that the "assigning of race may mean ascription is always an abuse of power: in this sense it is political" (Fassin, 2011, p. 423) and far from a mere identification mechanism.

Ascription, or the assigning of social identities such as race, starts with the act of naming or labeling a difference. It develops into a cognitive representation that is coupled with a power exertion (Wortham, 2006). However, the very notion of labeling demonstrates power and

36

privilege. This is evident in Foucault's (1977) study of demographics and other social sciences, in which he showed that the practice of classifying people into categories not only created social identification that became embedded within bureaucratic cognition, but also placed individuals in subject positions where power is exercised and behaviors regulated. In this way, people act in conformity with the labels put upon them. The expectation produces an effect. In Foucault's conception of power, one is defined through a web of influences, where power is produced and circulated among subjects. Foucault explained this concept:

> The individual is no doubt the fictitious atom of an *'ideological'* representation of society; but he is also a reality fabricated by this specific technology of power that I have called 'discipline'. We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it 'excludes', it 'represses', it 'censors'; it 'abstracts', it 'masks', it 'conceals'. In fact, power produces, it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production. (p. 194)

According to Foucault, any act of classifying involves both knowledge and power at the same time. The practices of categorizing and naming individuals places them in subject positions that are laden with new meanings, which further determines how they engage and are engaged within power relation dynamics. Thus, ascription of social identities places individuals in subject positions that influence how they and others attend to the social positions they occupy.

Furthermore, ascription is also closely linked with the act of recognition in a dialectic manner. In his essay, "Ideological State Apparatus," Louis Althusser (1971) used the term "interpellation" to explicate the process by which a subject is constituted and recruited into subject position through ideology. This view of the subject, which is contrary to the Cartesian

subject, calls for a subject that is deeply embedded and connected to the discursive and social structure. Althusser argued that discourse is only effective to the point that it can "hail" the subject into a subject position, and, hence, into a certain of way of acting and thinking about one's self. Therefore, it is through this dialectic relationship between the hailed individual and the ideological apparatus that is recruiting it that a subject comes into being and takes on its identity.

Stuart Hall (1997) drew from Althusser's concept of interpellation to explain how identities are constructed and implicated by discursive social structures:

I use 'identity' to refer to the meeting point, the point of *suture*, between, on the one hand, the discourses and practices which attempt to 'interpellate', speak to us or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses [sic], and on the other hand, the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects, which can be 'spoken'. Identities are thus points of temporary attachment to the subject positions, which discursive practices construct for us…. They are the result of successful articulation or 'chaining of the subject into the flow of the discourse. (p. 19)

The racialized identities of Somali youth speaks to this temporary attachment, or points of suture (as Hall put it), particularly if we consider Omi and Winant's understanding of racialization as a historically situated ideological process in which specific social practices or groups are categorized or assigned to racial meanings. Here, the assigning of racial meanings equates the points of attachment, where Somali subjectivity is chained to the "flow of discourse" (Hall, p. 19) of being black and Muslim in the post-9/11 context. This chaining has implications for the body. This is because racialization is constructed through social ascription that imposes difference on others (Fassin, 2011). These differences are not mere differences in phenotype

such as skin color, but they are differences that integrate phenotypic dissimilarity into social characteristics. For instance, being characterized as racially other in the US context means that one is treated in certain ways, and that certain things are expected of them. These outcomes have structural implications for the individual. For example, they have meant and still mean, to a degree, inequity in accessing education, jobs, healthcare, or residential areas (Alcoff, 2006; Fassin, 2011; Omi & Winant, 1994). Secondly, racialization is fluid not fixed, such that the black body's otherness is only possible in reference to that of the white body, whose presence often demands that black subjects be aware of their own otherness. Thus, racialization is an unnatural process that only becomes naturalized through experience. Ascription of racial identities produces two racialized subjects, "the one assigned to his blackness, and the one who by assigning, reveals his whiteness" (Fassin, 2011, p. 422).

Moreover, Fanon (1967) reminded us that the consciousness of black and other colonized people is dominated by awareness of their own bodies being objectified in social settings. Fanon explained this:

> I came into the world imbued with the will to find meaning in things, my spirit filled with the desire to attain to the source of the world, and then I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects. . . . The real world challenged my claims. In the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema. Consciousness . . . assailed at various points, the corporeal schema crumbled, its place taken by a racial epidermal schema (Fanon, 1967, as cited in Alcoff, p. 107).

Due to the visible nature of religious and racial identity among Somalis, the body then becomes the site of racial experience (Alcoff, 2006; Fassin, 2011). Emphasizing the role of the body in the racialization process, Fassin asserted that "the violence of racialization is exerted, experienced,

and performed through the body" (p. 428). In a race-conscious society like the US, Alcoff argued that race is embedded in the consciousness of Americans. Therefore, other social identities, such as class and nationality, can be eventually eliminated. She highlighted how, despite the fact that both class and national identities are also embodied, their relationship to the body is less salient compared to race and gender. Because both class and nationality demonstrate themselves as behavioral and can be changed, the embodiment experience also changes, whereas race and gender are more closely related to the body (Alcoff, 2006).

Does this mean, then, that our understanding of the world depends on our race and gender? I would argue that it also depends on a whole other list of social positions such as class, ethnicity, religion, immigrant status, among others. These questions are the driving force behind Merleau-Ponty's philosophical reflections, in which he theorized that "the world is not what I think, but what I live through" (Merleau-Ponty, 2004, as cited in Fassin, 2011, p. 28). He further added "because we are in the world, we are condemned to meaning and we cannot do or say anything without its acquiring a name in history" (Merleau-Ponty, 2004, as cited in Fassin, 2011, p. 28). In this view, the world not only acquires a meaning, but comes to existence through the body; in other words, "the world is not exterior to me: it is what I perceive of it and this perception is embedded in history but also constitutes history" (Fassin, 2011, p. 28). This indicates that the bodily experience of the world, in this case racialization, is intersubjective, such that the effect of racialization becomes an embodied one. Hence, race and gender continue to be the identities that are most heavily policed and this is due to their embodied and visible nature. Next, I draw on Merleau-Ponty's notion of chiasm to explain this phenomenon.

Chiasm. Merleau-Ponty (1968) used the concept of chiasm to conceptualize the body as a crossing over that unites subjective experience and objective existence (Baldwin, 2004). The

notion of chiasm is relevant in understanding the relation between the body and the world. The subjective-intersubjective experiencing of the world means that the outside world is united with the inside and that the two are, therefore, inseparable; one is interwoven or enveloped into the other and neither is reduced to the other. Explicating the role of the body in experience in Merleau-Ponty's work, the cultural theorist Couze Venn (2009) suggested that the chiasm allows for an experience that is not only dynamic and constitutive of the world-body relation, but is also between "embodied experience and consciousness" (p. 17), such that the world is known through a bodily experience of it and not through raw data or given facts. In this view, the world is understood through the concepts *of* "dwelling and of emplacement" (Merleau-Ponty, cited in Venn, p. 18), where experience becomes the lived field that we cannot separate from, thus leading to what Merleau-Ponty called the "flesh" (p. 137) of the world, which encapsulates the sphere of being. For Merleau-Ponty, "to be seen by the outside to exist within it, to emigrate into it, to be seduced, captivated, alienated by the phantom, so that the seer and the visible reciprocate one another and we no longer know which sees and which is seen" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 139). This suggests that both the body and the world fold up into layers as they encapsulate each other. The body is among objects in the world, while at the same time it is the subject that recognizes and feels the objects acting on it, hence, bringing the body into being.

The concept of the world-body relation is further elucidated by the example of two hands touching, both exerting touch on the other. This, according to Merleau-Ponty, shows that the body has two dimensions; it is both an experience, which is felt, and something that can be touched. Hence, it is *touching* as well as *tangible*. However, these two dimensions are also reversible: the touched hand can also be the felt hand, and the opposite is also true, but not at the

same time. This view constitutes Merleau-Ponty's conception of the body as the *flesh*, which is a way of being in the world (Baldwin, 2004).

Merleau-Ponty emphasizes that "[the flesh] is not a fact, or sum of facts 'material' or 'spiritual'. Nor is it a representation for a mind" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 139). Here Merleau-Ponty was extending the idea of flesh to the sphere of the transcendent that is detached from objective things in the world. Elaborating on this transcendent third sphere, Venn's reading of Merleau-Ponty suggests that the flesh is then subjected to "the problem of the transcendent-yet-immanent, relating to the reflexivity that sentiment beings experience, a reflexivity that, in complex beings, opens onto the problematic consciousness and of time" (Merleau-Ponty cited in Venn 18). This suggests that the *flesh* of the world, in this case experience, is then open to consciousness, time and to the ramifications that follow. In other words, we carry the world in our bodies in the form of experience as we move through time. For the black body, flesh is racialized, which then impacts our fundamental being-in- the-world. This is so because; race is not an add-on but is integral to the body and therefore being.

However, an important aspect of the notion of chiasm (or the interior-exterior nature of the world-body relationship), which was not developed in Merleau-Ponty's (1964, 1968) work is how it can be used to construct specific identities. The concept of a subjective-intersubjective experiencing of the world influences identity both at the individual and the group level. What is pertinent here is the question raised in terms of the relation among perception, the social, the individual, ascriptive identities, and that of lived subjectivity. I employ Alcoff's concept of identity as an interpretive horizon in order to explore other aspects of identity such as that of embodiment and the relation to the other. Because Alcoff's (2006) work mainly dealt with racialized and gendered identities, there is a need to extend this to subjectivities emerging from

other forms of racialized identities, where issues of race and gender are further complicated by the experience of religious discrimination or the racialization of religion.

Identity as horizon. The horizon, or the subject's understandings of itself, is open and changing, unbounded and influenced by traditions (Gadamer, 2003; see also Alcoff, 2006). An important concept of horizon as an interpretive tool for identity work is to be found in the theorization of identity by Alcoff (2006). She derived the concept of horizon from Gadamer's work, linking the notion of vision to that of cultural tradition and historical change. She explained the concept:

> the horizon is a substantive perspective location from which the interpreter looks out at the world, a perspective that is always present but that is open and dynamic, with a temporal as well as physical dimension, moving into the future and into new spaces as the subject moves. . . . [T]he concept of horizon helps to capture the background, framing assumptions we bring with us to perception and understanding, the congealed experiences that become premises by which we strive to make sense of the world, the range of concepts and categories of description that we have at our disposal. It is thus useful in elucidating cultural, or group related, and personal differences that affect interpretation. (Alcoff, pp. 95–96)

Hence, according to Alcoff, the concept of horizon is not only a mechanism for seeing but also the conditions in which vision takes place. These conditions are situational as well as temporal because of the unbounded nature of human history.

Gadamer explained "horizon is rather, something that we move and that moves with us" (p. 304). Yet, the process in which we access our vision is far from objective because it is influenced by our relationship with the past or traditions (Gadamer, 2003, as cited in Alcoff,

2006). Gadamer further elucidated "the horizon of the past, out of which all human life lives and which exists in the form of tradition, is always in motion. The surrounding horizon is not set in motion by historical consciousness. But in it this motion becomes aware of itself (Gadamer, 2003, p. 304). Despite the fact that our interpretive horizons are impacted by traditions which we share with others, they are subjective and limited, which makes their epistemic benefit contingent on the questions under investigation (Alcoff, 2006).

For instance, if we consider the experiences of Somali immigrants and refugees in various public spheres, such as in educational institutions and in the labor market in the post-9/11 era, it seems that interpretive horizons are at play, which also highlights the openness of horizons to social and historical elements. For instance, as anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiments intensify in the US and other Western societies, new interest in public discourse about Islam is taking place in the media in states like Minnesota, Ohio, and, more recently, Nebraska, among others, that continue to receive many Somali refugees and immigrants. In these cases, the media has focused on high-publicity cases such as labor rights disputes involving airport and meat packaging plant workers wishing for breaks that align with prayer times during the work day (Woldemikeal, as cited in Bigelow, 2010).

Instead of the commonly accepted discourse that highlights different cultures clashing, which is the focus of many of these media stories, this issue requires an approach with higher explanatory power that considers the open nature of horizon, where tradition not only moves through horizon but also becomes aware of itself as it is challenged and dislocated. This is so because no horizon is completely closed or incapable of movement (Alcoff, 2006). Gadamer explained that one's horizons are not closed to the present time, but rather are in conversation with both the present and the past. This is evident in the constant motion of human life, which is

44

"never bound to any one standpoint, and hence can never truly have a closed horizon" (Gadamer, 2003, p. 304). In certain cases, changing social location or having a new set of experiences, either through physical dislocation or practice, enables us to gain respect and understand different ways of life (Alcoff, 2006). In this view, Somali experience is one of gradual awakening to the horizon, which will impact the group's identity work that will likely follow suit.

Hence, the emergence of Somali group identity speaks to more than an understanding or a respect for a different way of life. It draws on the idea of acquiring new experiences through dislocation as a way of stressing the unbounded nature of horizon and the impact that openness has on traditions. How do visible identities, flesh, and horizon come together to help us understand the collective Somali experiences? The body is the site where visible identities, flesh, and the horizon merge to make meaning. In other words, identity markers such as race, gender, and religion mean something when they impact our being in the world, where we turn to our previous experiences and tradition to understand meanings associated with social categories. For Somali immigrant and refugee experiences, sometimes the horizon is incomplete in providing understanding of newly imposed identities. This is particularly true with race and religion in the US context. This is why the role of experience is crucial, because it is through experiences of racialization that the horizon needed not only for interpreting experiences of racialization is acquired, but where it also becomes an embodied one. This would result in a situation where Somalis, like African-Americans, can use race as an empowerment.

Before I proceed to expand the notion of horizon as a lens for identity interpretation and formation, I briefly explore the role of experience (embodiment) in the concept of horizon as an interpretive lens for racialized identities. This is pertinent because it is through experience that

the horizon is materialized. In other words, the very idea of horizon is an accumulation of our understanding of being in the world, i.e. experience.

      Role of experience. Gadamer's (cited in Palmer, 1969) historical and dialectical notion of experience emphasized an understanding of experience, in which "knowing is not simply a stream of perceptions but a happening, an event, an encounter" (Palmer, pp. 194–95). In this view, experience does not refer to a "set of informational knowledge preserved for this or that" (p. 195); rather, it is less technical and reflects more of the common usage of everyday meaning, that is, it is a "nonobjectified and nonobjectifiable accumulation of 'understanding'" (195). Experience is cumulative understanding that one gains through interacting with the world and with others, resulting in a non-objectifiable knowledge through interaction with the world. These examples highlight that racial (Fassin, 2011) and religious embodiment go beyond skin color or religious garments, but, rather, speak to the thickness of the body.

      For instance, as was mentioned earlier, it is not the mere identification of difference (in this case based on race and the headscarf), but rather it is the discursive social meanings and the locations these differences occupy that generate experience, whose accumulation overtime constitutes the thickness of what Fanon (1967) called bodily schema. For instance, this could be elucidated further by examining the relationship between first- and second-generation Somali immigrant and refugee experiences with racialization and the kinds of identity work in which they engage. An example is the difference between first-generation and second-generation Somalis in regard to racial identities.

      Ajrouch and Kusow's (2007) study showed that first-generation Somali immigrants and refugees in Canada often choose an ethnic and national identity over a racial one, whereas Bigelow's (2010) findings indicated that second-generation Somali immigrant youth appropriate

African-American youth identity. Bigelow also pointed out that Somali second-generation youth are more open in reporting and recognizing experiences of discrimination, such as police racial profiling and other institutional discriminations, than first-generation youth. This suggests that the social conditions that these youth experience often influence the horizons from which they interpret their identities. As one study participant explained, "I am a black man, and I identify as a black man in America" (citation). Thus, one can argue that, unlike their parents and recently arrived first-generation youth, second-generation Somali youth have had accumulated bodily experiences of racialization because of their race and religion (Bigelow, 2010).

Alcoff (2006), arguing through Fanon, emphasized that the position or the horizon from which one interprets the world turns out to be important such that it becomes "doubly inhabited and self-conscious" (108). Further, Alcoff asserted that "the state of one's clothes and body becomes more important when one has a heightened awareness of one's object status for others" (p. 108). Hence, every image and action, whether positive or negative, is passed on and used to represent everyone in the community. The implication here is that the heightened awareness will lead to all kinds of policing activities, both by the self and by the other, where embodiment is experienced differently and becomes doubly self-conscious. The everyday experiences of Somali immigrants reflect such heightened awareness of their own presence in social space. An example of this is the discursive public responses surrounding the observing of the hijab, or the Muslim headscarf (Semple, 2008). However, this heightened awareness contributes to the process that creates social domains in which a racialized Somali identity emerges. This is pertinent to Omi and Winant's (1994) racial identity formation theory, where racial identities come into being out of social and historical contexts that are bound by political and economic macrostructures as well as by micro-interactions resulting from everyday experiences. On the one hand, social domains

are important because "the individual operates within a domain of not his or her choosing, and yet still operates on that domain" (Alcoff, p. 108). On the other hand, it is through the daily interactions that emerge from these domains, where race is perceived (Omi & Winant, 1994) at the preconscious level (Alcoff, 2006), and tacit knowledge of race is accumulated within the body (Fassin, 2011), that leads to the emerging of racialized identities.

