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## ABSTRACT

This qualitative interview study explored how transnational Kenyan teachers experienced marginalization of their African languages and identities in both the Kenyan and the United States contexts, but reclaimed those languages and identities as important assets in their teaching of English language. The study asked: What are the post-colonial language and identity experiences of transnational Kenyan teachers in graduate education programs in the United States in the following domains: a) their primary and secondary schooling in Kenya b) their teacher preparation in Kenya c) their teaching experiences in Kenya; and d) their graduate education in the United States?

Post-colonial theories and linguistic imperialism theories provided a lens for understanding participants' language and identity experiences in Kenya, a post-colonial African nation that adopted English as the language of instruction in schools following independence, and in the United States, where issues of language, race, and power are intrinsically connected. Data sources included transcripts from fifty open-ended qualitative interviews, which were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify themes within and across participants' experiences.

Two major themes emerged from the analysis. The first major theme was marginalization. Participants' African languages and identities were marginalized in both the Kenyan and the United States contexts. However, in various ways, participants resisted this marginalization. The second major theme was that participants (re)claimed their African languages and identities as assets, both in their personal lives, and their professional lives as teachers and future teacher educators. These findings have

implications for literacy research and practice in Kenyan education, as well as for educational research and practice in U.S. universities.

THE POST-COLONIAL LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY EXPERIENCES OF  
TRANSNATIONAL KENYAN TEACHERS IN U.S. UNIVERSITIES

By

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy in Literacy Education in the Graduate School of Syracuse University

May 2016

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## DEDICATION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation is dedicated to my beloved children (Biko, Mokuu, and Imani), and to my dear husband, Mark.

With great appreciation, a special thank you to the participants in this research, without whose generous participation this dissertation would not have been possible. Thank you for your time and willingness to share your experiences with me. I enjoyed getting to know each and every one of you. It was an honor I truly appreciate.

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## Table of Contents

<b>LIST OF FIGURES .....</b>	<b>ix</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE: .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Historical Context of Kenyan Language Policies and Education .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Significance of Current Study .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Research Question .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Definition of Key Terms .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Overview of Chapters .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>CHAPTER TWO .....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Language and Identity in Post-colonial Africa .....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Language and Identity in the United States .....</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>Language and Hybridity .....</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS .....</b>	<b>61</b>
Post-colonial Theories .....	61
Post-colonial theorists and their contributions to the theory .....	62
Post-colonial theory and issues of identity .....	71
Linguistic Imperialism Theories .....	73
<b>CHAPTER THREE: .....</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>Participants .....</b>	<b>84</b>
<b>Data Collection .....</b>	<b>99</b>
<b>Data Analysis .....</b>	<b>103</b>
<b>Researcher Subjectivities .....</b>	<b>115</b>
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>127</b>
<b>CHAPTER FOUR .....</b>	<b>130</b>
<b>“THE WHOLE DAY THEY NEVER OPENED THEIR MOUTH”: THE MARGINALIZATION OF AFRICAN LANGUAGES AND IDENTITIES IN KENYA AND THE UNITED STATES .....</b>	<b>130</b>
<b>Kenyan Context .....</b>	<b>132</b>
Punishing Students’ Use of African Languages .....	133
Silencing of African Languages and Identities .....	140
The Hierarchy of Languages and Identities .....	147
Resisting the Marginalization of African Languages .....	161
<b>United States Context .....</b>	<b>169</b>
Becoming Raced .....	169
Linguistic and Racial Stereotyping in the United States .....	173
Silencing of African Languages and Identities .....	184
Responses to Marginalization .....	197
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>209</b>



<b>CHAPTER FIVE .....</b>	<b>212</b>
<b>“IT’S LIKE I AM TAKING SOME REST FROM A LOT OF ENGLISH”: (RE)CLAIMING AFRICAN LANGUAGES AND IDENTITIES IN KENYA AND THE UNITED STATES .....</b>	<b>212</b>
<b>Kenyan Context.....</b>	<b>215</b>
Nuances of Language and Identity Affiliations .....	216
Honoring Students’ Home Languages .....	227
<b>United States Context .....</b>	<b>240</b>
Nuances of Language and Identity Affiliations .....	241
African Languages and Identities as Capital .....	253
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>257</b>
<b>CHAPTER SIX .....</b>	<b>261</b>
<b>CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS .....</b>	<b>261</b>
<b>Revisiting the Study .....</b>	<b>261</b>
<b>Discussion of Findings.....</b>	<b>263</b>
<b>Limitations and Implications .....</b>	<b>274</b>
Limitations and Implications for Further Research .....	274
Implications for Literacy Research and Practice in Kenyan Education .....	277
Implications for Educational Research and Practice in U.S. Universities .....	282
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>288</b>
<b>APPENDIX A .....</b>	<b>292</b>
<b>References.....</b>	<b>303</b>
<b>VITA .....</b>	<b>315</b>

## LIST OF FIGURES

<i>Table 1.1: Definition of key terms specific to the Kenyan education system.....</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Table 3.1: A summary of participant profiles.....</i>	<i>86</i>
<i>Figure 3.2: Stages and steps for thematic analysis.....</i>	<i>105</i>
<i>Figure 3.3: Themes and subthemes from the data.....</i>	<i>114</i>

## CHAPTER ONE:

### INTRODUCTION

The teachers interviewed for this dissertation study experienced marginalization of their African languages in both the Kenyan and the United States contexts, but in various ways, they reclaimed those languages as important assets in both their personal lives, and their professional lives as teachers charged with teaching in English. The purpose of this study was to highlight the experiences of these ten transnational Kenyan teachers with their identities as speakers of African languages. Chapter one will provide a rationale for this dissertation study by looking at the history of language in Kenyan education, and exploring the current place of African languages in Kenyan schools. I will then provide a definition of key terms used throughout this dissertation, including a definition of terms specific to the Kenyan context that might not be familiar to an outsider audience. This study will be significant in providing a fresh perspective to the research on language in Kenyan education by exploring the experiences of Kenyan teachers, which while often overlooked in the research, are central to the conversations on language in Kenyan education. This is significant because Kenyan teachers are the ones often charged with enforcing the English-only policy in Kenyan schools, even though the teachers themselves, as will be seen in this study, see the value in embracing African languages even as they teach in English. Further, this dissertation study will ask participants about their experiences with language and identity in the United States. Adding this transnational layer to the study was a deliberate choice made in an effort to see what meanings these Kenyan teachers made of their experiences with language and identity in a context where issues of language, race, and power are more glaring (Lippi-

Green, 2004), after having experienced some of the same issues in Kenya, a context where the issues of language are not often immediately linked to race. Given the above rationales, the choice to interview teachers pursuing graduate education was a logical one for this study because these teachers are going to be future teacher educators, and they will be positioned to disrupt the power structures that contribute to the suppression of African languages in post-colonial African schools.

### **Historical Context of Kenyan Language Policies and Education**

Current literature on language in post-colonial Africa highlights schools as some of the major sites of linguistic oppression, and teachers as some of the main players in the repression of African languages, given the power and authority that they possess as educators (Kitoko-Nsiku, 2007; Maeda, 2009; Muthwii, 2004; Wa Thiong'o, 1986). In Kenya, while some teachers support the language-in-education policy that allows for the use of local African languages in the first three years of education, research shows that implementing this policy is often a difficult task for teachers (Jones & Barkhuizen, 2011; Jones, 2014; Nyaga & Anthonissen, 2012) due to a variety of reasons, including the government's lack of support in the form of resources such as material written in African languages, diverse linguistic backgrounds among student populations, and the limited amount of teachers equipped to teach in those languages. While there is no arguing that there are challenges in implementing Kenya's language-in-education policy, it is also clear that Kenyan learners struggle with the English language (Onchera, 2013; Spernes, 2012), and there is need for educators to support student learning while drawing on their home languages, which the students are often already conversant with (Xu, 2010).

In order to understand the language policy in Kenya, one needs to understand the history of Kenya. Data from the 2009 Kenyan census puts the total population of Kenya at 38 million (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2009). There are over 85 different ethnic communities in Kenya. However, some speak a common language, and therefore, there are slightly over 45 different languages spoken by these communities in Kenya (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2009). After the passing of a new constitution in Kenya in 2010, Kenya currently has one national language (Swahili) and two official languages (English and Swahili). These languages are used in government institutions as well as in education.

Kenya, like many other countries in Africa became a country in 1886 after the Berlin conference that European colonialists used to define the boundaries of their territories in Africa. Kenya was created as a British protectorate. The creation of the country led to the grouping together of over forty-two different ethnic groups, each with its own unique language and culture. The colonization of Kenya, and East Africa as a region, had a profound effect on the languages spoken in the region (Nabea, 2009). The spread of Swahili as a regional language can be directly attributed to language policies that were enforced by the British colonialists (Nabea, 2009).