To emphasize further the importance of condition and experience in racialized identities, the different positions people ascribe to social identity depends on the emphasis they attach to the "identity's relationship to the self, that is, the relationship between ascribed social categories and the lived experience of consciousness" (Alcoff, p. 86). In this view, when social identity's relation to consciousness or the core of the self is seen as oppressive, then identity is perceived as oppressive. The opposite view is one that considers the relation between the self and socially ascribed identities, such as race and religion in the case of the Somalis, despite the fact that they were created in oppressive discourses, are not necessarily pathological (Alcoff, 2006). It follows then that in certain contexts racialized identities can function as spaces where agency is created and exercised. In these situations, social identities can then be understood as mere ascription, without becoming crippling to the self (Alcoff, 2006). So, the question becomes: What causes social identities to become pathological or just mere ascriptions?

According to Alcoff, horizons are not created in a vacuum; rather, when individuals interpret their experience in the world, they engage in a meditative process, which is shaped by foreknowledge that is also historically, culturally, and politically situated. Summarizing Alcoff's conceptualization of horizons, we can conclude that horizons are comprised of the self, the social position, and the object from a particular view that is interpreted from cultural, historical, and political stands. However, this understanding of horizon can be extended to a notion of horizon

in which visible markers such as race and religious attire enter through the horizon of the other, leading to an amalgamation of horizons. In this study, a relevant question is what happens to Somali youths' identity work when these two horizons come together? The point is that our sense of self is mediated by the other. This really matters in a racist society that makes much of visible markers of identity. It matters because our lived experiences can teach us to hate ourselves.

Conclusion. In summary, being identified as Somali does not merely mean that one carries visible identity markers such as race and religion, but also constitutes a social identity that is fundamental in one's interaction with and interpretation of the world. For instance, in the US context a visible and acknowledged Somali identity determines Somalis' everyday life, both outside and inside their ethnic communities. In the mainstream social context, being Somali carries certain discursive disadvantages. For example, school personnel and students impose racialized identities on Somali youth by labeling them as terrorists. While imposed racial and religious identities may have social consequences for Somali youth in public institutions, religious identity practices like observing the headscarf can lead to a more positive status within the Somali community (Bigelow, 2010; Zine, 2001). However, whether social identities are repressive or not depends on how they influence, and to a certain degree determine, one's experience in the world. As the working notes I presented above indicate, it is through the lived experience of everyday life that the effect of social identification is felt and lived upon. As these experiences accumulate over time, they become fundamental to the identification and dis-identification (Venn, 2009) of Somali youth.

Now that I have examined postmodern and post-structural frameworks of identification, experience, and embodiment as they pertain to racialized identities, in the following I refer to how these theoretical constructs support this study. But first allow me to revisit the assumptions made in this study so that I may investigate how Somali students experience racialization processes. First, Somali students' school experiences are shaped by how they are positioned by school staff and their peers as well as how they position themselves. This positioning of Somali students from others and the self further impacts their learning. In other words, students' daily experiences in regard to their social positioning pertaining to race, as well as racial and religious

50

relations in their schools, provide the interpretive horizon (Alcoff, 2006; Gadamer, 2003) from which they not only interpret their identities but also make sense and understand their schooling experiences. Hence, examining the processes involved in the embodiment of experiencing racialization based on race and religion—using post-structuralist and postmodern lenses—will allow me to understand how Somali youth experience racialization.

Finally, given the importance of race, racial project, racism, and racialization in this investigation, next, I will briefly define these terms. The notion of racialization is partially based on Omi and Winant's (1994) theory of racial formation. As explained above, racialization is understood as a process that becomes an embodiment. I borrowed from Omi and Winant's (1994) conceptualization because it acknowledges the fluid manner in which racial categories are formed, transformed, and inhabited. For this reason, "race is a concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interest by referring to different types of human bodies" (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 55). While this definition emphasizes the role of phenotype in race as a necessary category for difference, what is more important here is the fact that the work of race is done through essentialism. Since the context of race in the United States constitutes both structural and cultural representation, the experience of race takes place through racial projects (Omi & Winant, 1994). According to Omi and Winant (1994), a "racial project is simultaneously an interpretation, a representation of racial dynamics, an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines" (pp. 70–71). The authors also argue that not all racial projects are racist; A racial project is racist "if and only if it *creates or reproduces structures of domination based on essentialist categories of race*" (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 71). This distinction is important because it helps differentiate between race and racism. Hence, a racial

situation does not always equate with racial aggression, and the notions of race and racism are

not interchangeable.

3. METHODOLOGY

The methodologies that inform this study are rooted in the assumption that the processes that shape Somali youth's schooling experiences are dependent on the socio-cultural context of their schools. If we want to understand how Somali students make sense of and interpret their position as students, we should pay attention to the power dynamics and relationships that shape school culture and their impact on the individual's experience. To capture how these elements influence Somali students, I conducted a phenomenological study that employed some ethnographic methods. The need to consider phenomenology as a methodological framework resulted from a pilot study I had carried out in a public school in large urban district. In the pilot study, ethnographic methodology was employed in order to understand how school culture shaped the experience of Somali youth. However, during the data collection and interviewing process of the pilot study, it became clear to me that, while structural elements were important in shaping environments in which experiences took place, any attempt to understand the schooling experience had to consider the lived experience of students. I became interested in how events as well as structures influenced how social conditions were experienced at the individual level. In addition, within school structures, individuals' experiences tend to be varied and multiple. Hence, for this dissertation study, a phenomenological perspective became necessary in order to appreciate the perception and the experiences of Somali youth in particular incidents, i.e. experiences of racialization.

This dissertation study employed a phenomenological approach as a primary method of inquiry in order to understand the individual experience of Somali students. A particular interest in this study was the experience of racialization among Somali high school students. Hence, phenomenology allowed me to investigate students' experiences as they were actually lived

rather than as they were conceptualized (van Manen, 2007). Furthermore, phenomenology as a method is committed to a deep understanding of certain aspect of existence in the context of particular social and historical life events (p. 31). Van Manen explains phenomenology as "the study of lived existential meanings; it attempts to describe and interpret these meanings to a degree of depth and richness. . . .[Phenomenology] attempts to explicate the meanings as we live them in our everyday existence, our lifeworld (p. 11). Hence, phenomenology as a methodological lens was better suited to this study, as it sought to understand how racialization, as a process of othering, was lived, experienced, and embodied by Somali youth.

In this particular research context, it was the lived existential meanings (van Manen, 2007) that these students gave voice to and drew meaning from in understanding their world. While the existence of social structures augmented our understanding of the context in which the phenomenon of racialization of Somali youth occurred, the phenomenological aspect of this research was mainly concerned with the "particularity, the concretely lived and the everyday" (Greenwalt & Holohan, 2011, p. 64) as it was lived by Somali high school students. For instance, Donald Polkinghorne (1989) argued that the distinction between phenomenology and other qualitative research could be attributed to the fact that "it's focused on the subject's experienced meaning, instead of description of their overt actions or behavior" (p. 44). This was an important point that I realized in the initial pilot study stage and which prompted me to consider phenomenology as a method of inquiry.

Phenomenology provides the platform in which experiences can be studied as a way of being (interpreting and existing) in the world. Meanwhile, one of the critiques of phenomenology is that it focuses on participants' experiences, limiting phenomenological research as a subject of study (Polkinghorne, 1989). However, phenomenology as a method cannot be discounted

54

because all "knowledge is grounded in human experience" (Husserl, as cited in Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 45). In other words, it is through experience that we can learn all that is known about being human. Drawing on Dilthey's conception of experience, van Manen asserted that the "lived experience is to the soul what breath is to the body" (p. 36). It is through lived experience that the stream of life is connected to the consciousness, which weaves meaning between the inner (individual) and the outer (the world) (van Manen, 2007). In this view, through phenomenological research we seek to appreciate not only the experience under study, but its connection to the flow of life (i.e., living life and experiencing it in a stratified and racist society).

As noted above, if "phenomenology is the study of lifeworld—the world as we immediately experience it pre-reflectively rather than as we conceptualize, categorize, or reflect on it" (van Manen, p. 9), then phenomenology attempts to report the experience as it actually happened to the person living it (Polkinghorne, 1989; van Manen, 2007). Thus, phenomenology as a research method aims to bring experience into the textual representation of its core, where experience is not only reflexive but is also brought to memory and re-lived by the participant (van Manen, p. 36). According to Polkinghorne, this could be achieved through designing of the interview questions, where subjects' awareness is directed toward the phenomenon under study. The interview protocol brings the participants to recall or to get as close as possible to the experience under investigation, even though as van Manen reminded us, all experiential accounts become transformed as they are recalled, reflected upon, or described during interviews. This is because an experience is never captured at the moment it is happening; it is always an act that is reflected upon. Therefore, we attempt to bring forth the meanings attached to the experience through phenomenological themes, where experience is structured through language (van

Manen, 2007). Before exploring how phenomenological data is analyzed through themes, let me

briefly describe the context in which this study took place and how data was generated.

Context of the Study

The study took place in Summit Academy (pseudonym), a K–12 charter school in a large, Mid-western city of 823,000 residents. Somali students made up 90% of the student population. Most students came to Summit academy on a voluntary basis; however, there were a number of students, who had been expelled from traditional public schools. School staff consisted of 90% Caucasian individuals (mostly teaching staff), and 10% Arab, Southeast Asian, and Somali individuals. The school is located in an area of town inhabited by mostly Somali immigrants and refugees. This area also had several small Somali businesses, such as restaurants, coffee shops, and small retail and convenience shops. In addition, there were two medical facilities which mainly served the Somali community, and were run mostly by Somali medical staff, child care and adult daycare centers, as well as several community centers and mosques. The rationale for choosing this school is that I wanted to understand how schooling experiences are linked with their community contexts. What were the experiences of Somali students in contexts where there was a Somali presence in and out of school? Also, if context influenced whether Somali students were racialized in their schools and community, what did these processes look like?

In order to, fully understand the phenomenon of racialization among Somali youth it was important to consider contexts both school and community. This resonates with Dahlberg and colleagues' (2001) point that "interviews, and written descriptions might not be adequate to capture the phenomenon fully. Instead the search for the phenomenon may extend to a larger area, and, for example, a ward or classroom must be included in the study. This approach is commonly referred to as a participant observation and fieldwork, a research method originally developed by anthropologists and ethnographers." (Dahlberg, et al., 2001, p. 169). However, this does not take away from the importance of the role of the participant in phenomenology.

School context and dynamics. Summit Academy is one of two charter schools that serve a large Muslim refugee and immigrant community residing in this particular part of town. Summit Academy strives for sensitivity toward the community's religious and cultural values. For this reason, the school functions and runs like an Islamic one, even though no classes are dedicated to religious studies as they commonly are in Islamic schools. Yet Summit Academy offers Arabic as a foreign language class for both middle and high school students. The school used to offer Spanish classes, but for budgetary reasons it could afford only one foreign language–certified teacher. Because the school's parents and leaders, like most Muslims, deem Arabic important for accessing Islamic texts, that language was selected over Spanish as the school's official foreign language. Nevertheless, Summit Academy's offering of Arabic language instruction does not mean this school functions as an Islamic one. Rather, the everyday cultural and religious practices embedded within the school's policies make it resemble an Islamic, rather than a traditional, public school. For example, the school staff enforces the hijab, or headscarf, even though it does not appear in the school's formal dress code pamphlet. In addition, genders are segregated during school lunch. Students told me that they were not allowed to sit or socialize with the opposite sex during lunchtime, which was confirmed by my observations of lunch breaks.

Summit Academy provides three lunch breaks, one for each grade level (i.e., elementary, middle, and high school). My observations of lunchtime proved valuable. During these lunch breaks, I connected and built a rapport with students. Over 9 weeks, I often sat and ate lunch with them. In my observations, I noticed that students sat and socialized according to grade level. Initially, the female students were welcoming and sometimes invited me to sit with them. This was especially true of the 11th- and 12th-grade students. Some days, however, these same female

students ignored my presence and I had to ask for permission to sit with them. Nevertheless, they were often curious about my presence in their school, asking questions about topics ranging from my marital status to my research and why I was interested in studying Somali students' school experiences. These conversations proved invaluable and helped me gain the trust of these young women.

I did not have similar success with the male students. Although these male students granted me permission to sit at their table whenever I asked, I felt that my presence was not welcomed. For example, if the male students were having an engaging conversation and laughing, as soon as I joined them all conversation ceased and complete silence ensued. Unlike with most of the female students, very few of the male students showed much interest in either my work or my presence in their school. This was particularly true for the older male students in the 11th and 12th grades whom I attempted to recruit for my study. Many of these students seemed shy around me. Initially, this dynamic surprised me, since I had not had any trouble building rapport with Somali boys of similar demographics in previous research experiences. As I spent more time in the school and conversed with some teachers, however, the boys' reaction made sense when considering the school's dynamics with regard to gender relations. In addition, my actions, such as eating lunch with the students and interacting with them as equals, contradicted the practices and actions of adults and other authority figures in the school. Teachers and other adults in the school did not socialize or interact with students during lunch time. While gender relations as well as teacher-student relations provide glimpses of the contexts in which students narrated their stories, which aided me in better understanding student accounts. However, it is important to note that, unlike ethnography, which emphasizes the subject and it's social context, phenomenological research is more concerned with the phenomenon under study.

And since, this dissertation draws from post-modern understanding of the subject, hence one can argue that both the subject and their social context can be known through their experiences. I elaborate on this point next.

   Addressing the role of the participant in phenomenological research. Phenomenology emphasizes lived experience. This experience not only provides an opportunity to understand the studied phenomenon, it also offers a glimpse of the identity of the participant narrating the experience. In addition, because phenomenology is concerned mainly with capturing the experience, arguably the narrator becomes the experience at the moment of narration, as it is narrated. In other words, the reader comes to know the narrator through the narrative of his or her experiences. Thus, in phenomenology the participant has the opportunity to convey what is important to him or her, rather than having labels assigned to him or her. For this reason, instead of describing the student participants according to norms of social sciences, I allowed the students' stories to speak for them and their experiences. This approach is in agreement with both the postmodern and post-positivist understandings of the subject in motion. In this phenomenological research, I am therefore more interested in the lived experiences of the subjects than in a formalistic view of the participants that labels them as an immigrant, a refugee, Black, Muslim, etc. As I explained earlier in summary of methods section (Chapter 1), social categories never fully depict people; They often cover as much as they reveal.

Data Collection

   Dahlberg, et al., (2001) asserted that "there are no phenomenological or hermeneutical research methods or techniques for data gathering per se" (p. 149). They wrote "in a project that is based on a lifeworld perspective, the researcher can make use of all the data gathering techniques found in everyday life and in other research approaches" (p. 149).

As I stated before, the purpose of this study was to investigate the lifeworld perspective of Somali immigrant and refugee students in regard to their schooling experience. I carried out observations of students in the winter and spring quarters for the school year 2014–2015. Data was collected in multiple ways. These included field notes (based on observations) and interviews covering the life stories regarding the schooling experience of Somali immigrant and refugee students. Participant-observation during class instruction, in hallways, and lunch breaks was also conducted. After three weeks of observations, I chose study participants, including both males and females, based on field notes. This purposive sampling (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was best suited to the phenomenological nature of the study, where being a Somali immigrant or refugee who had been in the US educational system since elementary school, was a criterion for selection basis. Here, the assumption was that these students had experienced or were experiencing the phenomenon of racialization in school. Nine students, six females and three males, assented to participate in the study prior to gaining parents' consent. All but one of the students was recruited based on conversations I had with them during lunchtime and/or study hall periods, where I helped students with assignments. The English teacher recommended one of the students. Once students agreed to take part in the study, assent and consent forms were provided both in English and Somali for parents and students to sign. In addition, I also provided consent forms for teachers that allowed me to use the informal conversations I had with them as source of data. And as I explained above, school dynamics and context, particularly as it relates to gender relations, influenced on participants' willingness to take part in the study.

In this study, the main method for accessing student experience with racialization was using unstructured (Glesne, 2006; van Manen, 2001), open-ended questions for phenomenological interviewing (van Manen, 2007). Hence, the key prompt that was used to

initiate participants to tell their experience was as follows: "Tell me the first time or a time in your schooling that you felt that you were different from your classmates and what that was like for you." Whenever necessary, I asked propping questions or provided clarification of the prompt. As Greenwalt and Holohan (2011) highlighted, good phenomenological prompts are not only easily understood by study participants, but also invite them to share a concrete experience with detailed narration.

It was my hope that the primary prompt would avoid research procedures that easily connected an experience of difference to that of being racialized (Greenwalt & Holohan, 2011). Instead of asking students to relay an experience of being racialized, the interview questions asked for an experience of difference and allowed students to determine what that meant for them. Following van Manen's (2001) phenomenological interview procedures, study participants were asked to describe in detail their lived experiences with as much detail as possible, including bodily experiences and context. In this aspect of the interview, it was more important to invite the participants to relive the concretely and embodied experience (van Manen, 2001; see also Greenwalt & Holohan, 2011). All interviews were audio taped and transcribed verbatim. These phenomenological interviews lasted an hour or a bit more.

Data Analysis

In this study data analysis occurred in two folds. Primary data, which was data collected from interviewing Somali immigrant and refugee youth, was analyzed using phenomenology. Secondary data, which was data collected from informal conversations with teachers, school administrators, and non-Somali students, as well as field notes generated from observations, were utilized to augment understanding of primary data. Essentially, data from observations was used to better understand the context in which the study was taking place. For instance, field text data was brought up during interviews with students to seek clarity (Clandinin & Connelly 2000).