In 1909 the United Missionary Conference in Kenya adopted that local languages to an area be used as the language of instruction for the first three years of education and then Swahili for the next two years. English would then be introduced to students at that point and used up to the university level (Nabea, 2009). Initially, the British colonists did not intend to teach their colonial subjects English, as this would upset the superior position that the British enjoyed, and lead the colonized to viewing themselves as equal

to the colonizers. The preference for Swahili was because as a Bantu language, it was very similar to the many other Bantu languages in the region and was therefore easy to pick up (Nabea, 2009). The Swahili language served as a language that could be used by different ethnic communities and thus ease communication between the Kenyan workers that tended the large farms and ranches that the British had seized from Kenyan communities.

There were however various dialects of Swahili spoken across the Swahili coast (The Swahili coast is the East African coastal area that stretches from Kismayu in Somalia to South Tanzania and includes the islands Lamu, Mombasa, Zanzibar, Pemba, Seychelles and the Comoros). The colonialists felt that there was a need to standardize the Swahili that would be taught and spoken in the East Africa region (Kingei, 2001). The East African Language committee was thus setup in 1930 to work on standardizing Swahili, and the dialect of Swahili spoken in Zanzibar, known as Kiugunja, was chosen as the basis of Standard Swahili (Kingei, 2001).

The British colonizers thought that teaching too many Africans the English language would interfere with the master-servant setup they were trying to maintain. As such, they put in place mechanisms to ensure that not many Africans got to advance to the higher levels of education where English was the language of instructions (Kingei, 2001). Local languages and Swahili were maintained as the languages of instruction in the African schools while the European schools were taught in English and the Asian schools were taught in Hindi, Urdu and other languages from India (Kingei, 2001). Segregation served as a way to keep a hierarchy of power with Europeans at the top of the hierarchy and Africans at the bottom.

In the 1950s, the language policy in education shifted from teaching in local languages and Swahili to teaching in English. This was brought about by the realization that the policy of teaching in Swahili had brought about an increase in nationalism and unity amongst the various ethnic communities in Kenya since it provided a common language that they could communicate in (Nabea, 2009). The other intention of the policy change was to bring about an elite class of African that was westernized and would look after the interests of the British after independence (Kingei, 2001). As such Swahili was dropped altogether from being taught with exception of areas where Swahili was the ethnic language of the community.

After independence, the language policy remained the same for some time with English maintaining its preferred status as the language of instruction for all the subjects. This was in contrast to other countries such as Tanzania and Ethiopia, which maintained the use of local languages as the languages of instruction in at least the primary level of education. In Kenya, English was declared the official language for all government institutions, including education. However, a 1964 survey by the Kenya Education Commission showed that a majority of Kenyans preferred the use of both Swahili and English as the languages of instruction in school (Kingei, 2001). However, Swahili remained an optional subject until the Gacathi Commission of 1976, which recommended that Swahili be taught as a compulsory subject (Nabea, 2009). The same Commission recommended that English be the language of instruction at all levels of education. With the advent of the 8-4-4 system of education (8 years of primary level, 4 years of secondary, 4 years of university), Swahili was made a compulsory subject to be taught at all levels of education. English became the language of instruction beginning in upper

primary school, while lower primary school (standard one to three) was taught in the local mother tongue of a given area.

Kenyan youth, especially in urban areas, have over the last few decades come up with a new, dynamic language that is referred to as Sheng'. Sheng' is a dynamic language that takes elements of different languages, including Swahili and English, as well as the various ethnic languages that are spoken in Kenya, to form a kind of slang that is spoken widely by urban youth, and increasingly by rural youth and older folk as well (Mazrui, 1995). The structure of sheng' is primarily based on the structure of the Swahili language (Osinde & Abdulaziz, 1997). However, it goes beyond code switching and introduces new elements with its own grammatical rules and structures. Sheng' emerged out of the poorer districts of Nairobi. It came up as a way of communication that was practiced by the urban youth who did not have great knowledge in either English or Swahili and were trying to bridge the language divide of the various ethnic communities that live together (Mazrui, 1995). Over the years, Sheng has grown in complexity and richness. The vocabulary is much deeper and the language has spread beyond Nairobi to the other cities and towns in Kenya. Businesses and the Media have also picked up Sheng, which they use for advertising and in programs with a younger target audience. This language, however, is generally discouraged in the school setting, and in some home settings as well, as it is often associated with lower class inner city youth with a reputation for crime and lack of academic ambition.

Understandably, neither teachers nor parents want their students or children associated with crime or lack of academic ambition. But scapegoating language as indicative of potential for academic and social failure is often misguided (Orwenjo,



2012). Understanding, celebrating, and drawing from students' home languages in the classroom, can have immense, and important benefits for students' literacy learning (Gibbons, 2009; Schmidt, Gangemi, Kelsey, LaBarbera, McKenzie, Melchior et al., 2009). Teachers do not necessarily need to be able to speak the students' home languages in order to honor these languages in their instruction (Xu, 2010). Teachers can learn about students' languages and cultures, and use those to support their teaching in ways that value the learners as individuals by valuing their linguistic and cultural backgrounds. In order to develop and support language and literacy learning among English language learners, it is important to view their other languages as capital that is an important part of their literacy learning in English (Gibbons, 2009).

As established earlier on in this chapter, there are considerable challenges to implementing the language-in-education policy, which allows for instruction in students' mother tongues in early primary grades, in the Kenyan context. However, these challenges are unfortunately not the only reasons some Kenyan teachers steer away from African languages in their classrooms. Kenyan schools have a long history of systematically repressing and undermining African languages (Campbell & Walsh, 2010; Wa Thiong'o, 1986). This phenomenon is a remnant of the British colonization of Kenya, which used education as a tool for the repression of African languages while promoting English as the more desirable language in education and other settings. Through policies that punished the use of African languages in schools, and sometimes even beyond school, African people were taught to associate their vernacular languages with shame and backwardness (Wa Thiong'o, 1986). Although Kenya officially got its independence from Britain in 1963, colonialism and imperialism are a continuing reality not just for

Kenya, but also for other former colonies in Africa. Because of the continuing presence of colonialism and imperialism in former colonies in Africa, many post-colonial scholars are hesitant to use the term post-colonial in discussions of former colonies and formerly colonized peoples. The argument is that there can be no “post” when there are still systems in place that work to keep the colonized at the bottom of the world’s economic and social hierarchy, while stripping them of their linguistic and cultural identities (Moore-Gilbert, 1997).

### **Significance of Current Study**

It is because of the power hierarchies and the suppression of African languages in post-colonial Africa’s schools that this study is particularly important. While there are numerous studies in the United States that highlight the importance of valuing student’s home language, there are very few studies in Kenya (e.g. Muthwii, 2004; Orwenjo, 2012; Spernes, 2012) that have taken on this important issue. These studies have undoubtedly made important contributions to the research on language in Kenyan education, and with this dissertation study, I aim to add to this conversation by adding a new perspective to the conversation. A lot of previous studies have documented classroom practice and then interviewed teachers and students about observed language practices. With this dissertation, I interviewed teachers about the experiences that they had with language and identity throughout their schooling, their teaching, and the experiences they are currently having with the same. In asking teachers to recall and reflect on their experiences with their multilingualism over their lifetime, this study aims to elicit perspectives that are based not just on isolated classroom events but rather on the experiences and meanings that these teachers have had across the lifespan.

The effects of colonization in Africa were such that Africans were colonized not just physically, but mentally as well (Wa Thiong'o, 1986). This colonization of the mind (Wa Thiong'o, 1986) sought to convince Africans of their own inferiority, and the inferiority of their languages. As a result, African languages are afforded an inferior position in Kenyan education. In fact, these languages are considered, not just inferior, but wrong and punishable (Spernes, 2012; Wa Thiong'o, 1986). These negative attitudes towards African languages, especially in schools, are widely prevalent, and are the reason it is of extreme importance to understand the linguistic experiences of Kenyan multilingual speakers, both in their time as students and as teachers in the Kenyan school system.

My decision to conduct this study with Kenyan teachers was based on a void I perceived in the scholarly literature on language in Kenyan education. This void was in literature representing the experiences of African teachers charged with the responsibility of teaching in English in post-colonial African settings where in an effort to promote English, African languages are often undermined and suppressed. Kenya was a logical choice given my background as a Kenyan English teacher, and also given that Kenya is one of Britain's former colonies, as are a lot of other African countries. Like other post-colonial African nations, Kenya has undergone similar (and by no means identical) challenges in negotiating its multilingualism post independence. Kenya is therefore an appropriate site for this dissertation study that will explore transnational Kenyan teachers experiences with language and identity marginalization, given the history the country has had with colonialism and multilingualism.

In addition to the Kenyan context, this dissertation study extends transnationally to explore Kenyan teachers' current experiences with language in the United States. As such, this dissertation is a transnational study of the language and identity experiences of Kenyan teachers who went to school, and also worked as teachers in Kenya, but are currently pursuing graduate education in the United States. The decision to add a transnational layer to this study was based on my desire to explore the meanings that they made of their experiences with language in Kenya and then with their experiences in the United States. I was interested in how their attitudes, thoughts, and ideologies about their own multilingualism shifted or developed after moving from Kenya, where their African languages were marginalized by other black Africans, to the U.S., where the politics of language are heavily influenced by the politics of race, ethnicity, and nationality (Lippi-Green, 2004). In Kenya, the hierarchy of languages and the suppression of African languages is often attributed to social class (Jones & Barkhuizen, 2011). However, theorists like Phillipson (1992), Said (1979), and Wa Thiong'o (1986) have argued that the domination of colonial languages over other languages is a deliberate effort by colonizers and dominant cultures to maintain the status quo that places them at the top of the social, political, and economic hierarchy while keeping the suppressed populations at the bottom. Given the complexity of the language situation in both Kenya as a post-colonial African nation, and the United States, as a dominant western nation, I was interested in how the participants experienced their multilingualism in both contexts.

Given the socially constructed hierarchies of languages and cultures, multilingual teachers in Africa and the United States often face the challenge of trying to overcome feelings of insecurity about their African/African-American, or other minority identities

and languages (Kitoko-Nsiku, 2007; Soto & Kharem, 2006; Wa Thiong'o, 1986), as well as insecurity about their competence in the use of the English language (Kitoko-Nsiku, 2007). This is a reality that is shared by bilingual and bicultural teachers in the U.S. who struggle with doubts about their ability to teach a language whose ownership is ascribed mainly to white Americans (Haddix, 2010), while their varieties are considered lesser varieties of the English language. However, these teachers have important linguistic and cultural capital that can be useful in their work as teachers.

Researchers argue that multilingual and multicultural teachers can model and promote positive ethnic identity and positive self-perception among bilingual/bicultural learners and as a result positively impact their school performance (Clark & Flores, 2001; Weisman, 2001). In many post-colonial African countries, a majority of teachers are bi/multilingual, as are most people in once-colonized African states. But the negative attitudes towards native African languages conspire to make the instruction these teachers provide continue the colonial agenda of stripping students of their African identities (Kitoko-Nsiku, 2007; Wa Thiong'o, 1986). In the Kenyan context, this study is significant because with the long history of suppression of African languages in Kenyan schools, highlighting the language and identity experiences of Kenyan teachers incites conversations about the place of students' African languages in Kenyan classrooms. This study presents an opportunity to investigate the ways teachers can continue to encourage the learning of English without denigrating or devaluing students' home languages.

In the U.S. context, this study is significant because with increasing migration across contexts, there is a growing number of international and transnational students in U.S. universities (Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Caldwell, & Utsey, 2005), and it is

essential that universities recognize students' multilingualism as assets in order to create classroom and professional environments that value their contributions to the learning process. Studies by Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Caldwell, and Utsey (2005), Gatua (2014), and Wamwara-Mbugua & Cornwell (2010) indicate that international students, particularly from Africa, face unique challenges, including language issues, racism, and feelings of isolation, while pursuing university education in the U.S. These studies found that while those African international students came into the U.S. with a good mastery of the English language, their accents were often stigmatized, and perceived as indicative of ignorance and lack of intelligence.

These African students also suddenly become raced individuals, with their skin color becoming a significant marker of their identity (Wamwara-Mbugua & Cornwell, 2010) where it had not been something they afforded much thought before coming to the U.S. Because of the stigmatization of their languages and identities, some international students from African countries experience feelings of loneliness and isolation (Gatua, 2014), which might prevent them from participating fully in their academic and professional environments. This dissertation study will therefore be of significance in the U.S. by highlighting the experiences of international Kenyan teachers in U.S. graduate education, which will in turn illuminate the need for continuing dialogue on ways to go beyond tolerating to actually celebrating the linguistic and cultural capital that this population of students brings to their U.S. graduate programs.

In looking at both the Kenyan and the United States contexts, this dissertation study adds to existing research by adding a transnational link to scholarly conversations about language and power in Kenya and the United States. The transnational aspect of

this study distinguishes it from other studies conducted on similar topics and provides another perspective that will be significant to both the Kenyan and the U.S. contexts in the ways discussed above. As will be extensively discussed in chapter two, African languages and identities are devalued and suppressed in the Kenyan context, often in overt ways such as the caning and punishing of students for speaking African languages (Wa Thiong'o, 1986), and in the U.S. context, often in covert ways such as the perception of black international students as ignorant due to their accents (Gatua, 2014). This dissertation study interviews the participants about their language and identity experiences across the two contexts while examining the meanings that they made of these experiences as multilingual students and teachers in both contexts.

### **Research Question**

The research question that guided this study was: What are the post-colonial language and identity experiences of transnational Kenyan teachers in graduate education programs in the United States in the following domains: a) their primary and secondary schooling in Kenya b) their teacher preparation in Kenya c) their teaching experiences in Kenya; and d) their graduate education in the United States?

The four domains in the research question were informed by the main areas that I felt language and education intersect. The first domain involves primary and secondary schooling, which as will be seen in chapter two, is a major site of linguistic suppression in post-colonial Africa (see for example Campbell & Walsh 2010; Kitoko-Nsiku, 2007; Muthwii, 2004; Orwenjo, 2012). The second domain involves teacher preparation. This domain was included because I wanted to find out what training the participants received in their teacher preparation programs that prepared them to work with multilingual

learners in their classrooms. The third domain involves their experiences with language and identity as teachers. Teachers are charged with the responsibility of teaching in English and enforcing the English-only policy in Kenyan schools, and so I wanted to find out what the participants' experiences with this were. The fourth domain involves their experiences with language and identity in the United States. This is the domain that brings in the transnational aspect of this study, which as previously explained, was added to find out what meanings the participants made of their experiences with language and identity given their current situation of being black international students in the U.S., which is a context where the connections between language and race are more visible in comparison to the Kenyan context. A more detailed rationale for the domains in the research question is provided in chapter three.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

In this section, I will introduce key terms that are used in this dissertation. To start with, I will explain some of the main terms in the Kenyan education system that might not be familiar to an outsider audience. I will then explain the terms post-colonial, transnational, language and identity experiences, and hybridity, which are used throughout this dissertation.

#### *Terms specific to the Kenyan education system*

This section provides a brief overview of the Kenyan education system while defining key terms associated with this education system. The aim is to make this dissertation more accessible to outsider audiences who might not be familiar with some of the Kenya-specific terms used throughout the dissertation, and in the participants' interviews.



In Kenya, two education systems have been implemented since the country gained independence from British rule in 1963. From 1963 to 1984, Kenyan schools followed the 7-4-2-3 (also referred to as the 763 system) system of education. This system involved seven years of primary or elementary school, followed four years of ordinary high school. After the first four years in secondary school, students would attend two more year of advanced secondary education before proceeding to university for three years to obtain an undergraduate degree.

As a carry over from colonial rule, students would sit for a qualifying exam at the end of each stage of school. So after the first seven years, the students would sit for the Certificate of Primary Education exams, whose results were used to determine the quality of high school they would attend. The students would be ranked according to their examination scores. The top students in each district would get an opportunity to attend national high schools. Nation high schools were the best academic schools in the country. The next best schools were the provincial schools that took the next best-achieved students within the province where they were located. After provincial schools, there were district schools that admitted the remaining qualified students within the district. At the bottom of this hierarchy of schools were the 'Harambee' or village schools, which were built from contributions from residents of the village within which they were located.

After four years in high school, the students sat for their ordinary level Certificate of Secondary Education exams. Those who attained the passing grade would then get an opportunity to attend two years of Advanced level High school at the end of which they

would sit for their A-level examinations. Grades from these examinations would determine entrance into a university.