In phenomenological research, the purpose of data analysis is to find the shared meaning of the experiential descriptions (Barrit, Beekman, Bleeker, & Mulderij, 1984; van Manen, 2007). However, unlike other methods of qualitative inquiry, where themes are coded due to the frequency in which they occur in the data (Barrit et al., 1984; Greenwalt & Holohan, 2011), in phenomenology themes are meanings recovered from a close reading of the experience (van Manen, 2007). According to van Manen, "theme is the experience of focus, of meaning, of point" (p. 87). Themes temporarily fixate the experience, allowing for language to structure it and bring forth its most important aspects.

Hence, theme analysis started with selecting important moments in the experience under study (Barrit et al., 1984). This was done by working across all interview transcripts, reading each one carefully several times (Barrit et al., 1984), and by paying particular attention to the whole-part-whole-nature of the data (Dahlberg et al., 2001; Greenwalt & Holohan, 2011, van Manen, 2007). The circular reading of stories is captured by Heidegger's description of the hermeneutic circle. Heidegger said of the circle:

It is not to be reduced to a viscous circle, or even a circle, which is merely tolerated. In the circle is hidden a positive possibility of the most primordial knowing, and we genuinely grasp this possibility only when we have understood that our first, last and constant task in interpreting is never to allow our fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception to be presented to us by fancies and popular conception, but rather to make the scientific theme secure by working out these fore-structures in terms of the things themselves. (Heidegger, as cited in Gadamer, 1988, p. 265)

Elaborating on Heidegger's hermeneutics circle, Gadamer (1988) asserted that "the circle possess ontological significance" because the interpreter is always seeking to be guided "by the things themselves" (pp. 266–267).

This suggests that the interpretive work is one that oscillates between an awareness of the fore-meaning projected to the text by the researcher and the openness to the uniqueness of the text by the same researcher. However, as Gadamer reminded us, fore-structures are crucial to the very process of understanding, since they provide the framework in which understanding takes place—there is no question that is not motivated by a fore-understanding of some sort. This does not mean that one has to do away with their fore-meaning. On the contrary, Gadamer pointed out that the interpreter moves between understanding and interpreting by projecting for the text a certain fore-meaning until new meanings emerge that enrich the fore-projections. Hence, this constant working back and forth between fore-meaning is "the first, last and constant task" (p. 267) of the researcher, since the one attempting to understand the text is always working against distractions from the fore-meanings. Hence, the constant preoccupation with fore-projections that are waiting to be confirmed by the text is what Gadamer referred to as understanding.

Participants are considered to be the experts of the phenomena under investigation in phenomenological research. Therefore, when choosing the essential elements in the experience, Barrit (1984) and colleagues suggested to use as much as possible the same words used by the participants. This is important because "themes are not found in the words of the description but between the lines" (Barrit et al., p. 4). The suggestion here is that while researchers choose what the important elements are, they should be guided by the words of the participants. However, this does not mean that there is no place for disciplinary language; at some point, the everyday language used by the participants needs to be transformed into discipline-oriented language (Giorgi, as cited in Giorgi, 1997).

Furthermore, because when theme is "intransitive" (van Manen, p. 87) there is a need to fixate it momentarily so it could give an insight to the experience. This fixing is done by seeking (and structuring) the essential moments in the experience. Dividing of the data into themes is not arbitrary, and according to Giorgi (1997), is guided by "a criteria that is consistent with the scientific discipline" (246). As Giorgi (1997) explained, this should not be mistaken with a logical-empirical approach, where one looks for presences or absences of the criterion. Rather phenomenology calls for a "discovery oriented approach" (p. 247), which means that the inquirer needs an open attitude that allows for unpredicted meanings to surface. Phenomenology assumes that the meanings of our experiences are often hidden by their taken-for-granted and everyday nature; hence, the researcher needs to read "between the lines" of experience.

In concluding the process, I made a preliminary list of all the important moments in the participants' language and compared them with one another in order to come up with common themes (Barrit et al., 1984). Meanwhile, it is important to note that, despite the fact that I was hoping to find common themes among participants' experiences, there were variations that were

specific to certain experiential incidents. These variations were acknowledged (Barrit et al., 1984; Giorgi, 1997). Hence, variations mean several things for theme analysis. First, variations from the data enriched the experience under study, such that what was thought to be one experience may mean that of several experiences. For instance, the observing or not observing of the headscarf as a religious identity meant different things for different female students as they negotiated an in-between existence between secular and religious values at home and at school. Meanwhile, the four themes recognized in this study provided the *whole-part-whole* nature of theme analysis, and was demonstrated in the relationship between themes and subthemes, as well as variations within the subthemes. Instead of mentioning several experiences within the subthemes, I chose to draw from an individual participant's experience. This gave me the space to dwell on an individual's experience in depth.

A draft of an early theme analysis and transcripts of the interviews were shared with participants for them to comment and reflect upon. Here, participants were encouraged to make any corrections, clear any misunderstandings, and provide any further thoughts. This was true for all participants, except one female student who changed schools in the middle of the school year. I tried to reach this one student through her cousin who also was a participant, but I never heard back from that particular student. While this process (Moustakis, 1994) was important, especially in the early stages of the analysis, I had to be careful that participants' comments did not drastically change the direction of my analysis. Barrit et al.,'s (1984) work resonates my concerns about this issue. These authors recognized that the informant's insight does not take precedence over that of the researcher. However, for the most part participants' comments lead to better clarity. One of the students provided neither comments nor feedback despite several attempts on my part.

Analysis of interview transcripts, and field observations speak to the multiple ways that Somali students positioned themselves and how school staff, and their peers positioned them. In student interviews social positioning had to do with being visible as a Black and Muslim, and sometimes immigrant. Hence, the themes elaborated in the next two chapters indicate Somali youth's experience of being different based on race and religion. As the interview data showed the experiences of un-belonging among Somali youth spanned over many years in their schooling experiences. Even though, the students in this study often shared experiential accounts that capture moments of their lives, yet all of them recollected earlier memories of being excluded because of their being Muslim, Black and immigrant. Hence, the themes in the next two chapters are arranged such that in Chapter 4, theme one and two narrate stories in early childhood, where participants did not quite understand their social positioning or the ramifications that followed it. While, theme three and four, in Chapter five, reflect on latter stages of experiences, where youth understood their difference and told stories of coming to terms with their being Black, Muslim, and immigrant. Next, I ground the visibility of their lived difference on the notion of identity.

4. FINDINGS (PART ONE): EARLY EXPERIENCES OF RACIALIZATION AMONG SOMALI YOUTH

When we speak of identity, we are not speaking of human identity (Gilroy, 2000), where we draw upon our most important shared entity (being human). Rather, when we speak on identity, we are always referring to what sets us apart, our difference, whether that be our skin color, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, class, nationality, and the list goes on. For Somali immigrant and refugee youth, this difference is due to the visible nature of their black race and their religion. Somali youth could also claim an array of identities that tells something about them as people; however, in this study I intend to explore how Somali youth experience racial and religious identities in their everyday lives. Prior research indicated that Somali youth are racialized by school officials (Bigelow, 2010; Foreman, 2001) and by the elders in their own community (Bigelow, 2010; see Chapter 2).

As I explained in Chapter 2, the focus of this dissertation is to explore the everyday nature of the racialization process as a phenomenon and how Somali youth make sense of being racialized in their schools and communities. In the following, I share the stories of the students as they responded to the primary prompt of this study or variations of it: "Can you tell me a time when you felt that you were different from your classmates?" As students shared their storied lives with me, several themes emerged from the interview text. A primary theme that was essential to all the experiences was that of difference. Students shared rich stories replete with the complexity and nuance of everyday living, often depicting vivid pictures of incidents that spoke to what it meant to be different based on their racial and religious difference.

Therefore, as the themes and subthemes indicate a primary threat among all themes is one based on religious and racial differences. For brevity purposes, the four themes will be presented in two separate chapters. For instance, this chapter will explore the first two themes. These include: 1) Negotiations between visible identity markers and lived experiences and 2) Negotiating acceptance through appropriation. While the next chapter will cover themes: 3) Living with difference as living with one's self, and 4) Seeking meaning in uncertain terrains.

However, all four themes speak to how racial and religious differences are lived out in various aspects of students' lives in and out of school. In this manner, difference is not an abstract phenomenon but as I will elaborate through out the sections in this chapter, and the next one. Difference based on race and religion become identification and positioning tools that at times are used to include and exclude Somali youth in class activities and school community. However, these same racial and religious positioning also present opportunities for these students to reflect and also engage the power structures within school and family institutions in creative ways, often challenging traditions within these institutions. And even though students' interview texts depicted a much darker narrative, of what it meant to be a Somali immigrant and refugee in U.S. public school, than anticipated. Yet, I have to re-emphasize that the stories of these students are contextual, as well as temporal, such that they do not represent all Somali immigrant and refugee students' experiences in public schools.

Theme One. Negotiations Between Visible Identities and Lived Experiences

The stories of Somali youth reported here depict experiences of marginalization, based on being different. Many of the students experienced marginalization in the form of loneliness during elementary school. The youth, in this study, did not understand that they were different, at the time these experiences took place. However, they lived their difference in their everyday interaction or lack thereof with other students and/or teachers in their elementary schools. As they recalled these feelings during our interviews, they understood that they were different because of their "skin color" (Yahya) or "having an accent" (Najma) or "not being able to speak English" (Hoodo), or "wearing the hijab" (Asli). What matters here is to understand how these experiences were lived out in the bodies of these participants from an early age. Hence, shaping their understanding and perception of themselves. This is important especially as we consider the role of the gaze in materializing visible identities, as the participants understood their difference as enduring.

While some of the lived experiences of difference are based on visibility of race and religion, other differences such as accent, immigrant status, and academic ability also showed to be important in students' lives. Yet, as we will see in the stories of the students, difference based on race, accent, immigrant status, and academic ability, are grounded by the visibility of race. This is what constitutes the context in which these experiences take place, as well as how Somali youth understand and interpret such experiences. Hence, what we see here is the constant negotiation between identity, whether be visible or otherwise, and the lived experience of difference perpetuated by visibility.

Through Somali youth's narrative, we come to appreciate the unclear boundaries, between the subject positions in which Somali youth are hailed to, based on visible identity

markers and the lived experiences these identity position produce. For instance many of the stories, in this theme, allude to subjective perception of difference that is clearly based on visibility of race and religion. It is interesting to note that the Somali youth often equated experiences of loneliness to being marginalized by others in school community. Despite the fact that many of the stories under this theme lacked specific actions that could be related to racist racial projects as defined by Omi and Winant (1994, see chapter two). Hence, in the following, Somali youth narrate school experiences that take part in a landscape of ambiguity, doubt and suspicion of the other. And because race is structural, as much as it is contextual and relational, hence, our experiences of race become embodiment that often influences our interaction with and interpretation of the other. Van der Berg (as cited in Dahlberg et al., 2001) explains this further:

> One's fellow man plays a part in the relationship of man and his body. He may make this relationship closer. On the other hand he may also make it more remote, he may increase the distance between my body and myself…poor valuation of others forms a barrier between one's body and oneself. [We] see ourselves through other's eyes—role—theory recognizes this; the phenomenologist takes it quite literally. When excluded we see ourselves and our bodies as undesirable, unwanted and we can not inhabit our bodies easily and freely as we would when we feel accepted and confirmed by the other. There grows a split between mind and body, we become embarrassed and ashamed. (van der Berg as cited in Dahlberg et al., 2001, p. 65)

Is difference a bodily experience? How do our bodies respond to being different, especially when difference has social ramifications? Experiencing difference could be understood as a common encounter in most children's lives as they transition from the familiar world of home to the unfamiliar world of school. This is more pertinent for immigrant children like the Somalis, who

71

are both black and Muslim. And despite the fact that studies show that many immigrant/refugee children experience loneliness when they start school in their new country. In research among immigrant children, loneliness is often attributed to language barriers (McBrien, 2005). While this maybe true for the experiences relayed by some of the Somali youth in this study, others attributed past experiences of being excluded to their bodies being different. Hence, in this study, there is emphasis on the intersection of race and religion in school experience. Recalling experiences of being different, Yahya a 12th grade Somali student, who came to the US at the age of five, said the following about his experiences in elementary school: "No one would interact with me and honestly, sometimes, it's just that I think it was because of my skin color. I went to like a school with a whole, a lot of white, population. I think, I was maybe the fourth or the third black boy in the whole entire school" (Yahya). For Yahya, being one of few black boys in the school shaped his school experiences early on. Also, in his stories, race and gender came up several times, and hence were important factors in making sense of his experiences.

For Yahya, reason, for being lonely, was because of his being black, while for Asli, it was due to her wearing the hijab. Asli was born in the US and went to a neighborhood school with a relatively large African American student population. Her perception of being marginalized is mainly based on her religious garb. Regardless, of the reasons for exclusion, students like Asli and Yahya relayed prolonged experiences of marginalization during elementary school that became normalized. Asli explained:

> It [being by yourself] becomes normal. It becomes a second nature. Like oh, when I come
> to school, put my bag down, do my schoolwork, then just quietly wait. Recess, I would
> just walk around. Maybe I find new mulch to kick and then go to lunch. . . . So you

accept it, even though you question it a lot, you will, you just say uh, fine, because then

you will go home and your mother will be there. (Asli)

Experiencing loneliness became a daily encounter for Asli, whose entire story revolved around

feeling out of place during elementary school. Throughout her story, Asli often related her

feelings of marginalization to observing the headscarf. As we will see in later sections, more than

any other factors being Muslim and observing the hijab shaped Asli's school experiences.

Difference becomes a bodily experience when it has social ramifications. As van der

Berg (cited in Dahlberg et al., 2001) explained, our relationship with others influences how we

perceive our bodies. According to him, social exclusion leads us to perceive our bodies as

unacceptable and we find it difficult to inhabit our bodies naturally. As children, we are not

aware of our difference; rather, we depend on the adults in our lives for developing relationships

with our bodies and with the world. And, we constantly seek affirmation from those around us.

Hence, we have less understanding of our difference and we may not understand why we are

different from others that we come in contact with. We may not understand that our difference

may not be easily accepted in certain social spaces. Nevertheless, we feel it when we are not

accepted by others. Conversely, we also feel it when our presence is welcomed by others.

"You know you're not wanted just by the look of their faces". Colonized bodies'

perception of themselves is often related to the violence of the gaze. Here what matters more is

how the colonized body feels and interprets the gaze, rather than the intention of the gaze

(Fanon, 1967). Here we see Asli's interpretation of the look: I didn't play with anyone because I

first thought no one wanted me because of all the experience I had back then but also, I didn't

have this welcoming presence, you know. You know you're not wanted just by the look of their

faces" (Asli).

73

Asli's experience showed school as lived space (van Manen, 2007), where experiences of exclusion become everyday encounters. In the above statement, Asli relayed a fractured self that regained its wholeness by the loving presence of her mother. Home was where she found wholeness and comfort after a long day of being surrounded by people who would not acknowledge her presence. In this sense, the sanctity of the home was linked with motherly love. Asli relayed that her elementary school was only few feet away from her home. Yet, the contrast between the two spaces in regard to the lived experiences was stark. This speaks to the various ways in which our lived space comes to life through the other.

Asli explained that: "I didn't have this welcoming presence, you know. You know when you are not wanted, just by the look on their faces". For Asli, her sense of lived space was experienced through her relationality with others that she shared space with. While several of the participants shared experiences of being excluded during elementary school, in passing, or with as a matter of fact tone, as they talked about other experiential incidents. For Asli being marginalized during elementary school has had social consequences. She related her early school experiences to the current challenges she, as teenager, was facing: "Even though I was a bright student, I would pay attention, I would do well in the class but socially, I was, I was lacking and that like hit hard when I grew up later on. I couldn't like make my own decisions because of that" (Asli).

When the body is casted under the critical gaze of others, according to van Manen (2007) it loses its natural way of being in the world. Instead, it becomes cumbersome and "awkward" (p. 104). In other words, when our bodies assume an objective status, as is often the case for colonized subjects (Fannon, 1994; Alcoff, 2006), then we develop a split between our bodies and minds (van der Berg, as cited in Dahlberg et al., 2001), where we become embarrassed or

ashamed of our bodies. Because of their racialized status, these students developed a perception of their bodies that caused them to have a sense of uneasiness being around others. Asli went further to say that the split from her body and mind was so great that it made her second-guess her decisions (i.e., the harmony between body and mind is disrupted). Farah shared this feeling of unease, with one's body due to objectified status. Farah, whose account relayed her experiences in being new to the city and to a school system that was predominantly populated by white students. She explained that "it was very weird for me because you feel like a sore thumb sticking out in a crowd of, you know, just in that crowd of people, that type of crowd".

In this incident, Farah becomes aware of her body's presence in this particular environment, where she felt unwelcomed. It is interesting that she related her feelings of being unwelcomed to a particular "type of people" i.e. white students. Despite the fact that she conveyed in another incident that she also had some challenges in her previous, and more diverse, school because of her religion and immigrant status. Yet, it seems that in this particular (white) school, Farah interpreted her difficulties in fitting in, to her race. By referring to what she called "that type of crowd" (read white students), she was positioning herself and her white classmates within the larger race and racial relation discourse. Where the binary between the oppressed and oppressor categories are clear and expected. In addition, she interprets her mere presence and visibility as racial violent. However, as we will see shortly, as Farah talked about her experiences in the same school, Farah's confusion and ambivalence about the nature of the binary became obvious as she struggles to position fellow Somali students.