This system of education eliminated a lot of students from having the opportunity to advance through school as advancing to the next level required passing the standardized exams at each level. The students who fell through the cracks would then enter the job market with no tangible skills to prepare them for the world of work. It is from this reality that reforms to the Kenyan education system were constituted. Reforms from the Mackay Report of 1981 and Gacathii report of 1976 led to the introduction of the 8-4-4 system of education. This system involved eight years of primary education followed by four years of secondary education and four more years of university education. The certification exams were retained for both the end of primary and secondary education. Also retained was the ranking of high schools, and the placement of students into those schools based on their scores from the primary certification exams. The main aim of the reform was to introduce the teaching of vocational skills that students could use to be employable in case they did not make it all the way through the system. Table 1.1 below provides a summary of the key terms associated with the Kenyan education system.

*Table 1.1: Definition of key terms specific to the Kenyan education system*

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
763 System	The old system of education that involved: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seven years of primary education</li> <li>• Six years of secondary education</li> </ul>

	<p>(divided into four years of ordinary level and two years advanced level)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Three years of university</li> </ul>
O Levels	Ordinary Level. The first four years of secondary education under the 763 system
A Levels	Advanced Level. The two years of advanced level secondary education after the O levels under the 763 system.
844 System	<p>The new system of education in Kenya that involves:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eight years of primary education</li> <li>• Four years of secondary education</li> <li>• Four years of university education</li> </ul>
National School	Category of secondary schools that are the top academic public secondary schools in the country. These schools admit the top qualified students from all over the country based on the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education examinations.
Provincial School	Second ranking public secondary schools after national schools. Category of the top provincial public secondary schools that

	admit the top students (with the exception of those that qualified for national schools) from all over the province.
District School	Third ranking public secondary schools. Category of public secondary schools that take students only within the district.
Local/village/ Harambee School	Category of schools that take students from the local town or village. These schools are usually financed by the local residents.
Primary School	Elementary school. Covers the first eight years of education
Secondary School	Secondary school/ high school covers the four years of post primary education
Standard/Class (followed by a number, 1-8)	Refers to Grade _ (1-8)
Form (followed by a number, 1-4)	Refers to Grade _ (9-12)
KCPE	Kenya Certificate of Primary Education A standardized examination that all students in the 844 system of education sit at the end of standard 8 (8 <sup>th</sup> grade). This exam determines the type of secondary school that the student then proceeds to.
KCSE	Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education

	<p>A standardized examination that all students in the 844 system of education sit at the end of form 4 (12<sup>th</sup> grade). This exam determines whether a student will get a place at a public university or not. It also often determines the type of program that a student may pursue at the university.</p>
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*Post-colonial*

In this dissertation study, the term post-colonial is used to refer to the period in time after the colonization of various nations, with a specific focus on Kenya. By using the term post-colonial, I do not wish to imply that colonization of Kenya and other African nations is entirely over. Many scholars have criticized the term “post-colonial” as implying that colonialism is over when in fact it is not. Although the physical invasion of various nations might technically be over, colonialism of some sort is always present in some part of the world at any given time. European imperialism continues to plague many parts of the world. Ramone (2011) argues that imperialism is ongoing and is fueled by Orientalist discourse that works to create a hierarchy of races. One of the main contributors to post-colonial theory, Edward Said, also voiced reservations about the term post-colonial because he believes that colonialism is not over but lives on in the “structures of dependency” (Said, 2002), such as foreign aid that is offered with strings attached, that have been created by western nations to ensure the impoverishment and continual dependency of former colonies on them.

While some scholars have argued that the term postcolonial is fluid and can mean whatever one wants it to mean, critics argue that the use of the “post” is problematic because it is immediately understood as an end to the inequalities between colonial and colonizing nations (Parry, 2002). The former colonizers’ continued efforts in the westernization of other peoples, and their interventions in former colonies have created processes that work to keep the East subordinate to and dependent on the West (Ramone, 2011). While not an ideal term, scholars and theorists have reluctantly embraced “post-colonial” as a fitting term to describe the historical transition and the cultural location (Parry, 2002) in between the colonization and independence of formerly colonized nations.

### *Transnational*

In this dissertation study, the term transnational is used in reference to the immigration situation of my participants as I explore their language identity experiences from across both the Kenyan and U.S. contexts. I refer to the teachers in my study as “transnational” rather than immigrant because in addition to having strong ties in their home country, they are in the U.S. on temporary student visas and have not necessarily immigrated to the U.S. Transnationalism refers to the connections that migrants maintain between their home countries and the countries they migrate to (Binaisa, 2013). Not all migrants engage in transnationalism, and those that do may have different levels of engagement with their countries of origin and their host countries for various reasons (Binaisa, 2013; Song, 2011). All the participants in my study engage in transnationalism as transnational scholars in various capacities. All of them have temporary student visas that allow them to do their graduate studies in the U.S., but they all hold Kenyan

citizenship and have social, family, and in some cases, professional connections in Kenya. Transnational migrants often engage in every day activities (such as the use of their native languages, and other cultural practices) in an effort to maintain a connection with their homeland and culture, and to display an allegiance and affiliation to their cultural backgrounds (Binaisa, 2013).

Song (2011) looks at transnationalism from the language perspective as more educational migrants engage in linguistic transnationalism, maintaining ties with their native languages while, in some cases, aligning themselves with English (the language of the host country), as English is viewed as a way to ensure that they or their children will have access to global citizenship. However, it is important to note that transnational migrants' experiences are not homogenous, but rather, their experiences, ideologies, goals, and levels of investment in their home and/or host countries differ from individual to individual.

#### *Language and identity experiences*

In this dissertation study, language and identity experiences refer to the participants' experiences with the languages that they claim, and the ways these participants responded to the ways that language was used in their lives. Language experiences here refers to the encounters that participants had with the various languages, dialects, and accents in their repertoire, and the ways that those languages were used, or manifested themselves, in their personal lives, and their professional lives as teachers charged with the responsibility of teaching in English.

The term identity as used in this dissertation is the fluid, continually changing ways that individuals make sense of who they are (Bhabha, 2000) in relationship to their

surrounding, and how they express or enact these definitions of self. Identity is a major part of post-colonial theories (Bhabha, 2000; Said, 1979; Spivak, 1994) as the theories explore the identities of the colonizer and the colonized, and how those identities were influenced, shifted, and changed by the colonial experience. Linguistic imperialism theories (Phillipson, 1992) also explore identity in the ways that English language imperialism impacts various other languages and cultures around the world.

Language and identity are very closely related because a person's language cannot be detached from his identity, or his sense of self (Delpit & Dowdy, 2002; Wa Thiong'o, 1986). Therefore, in this dissertation, language and identity experiences are considered jointly in looking at the encounters, events, and feelings that participants have had with various languages.

### *Hybridity*

In this dissertation study, the term hybridity is used to refer to the coming together and co-existence of languages and identities in an individual. While some post-colonial scholars and theorists such as Edward Said and Ngugi wa Thiong'o discuss identity in the extremes of East vs. West, and one or the other, other post-colonial theorists and scholars like Homi Bhabha and Chinua Achebe describe identity as being fluid, hybrid, and constantly changing. According to Bhabha, there can be no claim to an authentic or a pure identity since as a result of increasing globalization, migration, and intermarriages, the confines of a fixed identity become blurred and identities become hybrid (Bhabha & Comaroff, 2002). Bhabha argues for hybrid spaces where identities meet and co-exist. Similarly, Achebe (2006b) notes that there is room for a co-existence of the English language and African languages in Africans, and in African literature. While both Bhabha



and Achebe have received criticism for their advocacy for hybrid identities, both have rebuffed these criticisms by insisting that hybridity does not mean selling out one's native identity or becoming an assimilationist. Rather, for Achebe (1994) for example, being hybrid means that he can use the English language to express his African culture. Achebe (2006b) has argued that he can push the boundaries of what counts as English by using the English languages in ways that bring out his African voice, as opposed to trying to imitate western ideals in the use of the English language.

In Homi Bhabha's post-colonial theory work, the identity construction of the colonizer and the colonized is characterized by ambivalence, a complex love/hate relationship that is a mix of both attraction to the colonizer/colonized's identity and a repulsion to it (Andreotti, 2011). The colonized is repulsed by the domination of the colonizer, but at the same time, he seeks to imitate his language and mannerisms. Similarly, the colonizer is repulsed by the colonized and seeks to repress him, but at the same time, he does not want to allow the colonized an identity so similar to his own that his sense of superiority is threatened.

Ambivalence is closely related to hybridity, as both allow for an uneasy coming together of opposing identities. Through hybridity, other ways of knowing, which would otherwise be denied recognition within dominant discourses, are given a platform to add to the conversations and challenge dominant ways of knowing (Andreotti, 2011). Bhabha (2000) argues that there are no pure cultures or identities, but rather hybrid spaces where cultures and identities meet and co-exist. This dissertation study is interested in hybridity because all the participants in the study have experienced a coming together of languages

and cultures by virtue of coming from a multilingual post-colonial nation, and also by virtue of being transnational scholars in the United States.