Next, I will pick up the thread of Farah's narrative as she struggled to fit into her new school's social fabric. Farah told me that her family moved from the west coast, where she was used to going to schools with large number of students of color, including many relatives of hers.

"He doesn't seem to identify as Somali." For Farah, being African and Muslim took precedence over a Somali identity. Farah often distanced herself from other Somali students in the school. During our conversations, she resisted being called Somali, despite the fact that she would occasionally use Somali phrases in her speech. Instead, she invoked an ethnic identity based on tribal lineage, and often insisted that her parents were Somali-Ethiopian and Somali-Kenyan, which would make her not Somali. It seemed that for Farah being Somali is linked to a national identity more than an ethnic identity. This was important to her, and even though this research seeks to investigate youth who identify as Somali or at least acknowledge their Somali heritage, I chose to interview her. Because, I found her to be eloquent and reflective, and also one of the teachers recommended her as a potential participant. However, in our conversation, I told her that I respect and accept her choice of ethnic identity, but still would like to interview her, to which she agreed to. These are important points to note about Farah so that her story can be situated and represented in the most authentic way possible. To return to Farah's experiences of being different, she explained:

> [A]nd I remember going into that class and I was the darkest person in that class. And I was probably the only person in that class who hadn't been in the [Northville, a pseudonym] district for like all, cuz they all know each other from way back. I'm the only one who's like, you know, new this year and I'm the only dark skinned person, the only like Muslim. Well, I wasn't the only Muslim but the only Muslim girl, I guess. . . . There was two, there was two boys. There was a Somali boy but I did not know he was Somali though. He was very, he didn't like, he doesn't seem to identify as Somali. And then there's an Egyptian.

Nimo: What do you think he was?

Farah: I thought he was African but the way he talked, I was just like, you know

                how I said, I was thrown off by like the amount of white people here and

                how there's. . . . I was just like, the way he talks, he doesn't talk like he's

                African

Nimo: Did he sound white?

Farah: He sounded very white so I'm not sure what he was. He could've been from

                Africa, from another place in Africa. I don't know, but I didn't know what

                he was at first and then I found out he was Somali and I didn't [know], you

                know.

Farah conveyed that she was the darkest person and the only Muslim in her class, yet she quickly

corrected herself and remembered that there were two other African boys also in her classes.

Here, Farah converged her race and religious identities into one, since these two elements made

up the basis of her experience. And so, for her, they were inseparable, a point I will elaborate on

below. However, because the two boys' identities were not as revealing as her hijab, this makes

it easier for them to not stand out as much as she does. This facilitated an easier path for these

two boys to integrate and be accepted by the school's culture and community. These boys did not

hide their identity, which could be because they grew up in the neighborhood and went to that

school system, where they acquired the linguistic style of the majority (white) culture. Or it

could be that the school culture only accepts those that assimilate into white culture. In either

case, Farah's story about them is more telling of her own lifeworld.

        For that reason, according to Farah, it was difficult to imagine an African sounding white.

Hence, for Farah, the Somali boy was not open about being Somali because "he didn't like, he

doesn't seem to identify as Somali" (Farah). Moreover, he sounded white, therefore, according to Farah, "he could've been from Africa, from another place in Africa" (Citation). This means that in her view one could not be Somali and sound white. This may explain Farah's reluctance to be identified as a Somali, because other Africans could speak English with an American accent, but when Somalis did, it was confusing. Farah's narrative speaks to the discursive practices that people engage in as they attempt to read others' identities as text. It also speaks to the prevalent discourse about Somalis here in the US as people who are uneducated and unwilling to integrate.

More importantly, Farah's comments about the Somali boy in her class explains that the act of ascribing social identities happens in a discursive field. Hence, the ascribed social identities become embodied (i.e., being Somali). This means that Farah's conceptualizations of being Somali were mediated, first, by the visibility of her raced self (i.e., African), and, second, by common discourses of what it meant to be Somali. Here, once Farah found out that the boy was Somali, she was surprised that he did not fit in her understanding of what it meant to be Somali. In other words, she could not hail his subjectivity to a commonly understood narrative of Somaliness. While this alludes to the complexity of the subject in the postmodern paradigm in which this data is analyzed, it also shows the act of hailing (Althusser, 1971) is not restricted by the power of structures on individuals; rather, subjects interact with the world and sometimes embody their own subjugated social positions as normal. This could be one reason that Farah, despite the fact that her ethnic and linguistic heritage is Somali, resisted being identified as a Somali.

"I was the darkest person in the class….the only Muslim girl". Despite the fact that there were two other African students, yet Farah emphasized, "I was the darkest person in the class…. I'm the only dark skinned person, the only like Muslim. Well, I wasn't the only Muslim

78

but the only Muslim girl" (Farah). Here, she related her difference not only to her visible racial

identity, but also by invoking her religion and gender identities, highlighting the multiple ways

she was different. This is so because being the darkest and only Muslim girl in her classes meant

social exclusion by her peers, including the two African-Muslim male students. Here, Farah

converged her racial, religious, and gendered identities into one. This multilayered particular

identity site, where Farah relayed her stories from, is one that positioned her at the margin as she

struggled to gain access to the center. Farah mentioned later in her story that there were other

Somali female students who also observed the hijab, but they were not in the International

Baccalaureate (IB) program, therefore, neither she nor the two boys in her class associated with

these female Somali students.

Even though Farah was comfortable sharing her experiences of being marginalized

because of her visible identity as a black and Muslim female, she, like the other Somali male

student in her class, also chose not to associate with the rest of Somali students, who looked like

them. Instead, as she narrated, "Like well, I remember we had like a lunch table and it was just

for like the IB kids and like we all sat at that table. And I would sit there, too, but it's not like

anybody missed me if I went somewhere else, if I didn't go to lunch that day" (Farah).

Farah's dissociation with first-generation Somali immigrant students is consistent with

the findings from research among other immigrant and refugee youth of color. These studies

reported that second-generation immigrant and refugee youth often distanced themselves from

newly arrived immigrants and refugee youth in their school (Lee, 2005; Ngo, 2010; Valenzuela,

1999; Waters, 1994). Conversely, Farah wanted to be accepted by her peers and teachers, both

black and white, in the IB program, and she was frustrated when they did not accept her. The

assumption here is that, since she was in the IB program, Farah thought that she was more

American than the first-generation immigrant Somali students at her school. When I asked if she was the only girl with the hijab on, she said, "no because the classes I was taking, they were all higher level classes and so I was like the only one" (Farah). Here, she was telling us that it was not common for other hijabi (a girl, who wears hijab, this mainly used by Muslim youth) girls to be in higher tracks. She referred to Somali girls as "other hijabi girls." And when I asked her who these students were, she said, "I think Somalis" (Farah). To her surprise, she was othered despite her academic ranking. One such example of othering is in Farah talking about an incident in a class, where she asked the teacher to give her an extension on an assignment:

Farah: But I just love the fact that everybody in that room made me feel like I was not supposed to be there. And that's teachers, and students. Yeah you're not, you're not supposed to be, you're not, what are you doing here. You don't deserve, you're not supposed to be here. Like you don't belong here. But I, like you know, well, instead of like, okay, well, these people are rude, I don't like them, blah, blah, blah, which they were rude, I feel like a lot of the kids in that class were rude or they would just stare at me and stuff.

Nimo: Really?

Farah: Yeah, they would just stare

Nimo: Did any one of them say anything to you?

Farah: No, actually, they didn't stare. They didn't stare. They ignored me completely. That's what it was. They didn't stare at me. They ignored me. When I'd talk, that's when they were staring at me. They would like, look at

me when I talked but like other than that, like they would ignore me. I was

nonexistent. And I was just not used to it. I'm like these people are so

disrespectful, what's wrong with them? Like don't they see another person

is sitting right here? Well, I mean, I don't know, but that's kind of, that's

how I felt. There would be times where like they would, the one time they

would look at me, they would look at me with like a stink look and, for lack

of better words, they would look at me and just look and go back to what

they were doing.

In Farah's narration, there are no specific actions that can be related to acts of othering. Hence, it

is difficult to know how much of the othering is self-imposed, here as she looks at herself

through the eyes of society. It is more accurate to say that her story reflects on her perception of

social norms that minoritized black Muslims.

Here, Farah felt marginalized. According to Farah, her body was not only objectified by

the presence of an ever-watching gaze. But her body was also "ignored" and hence reduced to

nothing. Because of the visible nature of racialized body, the societal gaze presents a dialectic

experience of marginalization. On the one hand, the critical gaze fixates the body into an

objectified status. On the other hand, the gaze ignores the body's presence to the point that the

body feels "non-existent." Similar patterns could be observed in narratives shared by Asli and

Yahya. Considering the fact that these experiences occurred both in elementary and high school

settings, leads us to consider the wide array of social contexts in which students experience

school as a lived space. This is telling since many of the students relayed experiences of

loneliness, often stating that no one wanted to talk or interact with them. Hence, we can infer that

81

in those school contexts, it was not just desire that no one was interested in engaging these Somali students. Rather, it could also be argued that there might have been a lack of certain knowledge on how to interact with Somali children, who were visibly different. However, as we will see next, not all teachers were uncaring, or indifferent to Somali youth as was indicated thus far. In Suad's story, we come to learn teachers' attitudes and behaviors towards Somali youth ranged from compassionate to unresponsive.

"I kinda had like impersonal relationship with some of my teachers". Somali immigrant students look to teachers as a source of compassion and care, because in Somali tradition the teacher is revered and raised to the status of a parent. As the saying goes "your teacher is your second parent." Therefore, Suad shared a story about her high school English teacher that exemplified the notion of teacher as a compassionate and relatable person. To briefly introduce, Suad is a 12th-grade student who also went to a predominantly white school in which she and her sister were the only Somali students. Suad explained, in an example, one teacher that went beyond the call of duty:

> [O]ne of my favorite teachers was at that school. She was one of the nicest people you'll meet. She will help you with everything. She will talk to you. She will do anything to help you. She was one of the greatest people, I've ever met.
>
> I had her freshman and sophomore year, She was my English teacher and she was one of the best things I've ever had in my life. She was great.

Greenwalt and Holohan (2011) called this the teacher-figure and argued that students often look up to their teachers and other school authorities for issues of belonging in class and in the school community. In this view, it is the actions and the attitudes of the teacher-figure that determines students' school experiences. This means that students often can read their teachers' dispositions

82

towards them by the ways teachers interact and relate with students. An example of this could be seen in the above narration, where Suad enthusiastically talked about her English teacher. Suad's face lit up as she recalled her experiences with this teacher, whom she referred to as "one of the greatest people I've ever met." Because the pedagogical relationship between a teacher and a student resembles that of parent and offspring (van Manen 2001), Suad's relationship with her teacher was narrated as "the best thing I've ever had in my life." Contrary to this account, Suad also shared her experience with her other teachers. She elaborated:

Suad:	My earth science teacher was a great teacher, too. But like my biology teacher, she was a bit, I don't think she was very fond of Muslim people. Even though, I talked to her here and there, it wasn't much of like, we didn't connect that much. And some teachers, I kinda had like impersonal relationship with some of my teachers. I really didn't talk to most of them. I never talked to some of them.

Nimo:	Why did you feel that way?

Suad:	Why I felt that way? Because when you see people that I was really different and so it was gonna be weird for a different person to have like a weird relationship with a teacher because you would expect it to be the normal white kid, with the, you know, nice family, not African kid, with you know, who come from Africa a few years ago. You wouldn't expect him to be really tight with teacher because the teacher gets more with the white kid than he gets with me.

Suad narrated that she did not relate to her teachers because she felt that "a kid from Africa" could not have anything in common with a teacher like the "normal white kid" does. Suad's account about her teachers is telling of how her own experiences shaped her understanding of herself as a person and her background as the child of an African immigrant. Here, instead of Black she used African to emphasize not only her black skin but also her immigrant status. Even though African and Black are not interchangeable, Suad is drawing from the Western imagination of Africa and Africans. Instead of referring to her origins as Somali, she used African, echoing the essentialization of all Africans as a monolithic group. Hence, she is unconsciously essentializing her own identity. This is an ample illustration of Merleau-Ponty's conception of intersubjective experiencing of the world. In this sense, Suad's lifeworld as a Somali immigrant youth led her to experience herself and her difference as something "weird." So, it was natural that the teacher related more to the "normal white kid" and not to her. In this sense, she described her relationship with the teacher, who was also considered normal, as unusual.

Another point to speculate on is the role of gender relations in this story. Not to undermine Suad's story, but it is interesting to note that Suad's example of white male as the ideal student, whom the male teacher relates comfortably with. This speaks to the white male fear to interact with the Muslim female. Again, in this example, Suad is internalizing social positioning based on grand narratives about the Black, Muslim female immigrant subject position. To further position Suad's story, we see the intersubjective nature of experience unfolding in her story line, which I will continue to weave throughout in later sections.

Thus far, we have seen that the storied lives of these youth revealed that their blackness and being a Muslim immigrant were not the only identity markers that were limited to the

abstract sphere. But their difference was an experience that was lived corporally, spatially, and relationally (van Manen, 2007). Identity also contains a cognitive element in which individuals reconfigure and renegotiate how they understand their world and themselves. This is particularly true as individuals come across new experiences that influence their worldview and their position in it. For instance, being identified as Black could be beneficial in certain contexts. In order to explore how identity production is not only relational, but also contextual, I introduce the stories of two students, Hibo and Omar.

In both stories, we witness how racialized identities are lived out in various power relation networks (Foucault, 1977), as youth engage social institutions of school and family. But, more importantly, in Hibo's and Omar's narratives, we come to find out different aspects of racialized identities. This is so because their stories exemplify how the youth in this study find creative ways to seek acceptance and perhaps escape the marginalizing effect of essentialized, racialized identities.

Theme Two. Negotiating Acceptance Through Appropriation

At first glance, in Summit Academy, one immediately recognizes student dress codes consisting of khaki or black pants, white shirts and navy blue sweaters for boys, and long dark dresses, skirts, or *abayas* (long and loose over garments) for girls. While this may seem like any other charter school, one main difference is that almost all female students wore the hijab, with the exception of elementary students. One could see few unveiled students, particularly among the younger students, first- and second-graders, but the rest of the female student body, especially middle and high school students, all wore head scarves. However, after paying closer attention and talking with students about their attire, I came to learn how students' dress were also narratives that further enriched the stories they were sharing with me about their lived

experiences in and out of school. For many, especially among the female students, the hijab was an essential part that constructed their schooling experiences and a topic that we talked about in length during the interviews I conducted with them. Yet, there was another side to the story of how students complied with school's dress code, including the hijab. I decided to include this section, for the following reasons.

First, clothes showed how students, both male and female, negotiated certain cultural and religious spaces. Second, through dress style they often challenged authoritative discourses of what it meant to be a proper and good Somali/Muslim kid. Through dress, these students strove for a personal style while still adhering to certain aspects of what is accepted of and expected from them religiously and communally. Third, if dress style is considered as a speech act (Mahmoud, 2004) from a particular identity site, then, as I will show, what type of clothes Somali youth wear and how they wear them could be linked to horizons as windows for interpreting identities. The first point speaks to the in-between world immigrant youth often occupy (Valenzuela, 1999; Sarroub, 2005). The second highlights the identity works that are produced as a result of existing in between spaces. Here, is where interesting things happen as far as the phenomenology of racialization is concerned. These issues come to life as we engage with students' dress style as narratives.

To wear the hijab in Summit Academy was very different than the picture students presented about wearing the hijab in their previous public schools. This is so because Z-school, as a charter school that caters to the Muslim community, mainly Somalis, mandated the hijab as a part of the school uniform despite the fact that the hijab did not appear on the school dress code manual; the hijab was part of the unspoken uniform code. When I asked Hibo, an 11th-grade

student and a second-generation immigrant, if there was pressure to wear the hijab at Summit Academy, she explained, in the affirmative:

Hibo: Yes, actually, the first week I came here, I actually showed up wearing jeans and had my hair out and then I came to the cafeteria, like the cafeteria, like all the hijabis were in and I was just like, whoa. I was like, I'm the only person not wearing it and everyone stopped, like all together, stopped. Even the principal was like giving a speech, stopped. And turned and they all looked at me. I was just like, oh, my god. I sat down. Even Miss [Samira] looked at me like I was weird.

            Yeah, and I was just like, I wanta fit in, I have to wear a hijab and *goono* [skirt in Somali] so of course, the next day I came to school wearing a hijab and *goono*. Just so I wasn't, I didn't feel awkward

Nimo: Yeah, do you wear it [the hijab] outside of school?

Hibo: Not when I'm playing sports, I don't wear it

            I think the principal had like the most concern [about students not] wearing the hijab.

            No, it was like we butted heads

            Beginning of the year, I hated her because I came to school like not wearing a hijab and none of like her peers had a problem with it. My Muslim teacher, matter of fact, Somali teacher didn't have a problem with it. Didn't pull me aside and say something about it. But like, a person who doesn't even wear it herself came up to me and was like you should be wearing it and I was like, you had me

87

as a student in second grade. Did I ever wear it? My parents ever send me to
school wearing it? (Hibo)

Among the participants of this study, Hibo was the only one who did not wear the hijab
outside of school. Through her experience, we come to find out another story about the hijab as a
dress code for Muslim girls. In Z-school, all female students were required to wear the headscarf.
Hence, in this context, the hijab served as a patriarchal mode of regulating Muslim female bodies
(see Chapter 2). But, more importantly, this speaks to how the hijab as a religious identity
marker is an excellent example that shows how identities are contextual and relational. In this
sense, then, the hijab as a cultural text is read and perceived differently depending on the context,
namely charter versus public school. Moreover, the meanings drawn from the expression of the
hijab as cultural text (Zine, 2012) impacts how we relate to others and eventually our perception
of ourselves.

In Summit Academy, in response to the visible Muslim identity imposed on her, Hibo
decided to "wear a hijab and goono" because she wanted to "fit in" (Hibo). In this school
context, her hijab was read as a visible testimony of observing the faith. Conversely, in public
school, as shared by other students in this study, the hijab as a cultural text was often perceived
and approached with suspicion and fear. In the public school context, the hijab often led to
alienation of those who observed it. To return to Hibo's story, the imposition of the hijab as an
identity became problematic on those days Hibo did not want to cover her hair because her not
wearing the hijab challenged the school authorities' understanding of what it meant to be Muslim
female. Here, it is apparent that the power structure at the school level essentialized Hibo's
identity and thus bound her subjectivity into a hijabi position.

However, Hibo's identity was not completely resolved by merely putting on the headscarf. For instance, at one point she told me that she did wear the hijab except when she was playing sports. At another time she shared the story of how she was got into trouble when she did not wear her hijab to school. Her hijab identity was a source of ambivalence for her because it only seemed the right thing to do in order to fit into the school culture. But, more importantly, without the hijab she was mistaken for *gaalo* (non-believer in Somali) by an elder Somali woman. This implies that her Somali identity was also in question, as *gaalo* also refers to non-Somali in the Somali imagination. So, wearing the hijab was synonymous with being Somali (Bigelow, 2010). It was apparent that being called *gaalo* disturbed Hibo. Yet, she resisted the hijab when imposed by school authority. It seemed as though Hibo did not mind wearing the headscarf; at the same time, it was important for her to be able to play sports without covering her body and her hair.

Meanwhile, Hibo was not alone when it came to pushing the boundaries set by the hijab as a dress code, often blurring the distinction between hijabi and non-hijabi. For example, many of the female students in this school resisted the essentializing nature of their hijabi uniform. They constantly got in trouble by challenging, not only the uniform code, but also the hijab as understood by the school authorities, their parents, and the elders in community. For instance, many of the high school girls often came to school wearing colorful scarves in big hijabi up-dos accompanied by bright lipstick, a clear violation of the school uniform code. In addition, some wore their long dresses and *abayas* in a form-fitting style that was contrary to the traditional, loose *abayas*. This practice was more common among the American-born students or, as they called themselves, the "fashionista Hijabis" (Najma interview). Their way of dress reflected a bourgeoning Internet community of hijabi bloggers that share ideas on how to wear their

headscarves while still following the latest fashion style. These bloggers often push the boundaries of what is considered hijab-appropriate attire. Among these bloggers, there is a growing trend that shows tight clothing paired with headscarves or hijabs. Even though this topic is beyond the scope of this study, this trend speaks to the ambivalent spaces that Muslim youth, including Somalis, occupy as they negotiate religious and gender identities in secular Western societies.

In the US context, in many metropolitan areas with large Somali populations, the act of wearing the hijab is synonymous with being Somali (Bigelow, 2010). Hence, in the particular Mid-western city where this study took place, the hijab became not only a visible identity marker but also a racializing tool for Somalis that often led to gendered Islamophobia (Zine, 2012). And, while the hijab placed Somali young women in discursive fields where they were marked as foreign, young Somali males had wider cultural terrains to choose from. This was evident in the appropriation of black youth culture, especially as it pertains to dress and hairstyle. In Omar's story, we witnessed the fluid nature of identity that permeates cultural boundaries, hence creating hybrid subjectivities.

"I identify as Somali or African-American, it just depends". Several of the Somali male students in this study and their peers wore their hair in Afro-style in varying lengths. Some sagged their pants, though most did not because sagging was against school protocol. However, many of them wore their hair in curled Afros. And, one could often see high school boys twisting their hair into curly locks while in class. This particular type of Afro was considered desirable, or as Yahya explained it, "they do it to impress girls". Yahya seemed to condemn this practice of young Somali males wearing their hair in Afros. Even so, he also had wavy Afro hair that he wore in curls. But among these boys, hairstyle functioned more than to impress girls. As we will

90

see in Omar's story, wearing the Afro was in a way a coping mechanism to overcome his immigrant status and access African-American youth identity. Omar is an 11th-grade student, who came to the US with his family at the age of four. Omar's family lived in the inner city, where he went to an elementary school with very few Somalis. However, in middle school Omar was the only Somali and Muslim student in his grade. Outside of school, Omar wears hip-hop style clothing and identifies himself as both African-American and Somali. An example of what the Afro represented for Omar is an incident where Omar's friends found out that he was Somali:

Omar: They say that [Omar] really cool. Like when I had, sometimes, there was like people that never knew I was Somali. Like since they first see me, cuz they said my haircut and like there was one time that like I never used to cut my hair. I used to have an afro all the time

And then because, and then I used to just trim it down, like [he pointed to his hair], trim it down. And then there was this one day, I just cut all my hair off and then they were like, oh, as soon as I cut my hair off, I looked like a Somali they said.

Nimo: Oh, really?

Omar: They said, cuz they said, oh, we never, they said we never knew you were Somali cuz most Somalians, like they got low cuts and stuff. And then I was like, okay. And they were really just cool with it. They were oh, you're Somali? Okay, yeah

By growing an Afro, Omar was able to become cool and blend with other black kids in his school and neighborhood. However, when he cut his Afro, his unknown Somali identity was revealed, even though his Afro was a visible marker of racial identity, which is a racializing element both in the larger society as well as within the Somali community (Omar interview). In his neighborhood, wearing an Afro hairstyle was considered a legitimate African American identity marker. It was one that could assuage alienation and provide protection from the drug dealers and gang affiliated activities that were prevalent in Omar's neighborhood:

Omar: [L]ike there was, unless like the white person is like 'hood and he lived in a black area. There was this one Somali dude that moved in and then like they, these black gang, they beat him up and took his money. But like me.

Nimo: Did he move out then? Out of the neighborhood?

Omar: He called the police and then the police was like this is not your, the police told him straight up, he said this is not your society. Why would you move here? You see it's full of like black people (Citation).

In addition, the Afro hairstyle also speaks to the notion that not all socially ascribed (racialized) identities are pathological (Alcoff, 2006). The Afro as a hairstyle resulted from oppressive colonial discourses in which African hair was not considered desirable. As a hairstyle, the Afro is rooted in the 1960s Black Power movement. And, wearing an Afro is considered an act of liberation and a direct oppositional stand to white beauty standards. So, for Omar, wearing an Afro hairstyle was a way to relate to and acknowledge African Americans' struggles and a wider

92

black conscious movement. This is a good example of utilizing horizons as an interpreting tool for identity work (Alcoff, 2006).

Hence, in Omar's lived experience, we see horizons coming together (Somali/African American) to provide the interpretive tool for identity work. It is here where horizons are engaged in re-imagining what it means for visible identities like race and religion. In this context, Omar's wearing of an Afro merged with his visible Somali identity, and thus provided the framework for him and his peers in interpreting what it meant to be Somali. And, because he was open in relating to African Americans, his Somaliness became "okay" when he decided to cut his Afro and reveal himself as Somali. This is pertinent because Omar's perception of himself as Somali was mediated through his relation with the other—his African-American peers. Omar's appropriation of African-American youth dress did not mean that Omar did not identify as Somali. Omar relayed that "I identify as Somali or African-American, it just depends".

This showed that Omar's tendency to continuously reconfigure and reinvent his identity is in agreement with the postmodern understandings of subjectivities in motion, where identity is always in production (Hall, 1996). In addition, horizons, or the subject's understandings of itself, are constantly changing as traditions are challenged with new experiences (Alcoff, 2006). As I will elaborate in the next chapter, Somali immigrant and refugee youth continue to become aware of their racial and religious difference as enduring. We will see novice ways of engaging with horizons for identity projects that go beyond appropriations of locally produced youth identities. This is particularly true for religion, because unlike race, religion as a visible identity marker is unique to the Somali immigrant experience. This is pertinent since, in the post-9/11 context, Muslims continue to be at the receiving end of social and psychological discrimination

93

and isolation. Thus, it is important to explore how Somali youth find ways to engage with such social context, and what responses they produce as a result of heightened Islamophobia and racializing discourses continue to persist.

5. FINDINGS (PART TWO): LIVING AS RACIALIZED BODIES

In this chapter, I continue to engage issues pertaining to racialization based on visibility of race and religion. Themes three and four bring to light Somali youth's lived experiences with visible identity markers as processes of subjectivities in the making. In Chapter 4, interview texts revealed to us how early experiences of being racialized were lived out as bodily encounters. However, we have also encountered narratives of being racialized that challenged the notion of visibility. This was particularly true for the hijab, as well as hairstyle, as various identity markers became visible at certain times, and became invisible at other times. In this chapter, we learn how experiences of racialization continue to influence how Somali youth interpret their lives, particularly as it relates to the day-to-day nature of being racialized and the multiple ways that they draw meaning from these worldly encounters.

Theme Three. Living with Difference: As Living with One's Self

In the following, we encounter the stories of three students: Sahra, Suad, and Hibo. Their storied lives depict accounts of everyday encounters with the worlds as black and Muslim immigrant youth in public schools. Their narratives tell a tale of challenges as well as opportunities that often question their identities and religious belief systems. In post-9/11 terrain of heightened Islamophobia, these three girls contest and sometimes co-construct the racialized identities that are imposed upon them. However, most importantly, their stories provide a framework to look at the everyday encounters that shape their subjectivities.

One important finding, across stories in this theme, is one that emphasizes the embedded nature of race and religion as structures of hierarchy. In other word, the subject internalizes the very social norms and discourses that marginalize them. For instance, this phenomenon was often revealed in student stories, where they often looked at themselves through the eyes of

society, and often interpreted situations based on that, instead of the actual incident. A second finding was that the school often played a role, in which students' ambivalence about being Muslim was revealed. Here, Somali youth were made to confront their religious beliefs system in a way that mainstream Christian students are not made to.

"I wanted to take it [my abaya] off when I came there [school]." The narratives in this section tell the experiences of perceiving one's self as not good enough Muslim in the eyes of those in the school as well as in the community. Sahra shares:

Sahra: My god, I remember that day so clearly, too. I remember we saw a dead person. It was my first time, that Sunday [before she started wearing the *abaya*] was the first time seeing a dead person. Like as in like washing it [the body]?

Nimo: You went with your mother to the mosque?

Sahra: Yeah. To the mosque and I was there, they were like, oh, you wanna see a dead person and I said, I was curious, where does it happen? So we went to the back where they wash [the body] and everything, we saw the face and everyone just started crying. And everyone, and everyone that day cuz right after that, during halaqa time, everyone sat down and I told them about my struggles. I was like, I'm so scared to wear hijab. I'm so, because I would wear like this to the, to the masjid, but I would never wear this to school. I was telling them all

Everyone sat down, had a little halaqa thing where. Yeah, they talked about their struggles.

That very Monday, I started wearing the abaya. And I remember that day so clearly because I was wearing a pink, my abaya was like pink. And I had like a pink abaya. I tried to make it nice or whatever and it was so weird, wearing it. I was like, I wanted to take it off when I came there [school]. So bad. I felt like everyone was staring at me.

Sahra is a second-generation Somali immigrant, who grew up in a predominantly white suburb. Hence, she was the only Somali/Muslim student in her grade. Sahra's story is a story of meaning seeking between the conflicting secular and religious spaces in which she lived, namely, school and home. Hence, her minority status is often reflected in her constant feelings of "being starred at". While this might be common feeling among teenagers, yet there is more to this, because, many of the participants in this study reported being under the "gaze". This relates to double consciousness as articulated by Dubois (1999). The notion that you look at yourself through the eyes of the other and start to internalize some of the hatred embodied in that gaze or horizon. Hence, leading to ambivalence about one's own social position.

Experiencing the rituals of preparing a dead body for burial helped Sahra to connect with her religious traditions. Strangely enough, though, Sahra, for the first time in her stories, relayed a real connection with others. In the halaqa (a discussion circle at the mosque), she opened up to the other women about her struggles with wearing the hijab. At that moment, her being an Americanized youth, her age, or her not being able to speak Somali, did not matter. These are important factors because the mosque is a place where these categories create a social hierarchy. However, all that mattered at that particular moment was that she felt welcomed and accepted by other women of her community. At that moment, Sahra's presence was validated. As she recalled the significance of that day in her life, Sahra's voice echoed the range of emotions those memories revealed. Yet, Sahra kept her composure as she narrated the events of that day with such clarity:

Nimo: Okay, can you walk me through that day? What happened?

Sahra: That day, I prayed so much. I remember I was like, just let it be easy for me. Just

             let it like, that's when I started praying really good. Like I was like just let it be

easy. I really, really wanta do this for your sake. I'm not doing it for anyone

else's sake. And that day, I remember I got so many compliments. Oh, I like this.

Oh, it's really nice. Oh, thank you. I didn't imagine that kinda [of reaction]

Nimo: Yeah, it was surprising

Sahra: It was very surprising from a lot of people that were like, oh, I like the pink. It

matches your thing. And I was just like, I came home and I was like, oh, my god,

that was good. And it was, it was a relief, honestly, like everything. Cuz having

such, like no one understands the struggle until you go there because when

you're so, like choked by everything around you and you see it, like girls that are

like practically naked, wearing shorts and crop tops and you're walking by with

an abaya, the looks you get, like no one could ever describe it

So it was difficult and I remember that time. It was around the fall time so people

were still wearing shorts and

Yeah, it is, it is very difficult telling my parents, like difficult for me to wear an

abaya because it's such a norm for them. Such something they, you know, like,

that doesn't make sense to me. And they don't understand that so I feel like it's a

barrier that's between your parents and child because they'll never understand

each other.

No. It was difficult, really difficult.

Nimo: Yeah. Then you just, the second day, you wore abaya again? What happened?

99

Sahra: I wore it the [*abaya*] the whole week and I remember someone was like is it, are

you wearing it for a holiday? I was like, she was like, oh, is that for like your

holiday? I'm like no, I'm wearing it from now on. And they were just like why,

and I'm just like cuz I want to. You can't really tell gaalo people because my

religion tells me to wear this stuff. No, because they would never understand that.

They're like, why can't you wear any other clothes? Why you have to wear this

black one?

Nimo: You don't feel like explaining?

Sahra: I don't feel like explaining it so I was like cuz I want to [*wear abaya*].

As the story unfolds, we come to discover the role of religion in these youth's lives. Instead of

viewing religion only as a source of tension between home and school, Sahra's story tells a

different aspect of religion that is often not explored in the education literature. That is how

Somali youth utilize religion or spirituality as funds of knowledge (Gonzales, 2005) to be drawn

from in times of difficulties. Here, Sahra recalled that "that's when I started praying really

good". Sharing an intimate moment in prayer, Sahra revealed a vulnerable side of herself that

was not understood or easily accepted by her peers. It is interesting that Sahra did not even try to

explain her religious predilections to her peers. Instead, she invoked the secular ideals common

among her peers in regard to why she wore the hijab in order to relate to them. For instance, she

emphasized the individual choice to wear the hijab over the divine. To highlight the importance

of this point, I pointed out that she used the phrase gaalo, which, as explained, means non-

Muslim. By claiming that *gaalo* people would not understand her choice to cover as an

obedience to a divine command, Sahra relied on common secular ideals. Even though, for many

Muslim women, observing the hijab could be a visible act of practicing the faith (Mahmood, 2004), but Sahra explains her choice to veil as one that is divorced from any divine relations. It could also be argued that by explaining her observing the hijab for religious purposes, Sahra may have been accepted by some of her peers.

In her mind, by merging the secular and the divine spheres, Sahra attempted to escape from the ever-present critical gaze that essentializes Muslim women and girls who wear the scarf. Instead, she reserved this aspect of her faith (wearing the hijab) for the private sphere. She decided not to reveal her reasons for wearing the hijab. In addition, she also opted for a pink *abaya* instead of the standard black. The pink *abaya* signified a more modern and less threatening image, in the Western imagination, compared to the black *abaya*. These choices seemed to work with her peers, because as long as Sahra invoked the individual choice over the divine, her choice to cover was not questioned. Instead, she got compliments on her pink *abaya*. She feared that if she had mentioned God or Islam, then her hijab would not have been accepted. Furthermore, her decision in wearing the hijab was an individual choice, which is in direct opposition to the common narrative about Muslim women being forced into wearing the veil by patriarchal norms (Zine, 2012).