### **Overview of Chapters**

This dissertation contains six chapters. Chapter one is an introductory chapter that offers a rationale for the study, provides a historical background for the language situation in Kenya, outlines a focus for the study and presents the research question, defines the main terms used in the study, and provides an outline of the chapters. The rationale section explains the decision to conduct this study with a focus on experiences from two contexts (the Kenyan context and the United States context). While all participants were in the United States at the time of the study, they all grew up and went to primary and secondary schools in Kenya, and also trained as teachers in Kenya. The section also offers a glimpse into how English became the official language in Kenya, and Swahili became the national language (and was recently made an official language alongside English). Chapter one lays the groundwork that allows for a better understanding of what is to come in subsequent chapters.

Chapter two includes a review of related literature and a discussion of the theoretical framework. The chapter reviews the literature on language and identity, first in the context of post-colonial Africa, and then in the context of the United States. This is followed by a review of the literature on globalization, and the hybrid identities of multilingual individuals in both the African and the U.S. contexts. The literature review is followed by a discussion of post-colonial theory, linguistic imperialism theory, and theories of bilingualism as the theoretical frameworks that guided this study.

Chapter three starts off with an overview of qualitative interview as a research methodology and a justification for why it is an appropriate research method to use for this particular study. Next, I describe the procedures used to recruit and select participants for the study, followed by a brief introduction of each of the ten participants. I then describe the data collection process and the data analysis procedures that were used in this study. Right after the description of the methods, I introduce myself and discuss my own subjectivities as the researcher in this study before concluding with a brief recap of the methods and procedures, as well as a brief reminder of the purpose of the study.

Chapters four and five present the findings from this study. In chapter four, I present the theme of marginalization in both the Kenyan and the United States contexts. The theme of marginalization manifested in participants' experiences in both the Kenyan and United States contexts as participants recounted experiences of being caned, forced to conduct manual labor, and humiliated for speaking African languages in Kenyan schools. In the United States context, the theme manifested in participants' accounts of being subjected to racist treatment as students and teaching assistants in university classrooms in the U.S. Participants' accents, their languages, and their nationalities were stigmatized, and they were stereotyped in deficit ways because of their identities as black African international students.

Chapter five presents the theme of (re)claiming African languages and identities in both the Kenyan and the United States contexts. Participants (re)claimed their African languages and identities as important assets in both their personal lives, and their professional lives as teachers charged with the responsibility of teaching in English. They did this despite the stigmatization of their African languages and identities in both the

Kenyan and U.S. contexts. In the Kenyan context, although the participants reported being punished for speaking African languages in school, they often found ways to speak those languages anyway, for example by hiding when they spoke their mother tongues, or even by offering bribes to their peers when they were caught speaking these languages. They expressed strong connections with the languages that they spoke, including English, Swahili, and their African languages. Even while living in the United States, participants were still strongly connected to their African languages and identities. The theme of (re)claiming African languages and identities was experienced differently by different participants, with some privileging their African languages, some embracing hybrid identities, and yet others code-switching depending on the context. Participants worked to navigate the various identities that came with being speakers of both English and African languages, and in being in-between languages and cultures, they often did not fully fit in with either language or either culture.

Chapter six starts off by briefly revisiting the study and summarizing what each chapter offered. The chapter then presents the implications of the dissertation study for research and practice first in the Kenyan context, and then in the United States context while offering suggestions for working with multilingual learners in multilingual post-colonial settings, and for working with international students in U.S. universities. The limitations of the study are discussed before finally, the chapter concludes by offering directions for future research.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter two reviews scholarly literature and theoretical frameworks that demonstrate the relationship between language, race, and power in post-colonial African nations and in the United States. The chapter also reviews scholarly literature that highlights the ways that multilingual teachers have used their linguistic and cultural identities as assets in their teaching lives.

The chapter will begin by reviewing the literature on language and identity in post-colonial Africa's schools, followed by literature on language and identity in the United States, and literature on language and hybridity. This chapter will also discuss post-colonial theories and linguistic imperialism theories, which are the theories that inform this dissertation study.

There is a wealth of research on the effects of colonialism on black Africans' linguistic and ethnic identities. Scholars and theorists like Chinua Achebe, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Frantz Fanon, among others have written extensively about the colonial agenda of stripping African peoples of their languages, cultures and identities that was characteristic of not just the colonial era, but the present day as well. While colonization can be argued to be technically over, its effects are still evident in the ways former colonized societies view themselves and their languages (Wa Thiong'o, 1986). Wa Thiong'o (1986) uses the term "colonized mind" to refer to the mentality remnant from the colonial period that everything white and Western is superior to anything black and African. Similarly, Phillipson's (1992) theories of English Linguistic Imperialism explore the domination of the English language, which often results in the suppression of other

languages in contexts where English is taking root. In pushing back against the deficit mentalities that often surround bilingualism and bilingual individuals of color, other theorists and scholars (e.g. Anzaldúa, 1987; Lippi-Green, 2004; Nieto, 2002; Reyes; 1992) have written extensively about bilingualism as capital, and as an asset that should be celebrated.

These theories shape the literature review in this study. The framing of the literature review is also informed by the research questions: What are the post-colonial language and identity experiences of transnational Kenyan teachers in graduate education programs in the United States in the following domains: a) their primary and secondary schooling in Kenya b) their teacher preparation in Kenya c) their teaching experiences in Kenya; and d) their graduate education in the United States?

As a result of globalization, teacher and scholar mobility across contexts, and particularly the mobility of international scholars into US and other western universities, is becoming more common (Seloni, 2012). In the U.S., there are a growing number of black immigrants (Bryce-Laporte, 1972), and black international students from Africa (Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Caldwell, & Utsey, 2005; Gatua, 2014; Wamwara-Mbugua & Cornwell, 2010). These groups face unique challenges in the U.S., including racism, as well as language and cultural struggles ((Bryce-Laporte, 1972; Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Caldwell, & Utsey, 2005; Gatua, 2014; Wamwara-Mbugua & Cornwell, 2010). However, despite the linguistic, cultural, and other challenges that they face in the U.S., linguistically and culturally diverse international students bring to U.S. universities a wealth of linguistic, cultural, and professional capital (Ma, 2014; Seloni,

2012; Zheng, 2014) that though an important aspect of their personal and professional identities, is not always embraced in US educational institutions.

While my research focuses on Kenyan teachers in the United States, I will also draw from some research on the identity construction experiences of African-American and other linguistic minority teacher groups in U.S. schools and universities. This is in part because there is not enough literature on black immigrant, or transnational, teachers' language identities, but also largely because both groups face a lot of similar marginalization in the U.S. I do not wish to imply that the experiences of black transnational teachers are the same as those of African American or other minority teachers. There can be no monolithic identity ascribed to all teachers of color in the U.S. or Africa. However, Bryce-Laporte (1972) and Ogbu (1992) note that while there is a lot of divisive politics among African-American black people and African-born black immigrants to the U.S., (such as the idea that immigrant blacks have a higher potential for upward mobility in the U.S.), both groups are often subjected to racist treatment in the U.S., and as such, there is need for solidarity and collaboration among such groups in their common fight against inequality and injustices in US schools and universities. Gibson & Ogbu (1991) and Ogbu (1992) point out that immigrant minorities (those, including immigrant Africans, who come to the United States on their own free will) coming into the U.S. are more likely to see the U.S. as a land of opportunities, and as a place that holds potential for improvement of their lives, while nonimmigrant minorities (those, including African Americans, who were brought to the United States against their will) might not see it the same way because while the immigrant Africans are coming into the U.S. without necessarily having an oppressive history with the country, African

Americans have had to endure systemic racism in the U.S. their whole lives. However, there can be a bridge between the two groups, because once immigrant and transnational Africans arrive in the U.S., the color of their skin becomes a mark of identity for them, and as such, they receive similar treatment to African Americans in the U.S. In my review of the literature, I will seek to acknowledge the common struggles that both groups face by making connections between research on the language and identity experiences of African American and other marginalized teacher groups in the U.S., and those of black, African-born transnational teachers.

I will start this literature review by discussing the works of two African literary scholars, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Chinua Achebe, both of whom write extensively about their own language and identity experiences as post-colonial Africans. Both Wa Thiong'o and Achebe are literary authors considered the pioneering fathers of African literature. Both authors have also contributed to scholarship on post-colonial theory, especially as it relates to language and identity.