Conversely, it could also be argued that by explaining her reasons to cover for religious purposes, Sahra may have been accepted by some of her peers who can relate to being religious. Thus, her choice to draw from common, standard American discourses could cause further alienation. With religion, many of the Somali youth participants rely on mainstream secular discourses to justify their decisions, causing self-imposed distance in their stories. They often interpret everything as a judgment, when at times there may be mere curiosity. For instance, one classmate asked Sahra, "Are you wearing it [*abaya*] for a holiday?" It can be difficult for Somali

101

youth to differentiate between an innocent question and a demeaning one, especially because Somali youth may internalize the essentialization of Muslims in mainstream discourse. In addition, within the school community there is no belief in the possibility of honest dialogue across differences. It maybe partly the school's fault that these discussions are so difficult.

To return to the Sahra's story, the hijab once and for all marked her difference. Once she wore the hijab, she became visible. Yet, religion was an alienating element in Sahra's life even before she started observing the headscarf. This could also be seen as tension between Somali parents and their American-born children. Sahra explained that neither her parents, nor the women at the mosque, understood the difficulty of being the only Muslim student in her predominantly white school. This implies that these elders at the mosque sometimes use young Somalis' lack of visible religiosity as a way to marginalize youth like Sahra. In the next section, Sahra's story is juxtaposed to that of Suad to give us an insight on the complexity of being different and the Somali youth's perspectives of being racialized.

"Mr. Yada Yada told everyone that you are Muslim and I was embarrassed." Suad is a second-generation Somali female student, who also went to suburban schools with very few Somalis/Muslims, prior to coming to Summit Academy. Suad's story started with her experience of being forced to reveal her Muslim identity:

Suad: Okay, 7th grade. I remember my teacher comes up to me and he says, __ the ban has been… I can't say it. Has happened in France. And it was during the time, I didn't really wear the hijab so I didn't care. The time after that, I remember the day or the day of, the day after or the day of, my friends come up to me, oh, you know, Mr. Yada Yada told everyone that you're Muslim and I was embarrassed. And I remember one day exactly, we were going to music class and this kid comes up to me and he says are you Islam? Which is so wrong on so many levels. And I remember that day so clearly because I was at the brinks of saying no. I like in my heart, I was about to say no but I said yes.

and it wasn't like, I don't know. That moment stuck with me for the rest of my life cuz that was a moment I just, now I look at it and I'm just like what was going through me. Like I was to the point I was embarrassed of my religion. Embarrassed of who I am.

Nimo: So the teacher specifically told on your class?

Suad: He told the other classes, not only my class.

Nimo: You were the only Muslim kid in the entire grade?

Suad: I, I think so, maybe during that time I was.

Nimo: Okay. What made you say yes?

Suad: At the point, I think what made me say yes because I knew, in my heart I

          wanted to say no but I knew at the end, I was Muslim. Even as much stuff

          I could do, as much like even though I wasn't a practicing Muslim then.

Suad: And there were some people that just, I don't know what I did to them. I

          did nothing to them and they would just give me the stinky eye. But after

          a while, I started realizing, later on, I was like I really didn't care.

In Suad's story, we learn about a significant moment that would alter her experiences, not only in

that school, but that would continue to play an important role in her life in high school. Such

moment was the moment the teacher revealed her as a Muslim.

One interpretation is that while the teacher broke some level of trust in "outing" Suad,

and his actions so far narrated could be attributed to a simple interest in these issues. And he may

not have realized the child would struggle with a public identification. This interpretation begs

the question is this child's own ambivalence about being Muslim in the US, rather than any

specific act of hostility directed against her? While this is not meant to down play the

discrimination and violence, these youth experience as a result of their social positioning, but

rather, to show how complicated schooling becomes in such a context.

Another interpretation, however, focuses entirely on Suad's perception of this particular

experience. According to Suad, prior to the incident, she had an easy time in school that was not

marked by any (religious) difference, even though she later relayed, "I never felt that I was like

the rest of the White students." Yet her difference did not pose a daily struggle similar to the one

she experienced after she was identified, and identified herself, as a Muslim. This struggle

occurred because the school forced Suad into a confrontation with her own faith, which it never

does for Christian students. This experience is not necessarily bad, but, as shown in this study's stories, it does weigh on these children. This is evident particularly with regard to the wearing of the hijab, as discussed next. In Suad's narrative, however, an important point is the direct role that teachers play in positioning students as subjects (and the social ramifications of that positioning).

It seemed that Suad was able to hide her identity as a Muslim, "and it was during the time, I didn't really wear the hijab so I didn't care". Even though, her identity was not visible to many at the time, her teacher knowing that she was Muslim brought the issue of the hijab ban, and "told everyone that you are Muslim" and I was embarrassed". Suad was surprised, because she did not consider herself as a practicing Muslim since she neither observed the scarf, nor prayed regularly. Yet, she was identified as a Muslim. As a seventh grade student, Suad was more worried about her friends finding out about her Islamic roots, than the hijab ban in France. Meanwhile we can speculate on how much of the pain that the teacher caused is due to the fact that the child does not strongly identify as Muslim? In calling her a Muslim, he did certain violence to her self-concept. There is a tension here between cultural identification as Muslim and religious commitment as Muslim?

As I explained in chapter two a primary element in the construction of a racialized Somali identity is the act of naming, which hails the subject into specific ideology of what it means to be Somali i.e. a Muslim and black. In this incident, the teacher did more than just telling. By revealing Suad's religious identity, the teacher on the one hand, labeled Suad as the Other because she was Muslim. While on the other hand, he may as well make something unfamiliar, Muslims, into something familiar, Suad herself. Because she explained "I have known these people all my life". In this example, it seemed that Suad was aware of the

essentialist representation of Islam and Muslims in post 9/11 America and was "embarrassed" to be associated with such religion. Or, it could be that she was just embarrassed that she was not following the rules of her faith in the way she knew her elders would want. Or perhaps, she feared unfavorable treatment from her peers and teachers; both things are at play here. Regardless, her fears were confirmed as she explained: "But after that, I felt like sometimes people didn't like me because they find out I was [Muslim]". Yet, Suad realized that her difference based on religion was an important part of who she was and she could not escape. Hence, this realization froze her into a racial project.

Examining the data through the lens of Omi and Winant's (1994) racial formation theory, we see the relationship between essentialist representation of Muslims, and social structure of schools. By linking Suad to Muslims in France, the teacher was drawing from an essentialist discourse that denied any differences among Muslims. This is a key element in the concept of racial formation and one that I base my argument of racialization of religion on, a concept, which I would build on in subsequent sections as I examine the stories of the students in this study. In this view, when a racial project draws a link between essentializing a particular group and social structures that dominate, then according to these authors, this constitutes formation of racist racial project. To highlight the importance of racial projects, Omi and Winant (1994) differentiate between the macro and microstructures, where macro refers to the institutional and policy level. Whereas, the micro refer to our everyday interactions and experiences of racial projects, further emphasis on this point is elaborated in chapter two. In this study, I am more concerned about how Somali youth experience micro racial projects in their schools and community.

I end this section (in theme three) with a story from a female student, Hibo, whom we met earlier as she shared her experiences of not wearing the hijab in Summit Academy. Here, Hibo's voice echoed the marginalization felt by many of the participants, interviewed for this study. In the following, Hibo narrated an account that happened during a class discussion about 9/11. In this narrative Hibo's story brought forth the themes of marginalization, exclusion and ambivalence that continue to unfold and inform the following sections.

"It's one of Hibo's people." Unlike many of the stories thus far, the next account reveals clear acts of racist racial projects (Omi & Winant, 1994). However, this does not mean that the above, narrated encounters are less significant than the next one. All the stories in this study, whether they can be interpreted based on the frameworks in our disposal or otherwise, are relevant. This is so because these stories produce something as we navigate the in-between spaces immigrant youth live.

Hibo: Hibo: An experience that I'll probably never forget is like my freshman year
             when they were talking about like 9/11 and how like that and like the teacher
             slipped up and made like a racist slur remark and….A student was like, do we
             for sure know, it was, I think she asked was it for sure a Muslim did it and he
             was like, yeah. It's one of [Hibo']s people. Like, that is something I
             Yeah. Like that's something I would never forget. I mean, he apologized and he
             messed up but…

Nimo: How did that make you feel?

Hibo: It made, like I felt like everyone stopped and looked at me, like all attention was
             on me.

Nimo: Were you the only Muslim in the class?

Hibo: Yes, at the time, yes, I was so it was like awkward.

              But I mean, I mean, it's true. It was like, we are Muslim so in a way, he was

              right but the way he said it was like negative. I was like, yeah, it's true. They're

              Muslims and I'm a Muslim, too. I'm not gonna deny that. But I was like,

              Americans and every race and ethnicity does things as well. Does that make

              them your people or what?

Nimo: What did he say to that?

Hibo: He was like, I understand and I apologize. I was like, okay. Yeah, he apologized

              right away.

Nimo: What about the rest of the students?

Hibo: They were just like shocked. Caught them off guard, too. Yeah

Nimo: Okay. Did that change your, your relationship with the teacher after that?

Hibo: Yeah, I was like, I was like, I kept my distance from him in a way.

Continuing with the notion of racialization of religion or the converging of racial and religious

identities, in Hibo's story we witness how racialized narratives of religion are constructed. Thus,

it did not matter that the alleged 9/11 terrorists were of Middle Eastern origin and Hibo was

Somali. They were referred to as "one of [Hibo's] people." Even though Hibo challenged the

teacher about his stereotyping of all Muslims, she did not draw a clear line between her ethnic

identity and that of the carriers of 9/11. Instead, Hibo acknowledged the fact "it's true. It was

like, we are Muslim". Yet, she questioned the dehumanizing narrative about Muslims and called

upon the teacher to examine his own role in inequality in representation pertaining to Muslims.

Here, we learn that the teacher apologized. So on the one hand, there is a need to preserve room

for people to act violently but also to amend and learn. Thus, it would be interesting to interview this teacher, to see if he learned from his mistake, to see what degree this encounter did or did not change his life in positive ways. On the other hand, what was more important was the unconscious act of essentializing all Muslims as terrorists. As is common in everyday racial projects (Omi & Winant 1994), individuals are not even aware of the multiple ways they enact attitudes and practices that discriminate those belonging to communities of color (Feagin, 2010). While this conception of essentializing certain groups is mostly based on race, I argue that this notion could be extended to religion as a racial project, considering the state of Islam and Muslims in post-9/11 America, where it had become the norm to call for the policing of Muslims.

To further elaborate on the essentialization of Muslims by this teacher, it is important to note and further show the link between Islam as religion and how it was racialized. Hibo was the only female student interviewed in this study that was not observing the hijab, at least outside of school, at the time of the interview. In addition, she was also the only one among the female participants who in her previous school participated in sports and other school activities. This is pertinent, because unlike many of the students in this study, Hibo's parents allowed her to participate in these activities freely. Her parents, contrary to the findings of some research (see Haw, 1998), did not use Islam to monitor the type of extracurricular activities she could participate in. If these were factors that determined if students could be integrated into the school's social fabric, then Hibo represented a good example of that. More importantly, Hibo's Islamic identity was not visible as she neither observed the headscarf nor showed any reluctance in participating in athletic activities. These points are relevant because often teachers and other

school officials use parents' religious backgrounds as a way to position Somali and other Muslim students (Forman, 2001; Haw, 1998; Sarroub, 2005).

Moreover, in Hibo's story we saw that her identity as a Muslim was problematized and essentialized. By calling the terrorists one of her people, the teacher engaged in an open act of essentializing, thus casting Muslims (Islam) as a racist racial project. According to Omi and Winant (1994), a "racial project can be defined as *racist* if and only if it creates or reproduces structures of domination based on essentialist categories of race" (p. 71). Hence, in Hibo's story the grouping of all Muslims based on their faith was essentializating and, therefore, propagated all sorts of structural and social marginalization. Lastly, juxtaposing Suad's story with Hibo's provides a continuum of actions from those that are interpreted as racist but may be neutral to those that are clearly racist. This juxtaposition partly demonstrates the subjective experience of race, racialization, and symbolic racial violence among Somali immigrant and refugee youths. Race is a structural as well as cultural representation (Omi & Winant, 1994). Therefore, the hierarchy inherent in these structures provides an understanding and interpretation of the racial projects encountered in daily life. This is evident in the racialization of religion, as illustrated next in Farah's story.

Theme Four. Seeking Meaning in Uncertain Terrain

The meanings and stories behind Muslim women and girls wearing the hijab are myriad. All six female participants, in this study, shared different stories about their hijab. And many of these stories, we have already encountered in previous themes. However, in previous stories, the hijab stories were side stories, often supplementing other aspects of experiencing (perceived) racialization. In this section, the hijab is more than an identity marker. According to Farah, whom we met earlier, the hijab is a way of being in the world.

"Wearing the hijab vs. putting the hijab". In this section, I interrogate the hijab not only as a visible identity marker, but also as a way of being in the world. In this view, the hijab produces certain subjective experiences. Next, Farah explains what the hijab means to hers:

Farah: Yes, I was. That's like the thing about like what you said in terms of identity and stuff, it's not only like, well, you can add the perspective of oh, I'm a colored person, African, whatever. But it's also like, like what I said, like wearing your identity. Wearing the hijab. And like it's a diff, it's different cuz then you can actually put on a piece, put on clothes and stuff and it doesn't mean anything but when you're like, you can put on clothes and then you can like wear clothes.

Nimo: Meaning what? What is the difference? like putting on clothes, you can just put anything on and it doesn't mean anything.

Farah: You can put stuff on and it won't mean anything to you and it's not, it's without purpose. You just put it on.

Nimo: Including the hijab, you mean?

Farah: There are people who do that, yes. You can do that, yes. It's possible. With anything.

Nimo: What, does it mean, wearing the hijab?

Farah: Wearing the hijab is like pretty much. Wearing your identity is like when, for

example, with the hijab, you wear it and you're not apologetic about it. Like

you're not sorry that like, you know, people try hard to fit in. And it's like you

stand out but you're not, that's not like a bad… You're not like ashamed of it.

Like you're proud to wear it. You're not apologetic about being a Muslim

because like, you know, part of it, I guess, part of identity, or part of my identity

is being a Muslim and a lot of the time, you know, because of things that have

happened in the past and, you know, the things that are being, you know,

perpetrated in the media about Muslims and stuff like that, like they want you to

apologize for other people, other people's actions and they want you to feel sorry.

And they want you to condemn. And they want you to do that, even if you don't

know like what it is that's, you know, the new thing that's coming up now. You

don't know what it is. They want you to condemn it.

Nimo: Did you have those experiences yourself? Or it's something that you know is out

there?

Farah: It's something that is, well, sometimes it's said but most of the time, it is not said.

It's not something you talk about and it's there.

Yeah, yeah. Because it's like, you know, they want you to, this is not, nobody's

physically saying anything to you. They're not speaking words to you but the

attitudes that they give off. Like you know, just the little things, the way that they

look sometimes. When they talk to you, sometimes the words that they use, the

tone of voice that they have with you when they're talking, you know, it's not

something they say but it's showing you, hey, like they want you to feel like bad

for who you are. They want you to, or they give off the feeling that you should

feel bad for who you are….That you shouldn't be proud to be who you are.

I would say, like I would say sophomore year of high school. Well, I mean, even

before that, you wear it but you don't, you're putting it on. You put on the hijab

but you're not wearing it.

Nimo: Did that happen with you?

Farah: Yeah, and in middle school, I remember what happened was, and see, this is kind

of individual because I remember in middle school, like from 4th grade to 7th

grade, I went to an Islamic school, you know. It's very, you know, Islamic and

they teach you Islamic things and stuff and then.

Nimo: Did they make you wear the hijab in that school?

Farah: Yes, [the hijab] part of the uniform and it's not like, it wasn't, I wasn't, I started

in 4th grade so it was not something that was like, I was not like super against it

or rebellious or whatever.

As Farah explained in her story, wearing the hijab was more than putting on a piece of garment;

it was "wearing your identity." Thus, it is political, according to Farah, because wearing the hijab

means "you're not apologetic about it". In many Western societies, including the US, the hijab is

a much-contested piece of cloth that brings forth discussions surrounding women's rights issues

(Ahmed, 2000), the separation of religion and state, and an array of topics that are related to who

belongs and who does not belong to the nation (Zine, 2006; 2012). More importantly, as the

113

storied experiences of these students speak to, the hijab is an identity site where Muslim girls not only construct meanings for their lives, but also negotiate an identity between the secular and religious boundaries they cross every day. In this sense, the hijab eases Muslim girls' lives as they cross cultural borders because it assuages their parents' fears of their children losing traditions (Sarroub, 2005). Therefore, the hijab allows them to pursue education and careers for themselves in the secular world (Sarroub, 2005), as long as they are visible as Muslim woman (Zine, 2012).

To return to the concept of "wearing the hijab" versus "putting the hijab on," the hijab is a political stand, because, for Farah, it makes one "stand out," even though the hijab is a visible identity marker. But, as she stated, "that's not like a bad" thing, and one is "not ashamed of it." To her, wearing the hijab is more than symbolic because "part of my identity is being a Muslim." And, in order for one to embody this identity position, one needs to be "not apologetic" about being Muslim. Yet, this very Muslim identity is fragmented because it is a "part" of who she is and not the whole person (Farah).

However, the media and other discursive tools tend to fixate and mold what it means to be a Muslim into a simple good versus evil binary. The underlying assumption here is that all Muslims share an essence to commit evil, unless proven otherwise. Hence, as Farah explained, requiring Muslims to "apologize for other people's actions" because *"of things that have happened in the past"* and "they want you to condemn . . . even when you don't know what is it that's" going to happen (Farah). In order to be accepted as a Muslim, one is required to accept and actively participate not only in the policing of Muslims but also to constantly apologize for being Muslim. Thus, "wearing the hijab" speaks to that. It is a conscious decision on Farah's part

114

not to "put it on the hijab" and to embrace who she is. Farah raised an interesting point here about the media's role in creating the construct of the apologetic Muslim.

When covering a story about terrorist acts by Muslims, it has become a common practice by media outlets to always include a representative from the Muslim community that condemns these terrorist acts. While this may seem a way to cover all sides of the story and a channel to give voice to Muslims living in the West, it has also become a phenomenon that contributes to the marginalization of Muslims in general. In this view, then the media as a discursive field not only influences in shaping the ideology that Muslims are dangerous people and need to be policed, but also hails Muslim subjectivities into self-hate. Thus, the media as an element of a discursive field creates a construct of Muslim that is apologetic of themselves as people and often feel the need to "apologize for other's actions" (Farah), especially when others carry out acts of violence forcing Muslims to develop an ambivalent relationship with their faith. My intent here is by no means to criticize the efforts of Muslim individuals and organizations, both in the US and other Western countries, which work to build bridges between Muslims and the larger communities in which they live. Their work is important and needed, particularly as Islamophobia sentiments in the West continue to grow. Instead, my primary concern here is to elaborate on how the hijab as an emerging identity with political standing can be better understood. To do this, I draw from Alcoff's (2006) work on gender. Arguing against an essentialist view of gender, Alcoff explained that ".... there is no gender essence all women share. But gender is, among other things, a position one occupies and from which one can act politically" (pp. 147–148). This conception of gender combines identity politics and understanding of the subject as a positionality. In this view, the subject is then understood "as non-essentialized and emergent from historical experience and yet objectively located in

115

describable social structures and relations. Gender identity is not exhaustively determined by biology; it is not ahistorical or universally the same" (Alcoff, 2006, p. 147).

This is relevant because the hijab is a gender issue that further marginalizes Muslim women who observe the headscarf. In other words, in Western context, the practice of the veil produced what Zine (2012) called gendered Islamophobia. In this view, Muslim women who wear the hijab become the subjects of all sorts of scrutiny and harassment, especially in public spaces.

I understand the conception of the hijab as a political stand could be problematic for all who observe it. Because this view ignores other standpoints on why Muslim women choose to observe this aspect of their faith. These views include practicing piety (Mahmood, 2004) and spirituality (see also Zine, 2012), as well as cultural norms that dictate that many women wear the hijab in their societies (Abu-Elhaj, 2006). The former is a point I personally draw from in my own journey of wearing the hijab as a teenager to the present as an adult. At the individual level, the observation of the hijab may as well be a process of meanings that continuously evolves as one's life experiences change. However, we have to remind ourselves that this study is about Somali youth and their experiences with race and religion within the institutions of school and in the communities in which they live. Therefore, this investigation is committed to represent them in the most authentic ways that language and the theoretical lens I draw from allow me to. For this reason, the wearing of the hijab is interpreted contextually; that is, the hijab is conceptualized and understood as these young women who struggle to honor its tradition perceive it to be. The hijab is understood through their eyes and, hence, is a politically charged piece of garment, as Farah shared with me in her story. In contrast, as we have learned in Sahra's

story, the hijab represents an inner struggle and ambivalence towards modesty. To highlight the various meanings the veil represents for young Somali women, I revisit Sahra's story.

Throughout Sahra's story, we saw the constant shaping and reshaping of horizons as she began her journey to wearing the hijab. The veil, as layers of cloth, revealed layers of meaning. While the hijab consistently manifested to be a racializing garment for Sahra and other youth in this study, it also represented a way of practicing the faith. Sahra described herself to be a non-practicing Muslim prior to wearing the hijab. According to her, the headscarf marked her identity as a Muslim. Yet, it was important for Sahra to be accepted by her peers, who found her pink abaya to be a pretty and fun costume. On the one hand, the practice of the hijab was challenged. On the other hand, the hijab also challenged and entered the horizon of the other. And for these reasons, Sahra's experiences with the hijab speak to the anxieties, uncertainties, and, more importantly, the hopes she carried beneath her veil. These same experiences also speak to the horizons of Somali youth in the making.

Regardless of the personal story behind observing the veil, the hijab remains as the controversial and often racializing dress code for Muslim women and girls. The hijab is also a visible identity marker that situates Muslim women in certain discursive fields. The storied lives of the youth in this study indicate the complex and the nuanced experiences young Somali girls have with their hijabs. In these stories, the hijab is a source of marginalization, ambivalence, and comfort. While the hijab isolates them from mainstream society, it also links them to their parents' traditions. For this reason, the hijab is more than an identity marker. As we have seen throughout the narratives of this study, the practice of observing the veil became embodied experiences that produced lifeworlds of the girls in this study. The act of wearing the hijab, or lack thereof (Hibo, interview) lead to certain ways of engaging with the world.

And finally, in Farah's disposition of embracing the hijab as a political endeavor could be considered as an attempt to make sense of the ambiguity and doubt that is revealed in many of the stories narrated here in regard to difference. Hence, at times Somali youth's visible identity markers were a source of racialization, where they were subjected to clear acts of racial aggression, or what Omi and Winant (1994) called racist racial projects. While at other times actions that the youth interpreted as racist were in fact unclear. Hence, these same visible sites for identity work raised all sorts of curiosity, as well as all sorts of uninformed questions by the other. Therefore, the stories speak to the youth's interpretation and perception of racial situations they encounter in their daily lives, whether those could be referred to racist racial projects or not. Nevertheless, these racial experiences produce certain meanings and conditions that become important as the Somali immigrant narrative takes root in U.S. soil.

6. CONCLUSION

The relevance of this study is based on the need to look at the experiences of racialization and its impact on embodied perception of self and other as a key factor in how Somali students experience school. Hence, the conceptualization of this study was rooted in four premises. First, Somali immigrant and refugee youths' schooling experiences are shaped by socially ascribed identities based on race and religion. This study describes how Somali students' school experiences are influenced by how they are positioned by school officials and peers, and how they position themselves based on racialized identities. Thus, I reviewed literature that elaborates on how subjects are hailed into subject positions (Foucault, 1977) in a dialectic process (Althusser, 1971), as well as literature that examines the construction of socially ascribed identities in discursive fields (Foucault, 1977; Hall, 1997). Research among Somalis indicated that Somali youth are racialized both by school staff (Forman, 2001) and the elders in their community (Bigelow, 2010). Since research among Somalis is in its embryonic stage, most studies explored issues pertaining to integration (Forman, 2001; Ibrahim, 1999; Langellier, 2010) and language acquisition (Bigelow, 2008, 2010) as Somali children came into contact with educational and other social institutions. However, there is a void in the literature pertaining to how Somali youth experience and make sense of racialization. By looking at the everyday experience of racialization, this study fills this gap.

The second assumption is that students' everyday experiences with racialization provide interpretive horizons (Alcoff, 2006; Gadamer, 2003) from which they make sense of their world. Here, I borrowed from post-positivist theorists (Alcoff, 2006; Merleau-Ponty, 1968). The third assumption is that racialization as a process happens in two steps: (a) ascription of social identities and, (b) the actual experience of being racialized. In addition to the subject positioning

119

literature, I also drew from theories of experience (Gadamer, 2003; Merleau-Ponty, 1968). I borrowed from Gadamer's conception of experience as an encounter or a happening in the world. And, finally, the fourth assumption is one that considers the body as a site where racialization happens. In this view, racialization becomes an embodiment where the actual everyday experience of being racialized accumulates in the body. Here, I mainly drew from Merleau-Ponty's (1968) notion of chiasm, which explained the subjective-intersubjective experiencing of the world. These frameworks were instrumental in providing me with the lens and language needed to understand the everyday nature of racialization as a bodily experience.

Educators, in large urban districts with high Somali immigrant and refugee populations, often tend to describe the challenges with their Somali students as ones rooted in a cultural misfit among Somali families, schools, and mainstream society. This implies that as a Somali presence takes root in the US, many of the cultural challenges Somalis face will dissipate with time. As I illustrated in the reviewed literature, this is not true. The reason is that Somalis are visible ethnics due to the visible nature of race and religion among Somalis, which complicates linear notions of integration.

The majority of Somali students in public schools are either 1.5, or second-generation immigrants, yet Somali students as a group continue to underperform academically (Bigelow, 2010). There is a need to address the lack of success among Somali students that goes beyond cultural explanations. The few studies about Somalis focus on issues related to language acquisition (Bigelow, 2008, 2010) and integration. However, no studies have examined the everyday experiences of Somali students in school, especially as they pertain to racialized identities based on race and religion. This study addresses the gap in the literature. Since the central subject in this study is students' experiences with racialization, I engage phenomenoogy

as a method of inquiry. I chose to do so because phenomenology is interested in capturing the everyday nature of experiences. In this view, experience is understood as an encounter with the world and not a perception of incidents (Gadamer, 2003). This is pertinent since experiencing racialization is considered a bodily process that accumulates over time. I am interested in how racialization as a process is encountered by Somali youth in their schools and in their communities.

Summary and Interpretation of Data

The storied lives of Somali students narrated in this study, as well as the discussion and interpretations of the various themes, speak to the multiplicity and complexity of racialization as an everyday experience. Hence, in order to understand how Somali youth experience and make sense of racialization as a process, this question was divided further into: (a) what is the everyday nature of the experiences of being racialized? and (b) what is the relationship between socially ascribed identities and identity development of Somali youth? To answer the first question, I explored theories that linked racialization and racialized identities to students' perception and interpretations (Alcoff, 2006; Fassin, 2011; Venn, 2009) of their schooling experiences. And, for the second question, I investigated the phenomenology of racialized identities. Here, I reviewed theories of embodiment that speak to the subjective-intersubjective nature of experience (Alcoff, 2006; Gadamer, 2003; Merleau-Ponty, 1968; 2013). These frameworks allowed me to explore the lived experiences of Somali youth in their schools and the communities in which they live. These notions helped me explore racialization as a phenomenon, but first let me briefly restate my conceptualization of racialization as a concept.

The notion of racialization in this study is partly based on Omi and Winant's (1994) racial formation theory, where experiences of race are understood in terms of racial projects. Since race in the US context has both cultural and structural dimension, it makes sense to understand individual's experiences of race in terms of racial projects. However, according to Omi and Winant (1994) not all racial projects are racist. Hence, racial projects are racist "if and only if they create or reproduce structural domination based on essentialist categories of race" (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 71). With this understanding of racialization, next I summarize essential findings that address the above two questions.

122

The findings in this study indicate that not all stories reveal actions of racialization as understood above. The stories narrated by the Somali youths in this study contain a spectrum of actions that range from those that can be characterized as obviously racist and discriminatory, to those whose motivation is unclear, to those that are clearly nonracist (even if they are interpreted by students as racist). Importantly, many of the stories fell within a gray area on this spectrum in which it was not clear whether a specific act was racist or not, based on Omi and Winant's (1994) definition. With this in mind, the question becomes whether it is possible to tell whether actions are reflected as racist racial projects. If the youth in this study interpret a gaze of curiosity as one of othering, is the racial project racist? It reproduces something, but perhaps not as intended. Hence, there is a way the system can be shown to be reproducing itself despite the actors' intentions. Although this is a phenomenological study calling for centrality of the subjects' experiences, it also draws upon hermeneutics as an interpretive mechanism for interpreting the participants' experiences by engaging relevant literature and theoretical frameworks.

Racialization: a lived experience. My findings suggest that Somali students' experiences of racialization started at a young age, often in elementary school. Students narrated that they often felt physically marginalized both by their teachers and peers because of being black and/or Muslim. And in fact, they could never tell which was the problem. Hence, this points to the racialization of religion. Students' early school experiences often meant prolonged feelings of social exclusion from classroom activities and the larger school community. As one student relayed, these feelings of isolation became normalized everyday encounters (Asli interview). Early experiences of loneliness are consistent with literature findings of first-generation immigrant and refugee children's school experiences (McBrien, 2005). The explanation in the literature is one based on language acquisition. In this view, once immigrant students acquire English they become integrated into the school community. Conversely, the findings in this study suggest that Somali students' experiences of marginalization did not dissipate with the ability to speak English. Most of the participants in this study were US-born and did not necessarily have language challenges upon starting school. Rather, these early experiences of marginalization explain social exclusion as an aspect of racialization that often started in elementary school and accumulated throughout the years. This is significant because racialization as a bodily encounter supports the framework needed to understand the phenomenology of racialization that shaped students' interpretations of schooling experiences, identities, and worldviews.

Racialization: contextual and relational experience. Every student in this study shared compelling stories about their experiences of being a Somali immigrant and refugee in schools. In these stories, being Somali was inseparable from being Muslim. The nexus between race and religion lay the groundwork for understanding racialization due to visible identity markers (Bigelow, 2010). However, my findings suggest that besides race and religion, there were multiple elements that lead to Somali youth's perception of racialization. These elements included gender, language, accent, immigrant status, and academic track or ability, all of which became visible at some point and not visible at other times in the students' stories. This speaks to the contextual nature of identity; it also has consequences for the frameworks this study draws from.

Contrary to the findings in the literature (Bigelow, 2010; Zine, 2012), student experiences demonstrated female Somali youth were racialized because they were Muslim/Somali and not whether they observed the hijab or not. In fact, three of the female students shared stories in which their Muslim identity was essentialized and racialized by teachers, even though they did not wear the hijab at that time. Meanwhile, Somali elders used the absence of the hijab as a means to racialize Somali girls. For instance, these elders equated lack of hijab with being *gaalo*. Hence, racialization of religion was an element that was prevalent both in schools and in the community, despite the fact that it meant different things in different contexts.

And lastly, racialization was a relational experience that was only possible through the other. As I explained in Chapter 2, the process of racialization consists of a dialectic process in which the ascription of black racial identity is only possible by the presence of whiteness (Fassin, 2011). This is significant because the same notion could be extended to racialization of religion,

125

a point I will discuss shortly. Meanwhile, the presence of the other is crucial because it speaks to the role of school staff as well as community members in the racialization process.

Implications of racialization. While race and religion are two important factors that shape Somali youth's experiences in school and in wider society, there is a need to recognize that the notion of visibility is a relative one. This means that other bodily expressions such as language, accent, or immigrant status can also be used to essentialize identity positions of black and Muslim immigrant youth like the Somalis. Hence, these findings prompt us to think about the various ways in which identities of Somali youth were essentialized by not only school officials, but also by Somali elders and by Somali students themselves. The essentializing of their identity happened at various degrees in the storied lives of the Somali youth of this study, whether this meant the essentializing of Muslims as violent people, or how being Somali meant that one cannot be a high-achieving student, or how one can't sound white, among others. One common phenomenon about essentialization was its persistent denial of differences among those belonging to a particular group, (i.e., Muslims and Somalis). This is true even when this difference meant vast differences in cultural, geographical, and linguistic backgrounds. Conversely, the aim of essentialization is to position certain groups at the margin. In student experiences, this was evident in the way Islam was used by many of the teachers to position Somali youth within the school social climate.

This positioning not only alienated Somali youth, but it also created a school environment that was hostile to Islam and Muslims. This was evident on how other students were often shocked or confused to find out that their Somali friends were indeed Muslim. Somali youths' worry about being revealed as a Muslim indicated that there was a fear of social exclusion from school community. And from their own religious communities for not being Muslim enough.

These results are consistent with literature that shows schools to be the place Muslim students experience the most discrimination (Sirin & Fine, 2008).

In addition, as an important step for constructing a racialized identity, essentialization speaks to how Islam is made alien to the American narrative. Somali youth are made to feel that they do not belong and are a threat to society. For the essentialization of Islam to be effective, there is a need to create a narrative of us versus them, where Muslims are depicted as persons with violent tendencies (Said, 1979). The dehumanizing of Muslims is linked to the colonial project and has deep roots in Western imagination. These are important factors that teachers and school leaders need to be cognizant about in their quest for anticolonial and antiracist educational projects.

Meanwhile, racialization of religion provides a new set of opportunities that can contribute to the field, specifically in relation to pre-service teacher training programs and school administrators. Currently, there is an urgent push for educational policies that support antiracist education based on race. The findings in this study suggest that racial projects need to be expanded to religion as a category for guidelines against institutional oppression (Gilbert, 2004). As the findings in this study show that racialization of religion is a complex phenomenon, especially when religion intersects with race, as is the case with Somali youth experience. While, the frameworks help us in defining or differentiating racist racial project from nonracist ones. There is a need to consider narrative based research as the one this study draws from. It is through stories that we come to understand, and relate to the human experiences of schooling. For this reason, some of the stories depicted in this study can be shared with pre-service teachers and school administrators in training. In order to create a school environment that not only respects difference but also promotes pluralism.

The relevance of this may be seen in how the notion of difference was perceived and interpreted by the teachers and Somali youths. For instance, in the stories about experiences in elementary school, when the Somali children's difference was not addressed by teachers and other school staff, a school environment existed in which the Somali students felt marginalized and ignored. Also, in the stories where the teachers in middle and high school brought up the Somali youths' religious difference, the Somali students interpreted the teachers' actions as essentializing and racist. Thus, creating an overall school culture that respects plurality with regard to religion and religious practice requires dialogue among educators and researchers to find appropriate ways to address difference among all students, including students of minoritized groups.