In addition to work by Chinua Achebe and Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, I will also review empirical studies on language and identity, first in the context of post-colonial Africa, and then in the United States context. In concluding this section of chapter two, I will recap the main arguments from the literature review and state how my study fits into the pool of studies discussed throughout the literature review. A discussion of the theoretical frameworks will then follow.

The body of scholarly literature and theoretical frameworks in this chapter all work together to inform this study by revealing what we already know about the topic of study and where the holes are in the literature. My study fits into this literature by using



the information we already have from the studies as a springboard to exploring the issues from a different perspective. Specifically, the current study explored how multilingual Kenyan teachers recall and reflect on their experiences with language identity over the course of their lifetime, and how those experiences influenced their lives as students and as teachers in both the Kenyan and the U.S. contexts. As will be discussed in chapter three, the theoretical frameworks also informed the design and procedures of this study.

### **Language and Identity in Post-colonial Africa**

This section will highlight two major approaches to language and identity in post-colonial African nations, one being the one most visibly represented by Wa Thiong'o (1986) that privileges African languages and identities while shunning English and western identities as colonial, and the other being that most visibly represented by Achebe (1994) that embraces the hybridity of African languages and English. My decision to include a discussion of these two scholars' work on language in post-colonial Africa is based on the strong connections between their work and their own experiences with language and identity as Africans. As a literacy scholar with a creative writing background, I am intrigued by the connections that both authors make between their ideological stances, their personal experiences, and their literary works. This is especially of interest in this dissertation study because this study puts a heavy emphasis on participants' personal experiences, and their personal ideologies concerning their experiences with language and identity in both the Kenyan and U.S. contexts. Looking at these scholars' arguments will provide a way to understand some of the experiences that the participants recount in the findings chapters.

The language debate in African literature has involved a lot of insights on colonization and the effects that it had on Africans' perceptions of themselves. Ngugi wa Thiong'o's book, *Decolonizing The Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* has made important contributions to our understanding of how imperialism and colonialism work to suppress groups of people, along with their languages and cultures, in an effort to maintain the power and privilege that certain groups enjoy. On the other side of the debate is Chinua Achebe, who has contributed to scholarship on language and identity in post-colonial Africa by arguing that it is possible for Africans to adopt hybrid language identities without losing their souls to the colonial agenda.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o, a Kenyan writer and scholar, has made important contributions to post-colonial studies, particularly regarding language and identity. His work argues for the survival of African Languages and against the imperialist domination of English globally. Using African languages is part of African peoples' struggle against imperialism (Wa Thiong'o, 1986). While other scholars like Chinua Achebe have argued that one can use English that draws from African languages to express their culture, and as such get the best of both worlds, Wa Thiong'o (1994) refutes this claim and instead wonders why it shouldn't be the other way around. Why, he asks, shouldn't we, as Africans, take from other people's languages to enrich our own? Why should we claim other people's languages while being so reluctant to claim and enrich our own? (Wa Thiongo, 1994).

Wa Thiong'o went to school during the colonial times in Kenya and experienced the "monto", varied objects that some schools in Kenya (still) used to humiliate those students who speak African languages in school. Being caught speaking Gikuyu in school

was a humiliating experience as one would be physically beaten or publicly humiliated by being made to wear a “monto” around their neck with demeaning inscriptions (Wa Thiong’o, 1986). On the other hand, achievement in English was highly applauded as English was considered the language of upward mobility. The education system was, and continues to be, set up so that upward movement is by method of elimination. The examinations one has to pass to move up are all in English, except for Swahili language examinations. So if one does not master the English language, they are eliminated, and thus excluded from progressing on to the next level of education. To be successful in the Kenyan education system therefore, one has to master and be literate in the English language. In an effort to achieve this, some parents underemphasize African languages in the home in order to push for English (Campbell & Walsh, 2010; Jones & Barkhuizen, 2011; Tembe & Norton, 2008; Wa Thiongo, 1994) observes that the language politics in former colonies in Africa work to push us “further and further from ourselves to other selves, from our world to other worlds” (p. 439).

In addition to controlling the wealth of their colonies in Africa by use of military force, the colonialists also strategically managed to control their minds through control of their languages and their culture (Wa Thiong’o, 1994). Wa Thiong’o, (1994) argues that this mind control destabilized the African’s perception of himself. He was taught that everything about him was inferior and backward while everything about the white man was superior and as such, desirable. “To control a people’s culture (and language) is to control their tools of self-definition in relationship to others” (Wa Thiong’o, 1994, p.442). The colonialists were able to gain this mental control by suppressing African languages and defining them as lacking, needing improvement and generally primitive.

Wa Thiong'o cites schools in African countries that focus on teaching English and preparing students for entry into elite European or American universities. Such schools often hire white European or American teachers even though there are qualified local teachers that can teach English. The implication then becomes that the local teachers "might lower the standards, or rather, the purity of the English language" (Wa Thiong'o, 1994, p. 444). The white teachers are viewed as being not only the owners of the English language, but as more fitting images for the elitist nature of such schools in Africa.

Wa Thiong'o's stance on the language debate is that Africans, including African writers and intellectuals, should not only speak but also write in their African languages. He rejects the notion that English makes it easier to reach a wider audience and instead argues that English rose to such a global status by means of oppression and colonization of other nations. African languages, such as Kiswahili, should be credible candidates for global language status as well (Wa Thiong'o, 1993). The promotion of English as a global language by Western countries, and the subsequent desire of speakers of other language for English mastery have more to do with power than the language itself (Wa Thiong'o, 1993). Wa Thiong'o argues that Westerners use language as a tool to keep dominating other nations while suppressing the languages, cultures and identity of those nations.

Furthermore, according to Wa Thiong'o (1994), even when Africans learn the English language, their variety of English is often not accepted by the "owners" of the language. His response to scholars like Achebe that argue that English can be transformed to meet the cultural needs of Africans is to ask, "after all the literary gymnastics of preying on our languages to add life and vigour to English and other

foreign languages, would the result be accepted as good English or good French? Will the owner of the language criticize our usage?" (Wa Thiong'o, 1994, p. 436). The two literary scholars are both revered in African literature for their works that capture the African spirit in marvelous ways, but on the language issue, they are on opposite sides of the debate with Wa Thiong'o advocating for the rejection of English and other imperialist languages, and Achebe advancing the need for African to embrace hybrid language identities as speakers of multiple languages, including English.

Chinua Achebe's contribution to the language debate is focused on hybridity and the embracing of both African and Western languages. Contrary to Wa Thiong'o's advocacy for writing purely in African languages, Chinua Achebe argues that a more realistic stance would be to value English for its ability to make communication possible among people from different ethnic backgrounds, while also valuing African languages (Achebe, 2006b). Having felt the pull of both English (and other things that came with the language, such as education) and Igbo (his native language), Achebe established a connection with both worlds and used both to create an identity that fit his needs as an African writer and intellectual.

Achebe describes his classic novel *Things Fall Apart* as an atonement with his past, and as his return home as a prodigal son (Achebe, 2006a). *Things Fall Apart* (Achebe, 1958) tells the story of Okonkwo, an extraordinary African man that despite having had a lazy and cowardly father, establishes himself in his community as a warrior, a respected clansman, among other admirable things. Okonkwo is however unlucky in many ways as he kills a boy who called him father, accidentally kills a fellow clansman and is forced to go into exile. When Okonkwo returns to his village, the white man has

invaded their clans. Okonkwo is ready for war against the white man as he demonstrates when he kills one of the court messengers with a machete. But when his fellow villagers allow the other court messengers to get away, he realizes that the rest of the clansmen are not ready to go to war, and he hangs himself. The novel is written in English, but it contains the richness of African languages and culture in every sentence.

Achebe acknowledges that English came to Africa as part of a package that included the evils of colonialism, but he argues that that is not reason enough to reject a language that he feels serves an important role in African literature, and Africa in general (Achebe, 1973). He argues that it is important though for an African writer to maintain the voice of his own Africanness, his own experiences, since the aim in using English should not be to use it like a native speaker, but to make it serve one's particular voice and culture (Achebe, 1994).

Achebe (2006b) argues that what's to blame for the difficulties African languages are experiencing with the threat of English is not imperialism but the fact that Africa is experiencing increasing linguistic plurality as a result of internal migrations that have seen communities and ethnicities mix to the extent that using African languages in schools and other such spaces becomes difficult.

With the rise of African writers like Chinua Achebe and Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, among others, there has also been a shift in how Africans are represented in literature. As discussed earlier, colonial literature "worked to maintain imperialist ideology by implying that colonized subjects were not fit to govern their own societies because they were infantile and undisciplined" (Ramone, 2011, p. 32). Achebe relates an incident when he was at the university and a novel by Joyce Cary, *Mister Johnson*, was presented

to them as being the best novel ever written about Africa (Ramone, 2011). This novel had portrayed the African as primitive, inhuman and barbaric. As can be expected, Achebe and other African students at the university protested this representation and as a response to his experiences with such texts at the university, Achebe wrote the novel *Things Fall Apart*, which rewrote the African experience as complex, as opposed to the European discourse about Africa that portrayed African communities as “inferior and lacking” (Ramone, 2011, p. 33). While scholars like Achebe provide positive representations of African languages, cultures, and the African experience in their work, there is still more work to be done, and the decolonization of the mind (Wa Thiong’o, 1986) is a process that requires deep reflection on the political, cultural, and social discourses that shape our understanding of our experiences, and ourselves. This is yet another reason why this study is so important. The experiences of African teachers in post-colonial settings where English is the language of instruction are vital to the conversation surrounding language and power. Teachers’ reflections on their personal experiences with language and teachers may open up conversations that will disrupt the structures of power that stand in the way of the decolonization of our minds (Wa Thiong’o, 1986).

#### *Language and schooling in post-colonial Africa*

In this section, I review literature on language and identity in post-colonial Africa, with a specific focus on language and schooling. The purpose of focusing on schooling is that, as previously established, school is one of the major sites of linguistic suppression in post-colonial African nations (Muthwii, 2004; Maeda, 2009; Wa Thiong’o, 1986).

Given that in African countries such as Kenya, most people are bi/multilingual, it would be easy to assume that there is a peaceful co-existence of the many languages spoken in the country. However, as will be discussed below, studies indicate that in Kenyan and other post-colonial African schools, there are tensions between English and the African languages that are some students' home languages.

Tembe and Norton (2008), Jones and Barkhuizen (2011), Campbell and Walsh 2010, and Kitoko-Nsiku (2007) carried out studies in Uganda, Kenya, and Mozambique on language practices in the countries and found that while parents, students and communities thought that a strong cultural and language identity was important, they nonetheless felt that being able to participate successfully in a more globalized world was more important since this would pull their children up socially and economically. In these studies, there is a clear hierarchy of languages for the participants and they want schools to focus on the language at the top of this hierarchy, English. Norton and Toohey (2011) have done extensive work on “imagined communities” and “imagined identities” (p. 415) in second language acquisition studies. They argue that these imagined communities and identities act as a driving force for learners and parents who want their children to be able to participate in desired communities and identities in order to have the opportunities and privileges that being associated with those identities will afford them in the future. The desire to claim those identities determines the amount of “investment” (Norton & Toohey, 2011, p. 420) that the learner puts into the language that will afford them the desired results.

The first example of this is Tembe and Norton's (2008) study of community responses to multilingual language policies in one rural and one urban school in Uganda.



Tembe and Norton (2008) found that in both settings, although the community acknowledged the importance of local languages for their children's identity constructions, they considered mastery of the English language a higher priority because it would afford their children better chances at upward mobility in a more globalized world. The participants felt that it was not the schools' responsibility to pass on local languages and cultures, and cited the case of Tanzania's struggling education system as a case in point for why their schools should focus on English as opposed to local languages such as Kiswahili or Luganda. Tembe and Norton (2008) argue that there is need to educate communities on the pedagogical benefits of vernacular instruction, particularly for younger learners.

A second example is Jones and Barkhuizen's (2011) study of the language policy implementation in a rural school in Kenya finds that even though the language policy encourages the use of vernacular languages in lower primary classes, the reality on the ground forces teachers to push Kiswahili and English. The parents wanted their children to have strong cultural identity but were more concerned about their ability to participate and succeed at the national and global level, which would require them to have strong competencies in English. Another tension was that while the majority of the students had a shared mother tongue, some of the children came from families where they had been taught the local dialect of Kiswahili and very little of their mother tongue. So those students did not comprehend when lessons were in the mother tongue, as also the other students did not comprehend when the lessons were in Kiswahili. Teachers were therefore left with the responsibility to make delicate decisions that will allow all students

to gain from their instruction. The exams were in English for all students even though the policy allowed for instruction in the mother tongue.

A reflection of the shift in language use within the family and in schools in Kenya can be seen in a study by Campbell and Walsh (2010) where it was evident that parents are increasingly pushing for the English language even at home. Campbell and Walsh's (2010) study was of children in an elite English-medium school who were largely from elitist backgrounds. While the children reported speaking English with their parents, they also noted that they used Sheng' with their friends, which includes a mix of English, Kiswahili and other African languages. Outside the confines of formal education, many learners in Kenya use informal languages such as Sheng', Kiswahili, or mother tongue languages.

However, it is important to examine the underlying power issues in the promotion of English as the language of status and upward mobility. This highlighting of English is often accompanied by a suppression of African languages. And when you suppress a person's language, you suppress the person too as a human being (Delpit & Dowdy, 2002). Kitoko-Nsiku (2007)'s study is an example of the dehumanization of African people's identities through the suppression of their languages. Soto and Kharem (2006) refer to this dehumanization as "linguistic terrorism", because in essence, it is a form of terrorism to strip a people of their languages and their identities.

Kitoko-Nsiku (2007) explores the challenges of implementation of a bilingual education system, which includes Bantu languages, in Mozambican schools. As a former Portuguese colony, Mozambique faces a lot of the same language issues that former colonies, including Kenya, which is a former British colony, face today. Mozambicans

were stripped of their native Bantu languages and taught to have negative attitudes towards those languages as Portuguese was promoted to them as the language of redemption from their native identities. Kitoko-Nsiku (2007) finds that one of the major constraints to the bilingual education initiative in Mozambique is the colonial history of language use in the country, whereby the colonialists convinced Mozambicans that their languages were primitive and useless enough to be fit only for dogs. This mentality was hard to break even after colonialism was long over. Teachers and communities had internalized these “truths” about themselves and in order to be able to accept the importance of bilingual education in Bantu languages, they had to unlearn all that they had been taught about themselves for decades. This study further contributes to the argument for the reeducation of African parents, teachers and communities on the importance of native African languages and identities, even as they push for the English language for their children and students. This reeducation would potentially emphasize the idea that it is possible for languages to co-exist side by side without dominant colonial languages having to attempt to suppress African languages out of existence. Ethnic pride and positive attitudes towards native African languages and cultures is an important part of the healing of the African soul from the wounds of colonization.

As the studies above show, there is a hierarchy of languages in Kenya, as well as other African former colonies. However, it is worth noting that there are schools and teachers who are willing to enforce the national language-in-education policy, which recommends the use of students’ native African languages in the first three years of schooling. However, there are various challenges to implementation of this policy in Kenyan schools as illustrated by the studies discussed next.

Nyaga and Anthonissen's (2012) study of the implementation of the language-in-education policy in multilingual Kenyan classrooms found that there are difficulties in implementing the policy that allows for instruction in the first three years of schooling to be conducted in the students' mother tongue, or the language of the school's catchment area (Kenya Institute of Education, 2002). These difficulties arise from various factors, including that the government does not back this policy up with resources such as materials for lower primary that are written in the mother tongue, which would be crucial to making implementation of the policy plausible. Additionally, teachers are posted to any part of the country upon completing their training, and as such, many teachers end up teaching at an area where the language spoken is not one they can speak themselves. Because of this, and also because of the varying multilingual situations among students in different schools, teachers are forced to make their own interpretations of the policy according to what works for their particular context.

Similarly, Jones (2014) conducted a qualitative study on the ideal versus the reality of the implementation of the language of instruction at various class levels in a Kenyan school in the western regions of the country. Unlike Nyaga and Anthonissen's (2012) study, which was conducted at various urban schools, Jones' (2014) study was conducted in a rural school where most of the teachers and students spoke the same mother tongue. She found that although the teachers supported the national language policy that advocates for the use of mother tongue as the medium of instruction during the first three years, the reality of their practice was that they sought to move away from the mother tongue as soon as possible, usually after the first year of schooling. However, the teachers in this study recognized that students struggled to understand the English

language, and so code switching between the local mother tongue, Swahili, and English was a prominent feature of classroom discourse (Jones, 2014). When a situation called for it, teachers used either the local mother tongue of Kiswahili to explain concepts. In an effort to adhere to the English-only ideal in upper classes though, teachers often only sought one-word answers from students and did not provide opportunities for them to speak during the lessons. While this practice ensured that only English was spoken in the classroom, the teacher was doing most of the talking, and there was no way to guarantee the students understood what was being taught to them (Jones, 2014).