Consequences for theory. In Western societies, race is the prototype that lays the foundation for identification and representation (Alcoff, 2006; Gilroy, 2001; Hall, 1990; West, 1982) despite the fact that race has no fixed meaning and is often changing with socio-historical processes (Omi & Winant, 1994). Yet, race is real and influences our daily lives in multiple ways (Alcoff). The reason is that race is scripted to the body and, hence, visible. However, the findings in this study prompt us to think about ways to extend these frameworks to the realm of religion as a factor for racialization. The findings also urge us to question the notion of visibility as it relates to race and religion as necessary factors for racialization as a project. While I agree with the concept of visibility pertaining to race and religion among Somali immigrants, the results of this study shed light on the limitations of such conceptions. This is particularly true in situations where Somali youth position themselves and their Somali peers within the school's social order. It is during these incidents that other elements such as gender, accent, and immigrant status became visible, while race and/or religion became invisible.

In this view, we can then conclude that it is the visibility of race that grounds the system and allows for other things to come forward during certain contexts. But the hierarchy is found on visibility and the lived embodiments of the meanings of such visible markers.

Somali youth positioning themselves. Racialization of Somali immigrants and refugees happens in a discursive field that shapes and constructs what it means to be Somali. This discourse often places Somalis on the margin, where the emphasis is on being black, Muslim, and undereducated newcomers. Somali youth in this study often accessed these same discourses as they defined and related to one another. This was particularly true pertaining to the relationship between the 1.5 and second-generation Somali immigrants and their first-generation counterparts. Here, factors such as accent and immigrant status were used by 1.5 and second-generation Somali youth to essentialize the identities of first-generation Somali immigrant youth. For instance, Somali youth used accent as a determining factor for whom to socialize with in school.

On the one hand, Somali youth who "sounded white" were more likely to be accepted by white students and teachers. On the other hand, these students interacted neither with other second-generation Somali students, who used vernacular English, nor first-generation Somali immigrants. This implies that accent, or "sounding white," is more desirable as it makes one less Somali. The interpretations of these findings are consistent with studies of other immigrant youth of color (Lee, 2007; Ngo, 2007; 2010; Valenzuela, 1999). Accent, like race, was not only a racializing factor but also represented the ambivalent identity positions that Somali youth occupy, which could be directly related to their ambivalent relationship with whiteness.

As many colonized people of color, Somali youth in this study were aware that their identities were racialized in relation to whiteness. For instance, they considered whiteness to be

the norm, while they referred to their immigrant status and black skin as "weird." On the other hand, they desired to get closer to whiteness through accent changes, as well as academic and economic success. These attributes were considered white characteristics and a measure of success, and, hence, a way to minimize immigrant status. Meanwhile, these interpretations exemplify the concept of chiasm or an intersubjective (Merleau-Ponty, 1968) experience of the world, where bodily experiences of being racialized leads people to hate themselves and their background.

Contesting and re-negotiating racialized identities. Student narratives highlight the significance of the body as a site for racialization. This is consistent with the frameworks that this study draws from (Alcoff, 2006; Fassin, 2011). However, my findings also suggest that the body, as it relates to dress and hairstyle, becomes a site for contesting and/or renegotiating racialized identities. This is particularly important as Somali youth navigate cultural and religious spaces in schools and communities. In addition, a closer reading of students' accounts showed two main findings. First, the way in which Somali youth negotiate identity is gender-specific. Second, the meanings students attach to wearing the hijab or Afro as tools for identity negotiation depends on one's understanding of the relationship between racialization and the self.

Living the hijab. In mainstream culture, the hijab positions Somali female students at the margin, while the hijab enjoys a central status within the Somali community. Either way, the hijab imposes a racialized identity on Somali girls. This is consistent with findings in the literature (Bigelow, 2008, 2010; Sarroub, 2005; Zine, 2001; 2012). However, what is missing from the literature is that the hijab also speaks to the anxieties, ambivalence, and complexities of living in between spaces of secular and religious values that many Muslin youth in the West

130

experience. First, the hijab provides a platform for Muslim parents to transmit an aspect of

Islamic tradition to their daughters (Haw, 1998). In mainstream culture where female bodies are

highly sexualized (Halstead cited in Zine, 2006) many parents of teenager daughters struggle to

teach their daughters to be selective consumers of the fashion industry. This is also true for

Muslim families, whether their daughters observe the hijab or not. As the findings in this study

indicated, hijabi Somali teenagers, like their non-hijabi counterparts, also push boundaries

pertaining to modesty. They match their hijabs with form-fitting clothes and bright lipsticks.

These young Somali hijabis are part of a growing number of young Muslim female bloggers who

share ideas on how to be a fashionable hijabis. This is a new phenomenon, and one that deserves

more research. And, finally, despite its marginalizing effect in mainstream culture, the hijab is

also a good example of how a racialized identity marker is not always pathological. This is

evident not only in the status of the headscarf within the Somali and Muslim communities, but

also in the role of the hijab in producing Muslim identity in Western countries. Hence, observing

the hijab is more than a piece of cloth; it is a way to engage with the world that produces ways of

being.

Afro Hairstyle. While racialized identities were imposed on Somali female students, the

males in this study chose to access racializing trends by adopting African American dress and

hairstyle. It was common among the male students in the school that I observed to wear baggy

clothes and Afro hairstyle. These observations are consistent with research findings among

Somali youth (Bigelow, 2008, 2010; Forman, 2001; Ibrahim, 1999). These studies suggested that

Somali youth identify with urban African American youth. While this may be the case, the male

students in this study seemed to have a much deeper understanding of performing the youth

subculture in their neighborhoods and schools. And, despite the fact that Somali parents frown

upon their boys' adoption of black youth style, the Somali boys at Summit Academy had a completely different perspective than their parents and the elders in their community.

For instance, performing urban youth identity through dress and hairstyle allowed Somali young men to relate to their African American peers. In addition, as one of the participants relayed, wearing baggy clothes and an Afro made Somali boys less visible and often protected them in their neighborhoods where Somali immigrants are often attacked. Also, one can argue that Somali boys were allowed to adopt African-American youth culture. Their visibility was tied to cultural rather than religious practices. Whereas, Somali girls, in this study, were hurt not only by the hijab as terrorist trope, but also by being made to feel by teachers and other students as not good enough Muslims for not wearing it. Meanwhile, the youth in this study seemed to adopt a more complex understanding of identity. As Omar explained, whether they identified as African American or Somali depended on the context. Hence, they were constructing a much more fluid and hybrid conception of their identities.

Implications for self-positioning. Forman (2001) showed that when Somali boys perform black youth culture, they often face stricter disciplinary measures from school officials. According to Forman, this often worries Somali parents who think that they are losing their children (Bigelow, 2010; Forman, 2001). Somali boys become subject to the same discriminatory practices that African-American and Latino boys often face in schools (Ferguson, 2001; Noguera, 2009). This was also evident in the Summit Academy, where Somali boys were suspended at a higher rate than any other group in the school.

Many of the male students I talked to during my fieldwork complained that their teachers did not understand them. They explained "instead of trying to understand us they prefer to send us to the Principal's office or suspend us" (Abdu, interview). For instance, two of the three males

who I interviewed for this study had several in-school suspensions during the 10 weeks I spent at the school. However, the same students never got suspended from English class, which was taught by a Somali female teacher. The boys said they never get suspended from English class because the teacher understands them. Somali boys' school suspension is an area that has not been investigated, and hence, needs more research.

Consequences for theory. Somali youth's tendency to appropriate their African American peers speaks to the notion of merging horizons. As the students' stories indicated, in order for horizons to merge, it was necessary that Somali youth were open in relating to their African American peers. According to Thandeka (1999), the desire to relate to our fellow humans is a basic human nature that transcends racialized existence. It is this openness to the other that eased Somali youth into being accepted by their African American friends. This aspect of the horizon highlights the importance of experience as we encounter new experiences. Meanwhile, it also speaks to a much deeper aspect of Somali youth's lifeworld that goes beyond (reactionary identities such as) racialized identities. Thus, horizons as interpretive tools for identity work captures the multiplicity of experiences that leads to nuanced and often contested identity positions. Hence, my findings support this reading of the horizon.

Meanwhile, the findings suggest that Somali youth's experience with racialized identities speak to the need for theory to look beyond reactionary identities. What I mean here is that while it is important to investigate the intricacies and subtleties of racist systems and societies, there is a need to acknowledge that there is more to identity than social positioning or reactionary endeavors. Since these reveal as much as they hide about who we are as people. The findings also problematize the notion of visibility in both male and female student experiences.

Race becomes invisible while immigrant status becomes visible. This was exemplified in shaving off the Afro, which revealed Somaliness, or immigrant status. Conversely, when that same youth is wearing the Afro race becomes visible. Perhaps, there is a need to extend the notion of visibility to invisibility. The notion of race as a visible identity marker has an explanatory power in relation to the presence of whiteness. In situations where the white gaze is temporally suspended, there is a need to take other elements of visibility into account. I am well aware of Alcoff's (2006) argument that bases the visibility of race and gender as inscription to the body. She considers ethnicity and class as behaviors that can be altered. The question is, then, how does the notion of visibility in regard to race hold when the idea of whiteness as we know it in the Western context is not there?

Religion. Religion is an important part of Somali youth's daily lives. In school, religion is a source of marginalization for Somali students (Bigelow, 2008, 2010), but in private life religion provides a platform for building resilience. This is evident in Sahra's story, where she shared her journey to wearing the hijab. Her decision to wear the hijab was a direct result of her participating in a burial ritual at the mosque. Sahra's story is significant for two reasons. First, instead of focusing the discourse surrounding religion (Islam) as it pertains to the essentializing and racializing of Muslim youth, there is a need to consider religion more than as an identity marker. This is evident in the predominant focus on ethnicity in the literature about immigrant youth, rather than religion (Lippy, 2000). If we are truly interested in understanding Muslim students' lives, there is need to consider the role religion plays in everyday experience.

Second, in Sahra's narrative we encounter religion as social positioning both in school and in the community. But, what is more important is the various ways in which Sahra navigates and negotiates with the very discursive practices that marginalize her. Similarly, Suad's and

134

Hibo's accounts convey similar patterns of racialization of religion. But, their experiences are unique because their stories reveal the direct roles that teachers play in racialization of religion among Somali youth. Meanwhile, their stories also challenge the notion of the hijab being a primary source of racialization among Muslim females. This is so because both Suad and Hibo experienced essentialization and racialization of religion at a time they were not wearing the hijab.

The teacher-figure in the essentialization and racialization of Islam is instrumental in understanding the school as a racializing space. This is consistent with the findings reported in the literature (Bigelow, 2008, 2010; Sirin & Fine, 2008). However, there are no studies that I am aware of that illuminate the role teachers play in constructing essentialized Muslim identity in schools. The results from this study bring this issue to light, where the teacher-figure has shown to engage in practices that essentialize and racialize Somali youth. For instance, the teachers ascribed Somali students as Muslims as a way to position them as the other. Here, the naming act is not a mere description, but it is an intentional act to alienate Somali students. In these stories, the teachers are drawing from wider anti-Islamic sentiment discourses. For example, the teacher re-enforces these discourses by referring to the perpetrators of 9/11 as "[Hibo's] people". In this sense, then, the act of naming is an abuse of power (Fassin, 2011). Of course, here the teacher's voice is not central to this investigation, and, hence, unknown. But, if we are interested in Somali youth's lived experiences, it is the effect that the teacher-figure produces in these youth's lives that we can learn from. While, the above can be identified as a racist racial project, yet, the teacher-figure in these stories can be placed in a spectrum of racial attitudes and behaviors that range from overtly racist to ambiguous and finally to compassionate and relatable adults, in Somali youth's lives.

Relevance of School Climate

Thus far, this dissertation has focused on student experiences. As the interview data suggest, the student stories speak mainly to past experiences that often took place in previous school contexts (i.e. public schools). It is imperative, however, to explore the school contexts in which these experiences took place and the school spaces from which the student narratives were told. If racialization is relational (Alcoff, 2006), then it is important to consider the contexts or spaces where these relations occurred. This section looks at the role of the school as a space where racialization occurs. I do this by considering both the current school context where the student stories were narrated and previous school contexts where student experiences took place. Dahlberg et al. (2001) found that understanding the context in which phenomenological research takes place augments the appreciation of the studied phenomenon. For this reason, field observation, a method developed in anthropology and ethnography, is also important in phenomenology (Dahlberg et al., 2001). In considering racialization as a process, the role of the current school context in the lifeworld of Somali youth must be considered, and the students' stories of past school experiences must be read in conjunction with their current school environment.

School leaders at Summit Academy consist of both first-generation immigrants and Americans of European descent. For instance, the school director is a first-generation Arab American, while the three school principals (elementary, middle, and high school) are White females. Yet the school seems to share and implement values consistent with the broader Somali community it serves. This is evident in the school policies regarding modesty, dress code, and gender relations. While at first glance it was not clear how the school policies were indicative of racialization, a closer examination of the meanings and implementations of the school policies,

136

particularly regarding dress code, provide evidence of racialization of Somali youth.

As shown in the analysis of student interviews, the visibility of race grounds the system. In other words, elements such as religion, immigrant status, accent, and academic track can all become racializing tools at some point based on the students' stories. It is the presence of Black skin, however, that provides the basis for racialization among Somali youth. This was evident in several informal conversations I had with the school staff. During one particular conversation I had with the school director, Mr. Ali, he referred to Somali students as Blacks while referring to other ethnicities such as Arabs and South Asians as Whites. Thus, even though the school director is a first-generation immigrant himself, in his conversation he drew from common discourses surrounding race and racial relations in broader society. This may affect his relationships and interactions with the Somali students, who make up 90 percent of the student body.

In addition, Mr. Ali's statements do two things. First, they essentialize racial identities of all groups. They ignore any difference between African Americans and Somalis, and instead group them as Black. In addition, they dismiss differences among Arabs, Asians, and Whites of European descent. In considering the importance of race and racial relations within a US context, the social positioning of Somalis versus Arabs or Asians clearly has different implications and produces different results in this particular school context. Second, the assigning of Somalis to a Black identity also assigns them to a lower social hierarchy in which particular power relations are in play. Meanwhile, as an Arab American, Mr. Ali assigned himself to a White racial category, presumably allowing him certain privileges in his interactions with his Somali students. Thus, not only do immigrant communities see themselves in the eyes of larger societies, but they also accept racist practices inherent in these discourses. Notably, while Mr. Ali and other school

137

leaders consider Somali students to be Black, the Somali school staff and the larger Somali community does not necessarily embrace the Black identity assigned to them by the larger society (Kusow, 2006). Instead, Somalis perceive the Black identity to be related to the cultural practices of inner-city African Americans. Research shows that Somali elders often worry about their youth becoming Black (Bigelow, 2010; Forman, 2001). While non-Somali school leaders and their Somali counterparts may differ about what constitutes a Black identity, they do agree on one thing: that a Black identity (i.e., hip-hop youth culture) is undesirable and should be guarded against.

With this in mind, then, the school's implementation of a dress code that bans hip-hop dress and hairstyle may be viewed as a regime of power to discipline and control (Foucault, 1977) the Black body. The school operates as an extension of the community's understanding of race and racial relations by attempting to keep the children under strict rules of acceptability. For this reason, in their narratives, many students shied away from talking openly about differences between African Americans and Somalis or avoided the notion of race altogether, instead focusing on religion as a basis for their experiences of being different in their previous school context. As explained earlier, however, students at Summit Academy resist school policies, particularly those surrounding the dress code. Both boys and girls challenged the school uniform in multiple ways and continue to question school officials' and their elders' understanding of what it meant to be a Muslim, and Somali, or Black youth in this Midwestern urban community. Similarly, most students at Summit Academy resist being identified as Black despite their tendency to adopt and appropriate hip-hop youth culture, showing the complexity and ambivalent nature of being an immigrant youth of color.

Juxtaposing the context of Summit Academy with that of traditional public schools where

the students' past experiences took place, school culture plays a pivotal role in the racialization process. Racialization of Somali youths occurred differently in these two contexts. At Summit Academy, the Somali youths are considered Black because of their dark skin, and the school attempts to de-racialize them by regulating and monitoring their bodies and focusing on their religious identity. Conversely, in the public-school context, the Somali youths were often racialized due to their religious difference. These findings highlight the relevance of a school climate that supports plurality and inclusion. Accordingly, an individual teacher's effort—or harm, for that matter—can be augmented or rectified by broader school policies that take all children's school experiences seriously.

Continuing Questions for Future Research

The findings in this study show that gender was an important factor in students' experiences with racialization for two reasons. First, the literature about Somali youth related racialization to race and religion. Because of this, gender was not considered as a major factor in the conceptualization of this study. However, the findings indicated that racialization of religion was significant particularly as it related to gender. Gender was important in regard to various ways student negotiated identity in schools and in community spaces. Second, gender was significant in how Somali students were positioned by school staff. Hence, future directions for research about the racialization of Somali youth may entail the role of gender in the racialization process. For instance, there is a need to examine the trend of looking at the Muslim woman/girl as a construct and what sort of subjectivities it produces in US and other Western contexts. This will improve our understanding of Somali youth's lived experiences.

Lastly, missing from this study is the role of community spaces in the racialization process. For instance, this study could be expanded by investigating Somali youth experiences in mosques and other community organizations. This is important because it can provide venues through which schools and community organizations can work together in engaging Somali youth.

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