Indeed the difficulty in oral communication among students in Kenyan schools is echoed by Onchera (2013), whose study examined English teachers' perceptions of factors that affect the teaching of oral communication in secondary school English. Onchera (2013) did a survey with the English teachers and the students at 35 secondary schools in Kisii county, and the study findings indicated that most of the teaching in the schools was by lecture method, and students were generally passive in the learning process. English teachers did not provide enough opportunities in the classroom for students to practice their oral communication skills.

In a qualitative study of primary school students' experiences of being multilingual, Spernes (2012) conducted focus groups with students in various primary grades and discussed with them their uses of English, Swahili, and Nandi, the students' mother tongue. The students were all very proud of their identity as speakers of the Nandi language, but they all indicated that it was wrong to speak Nandi in school. They supported the practice of teachers caning them for speaking Nandi in school even though the teachers themselves spoke Nandi with each other in the staffroom. The students

argued that it was ok for teachers to speak Nandi because they did not have to sit for exams. But as students, they understood that they had to speak English, and the teachers had to cane them to get them to speak English. However, most of the students could not speak more than a few words in English. Spernes (2012) asked the students to partner up and tell each other a story in any language they chose. With reassurance that they had permission from the head teacher to speak any language they wanted in the focus group, the students all chose to tell their story in Nandi. They were then asked to tell the same story to a different student but in a different language. There was less excitement and less animation as the students retold their experiences in English or Swahili. Most of the students ended up telling only a few sentences of the story, which was told in a more animated, and more detailed way when they told it in Nandi. Confronted with this observation, the students indicated that for them, Nandi was a private language and it was good for telling experiences, but not for learning in school. Whenever they had to speak Nandi in school, they had to hide and speak it in secret to avoid caning.

Speakers of marginalized or stigmatized languages often internalize the negative discourses about their languages, and themselves, and begin to reproduce those discourses in their own attitudes towards their native languages and towards themselves. Schools and society continuously tell bi/multilingual students and parents that their bi/multilingualism is a liability in their success. Often, the students believe it and as a result, too often they give up on themselves or work hard to rid themselves of the identities that hinder their success and acceptance in school and society.

As demonstrated in various studies discussed above, the politics of language in schools is complicated. For both teachers and parents, it is a tradeoff where they have to

weigh what they believe will provide the best possible existence in a globalized world for the learners, or for their children. The question though is, do we have to give ourselves up, give up our languages, our cultures, our identities and as such, everything that connects us to our roots in favor of white, western cultures and identities in order to move up in society? After conducting this dissertation study, I want to argue that there is room for African languages and identities in a world that is increasingly dominated by the English language and western identities. Bi/multilingualism does not have to be subtractive where learning the English language means giving up one's other language(s) and identities. In fact, bi/multilingualism and bi/multiculturalism afford one different perspectives that can enrich their learning or teaching experiences and those of their colleagues and students (Ma, 2014; Seloni, 2012; Zheng, 2014), and this is something that is not always acknowledged in Kenyan schools.

### **Language and Identity in the United States**

This section will review literature on linguistic minority students in U.S. universities and linguistic minority teachers in the U.S. that demonstrates the relationship between language, race, and power in education. Some of the studies will also demonstrate the ways that these individuals resisted the marginalization of their languages and identities. The literature reviewed in this section helped in the designing of the interview protocol for the fourth interview, which I conducted with each participant in this study. The fourth interview was based on the fourth domain in the research question, which focused on the language and identity experiences of the participants in their graduate education in the United States. For example, some of the literature in this section indicated that international African students in the U.S. were often assumed to be

ignorant because of their accents. Based on these findings from the reviewed studies, I asked my participants what their experiences were in their classrooms in the United States. In this section therefore, I will present studies that highlight the experiences of language minority students and teachers, including international African students in U.S. universities.

Language is intrinsically tied to one's identity (Anzaldù, 1987) and how they experience the world. In this section, I will present some studies that illustrate the experiences of language minority students in U.S. universities, including experiences of being silenced (Pailliotet, 1997), and choosing to be silent (Haddix, 2012), and experiences of adapting to a new cultural environment where suddenly their blackness and their accents become a source of tension in their interactions with students and colleagues (Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Caldwell, & Utsey, 2005; Gatua, 2014; Wamwara-Mbugua & Cornwell, 2010). Together, these studies illustrate the shared experiences with language and identity among transnational African students in U.S. universities, as well as other students of color in predominantly white universities.

Studies show that racially, linguistically and culturally non-dominant students in U.S. universities often feel silenced in their courses. Haddix (2012), Pailliotet (1997), and Shin (2011) carried out studies with pre-service teachers in different U.S. universities and found that the voices of these teachers are often unheard, either by choice out of frustration, or by the structures of how the teacher education programs are run. American and other western universities are often largely focused on perpetuating white, western ways of knowing through the kinds of knowledge that is valued and rewarded, and also their choice of literature that is included in the curriculum (Seloni, 2012). The voices of



marginalized groups are not only neglected, but often also silenced.

Haddix's (2012) study outlines the deliberate silence of linguistically non-dominant students in teacher education programs that are predominantly white, English-monolingual. She notes that while these students have shared understandings with their "sistas", they often choose to be silent in their classes because they are tired of being the only ones with the perspectives that they have, which are informed not just by theory but by their daily realities. The pre-service teachers in Haddix's (2012) study were African American, but this is a feeling that black African-born immigrant teachers can identify with as their realities are hardly represented in teacher education programs in the U.S. When linguistically non-dominant students find themselves in classrooms where they are often put in a position where they have to be the voice of all members of their community group, and they have to constantly set records straight, defend their positions and so on, it can be a thankless kind of endless teaching that is both exhausting and silencing. Norton (2011) describes this kind of silence as a form of resistance where multilingual learners resist negative identities that might be assigned to them in majority dominated contexts by being silent. The role of teachers and teacher educators is to recognize what "identity positions" (Norton, 2011, p. 429) silence certain students, and to work with them to identify classroom practice that will ensure all students' voices are valued in their classrooms.

There are extensive studies in the TESOL field that highlight the negative connotations of identity labels such as the native vs. non-native discourses, especially as relates to language teachers. An example is Jordão (2009)'s study in Brazil that revealed that learners, and sometimes teachers, of English in Brazil tend to prefer mainstream

varieties of English such as American English, as compared to other Englishes. This is also true in the U.S. (see for example Shin, 2011) as non-mainstream varieties of the English language are treated as inferior to mainstream (also labeled “standard”) English. For Kenyans in the U.S., they are automatically categorized as non-native speakers of the English language, because although Kenyans learn standard forms of British English, they speak with a Kenyan accent, which makes their English non-mainstream.

Because of the stigma attached to non-mainstream varieties of English, speakers of these varieties are often perceived as speaking inferior varieties of the language (Shin, 2011). Jordão (2009) argues that being a native speaker of a language does not automatically make one a good teacher of that language, and that there is need to focus on the ability of language (and English in particular) to “give voice to some and to silence others” (p.99). English teacher education programs in the U.S., in particular, have a predominantly middle-class, white, female population (Haddix, 2010) and as such racially and linguistically diverse pre-service teachers are gravely underrepresented in these programs. Those in the programs have to struggle with feelings of marginalization and inadequacy because they are teaching a language that, as far as society is concerned, is not their own (Haddix, 2010).

In addition to language, differences in culture can also be a silencing factor for linguistically and culturally non-dominant students in teacher education programs. Both Pailliotet (1997) and Shin (2011)’s studies illustrate this in different U.S. contexts. Pailliotet’s study highlights the experiences of an Asian, language minority student in a US teacher education program where she is faced with multiple hardships including communication, feelings of isolation, prejudice, and even failing to meet the expectations

of her supervisor, who failed her based on one classroom observation and one fast-paced conference. It is all too common for teachers and educators to overlook the unique struggles that linguistic minority, and especially immigrant linguistic minority students face, marking them as being deficit when in reality the issue could be one of communication or cultural misunderstandings.

Closely related to Pailliotet (1997)'s study is Shin (2011)'s study of the identity construction of non-native English-speaking students from East Asia in a TESOL program in the U.S. Shin (2011) found that the participants' cultural differences in classroom practice, such as not talking a lot compared to their American classmates, were constructed as being "inferior and disadvantageous as they were against Western norms" (p. 158). Not only the English language, but Western cultures and practices are read to be superior to other cultures. So when a learner does not speak English with native-like fluency, and they do not speak as much as their Western peers do, they are read as deficit, lacking, and sometimes even ignorant. The very same practice of not speaking much would be encouraged, and rewarded in a different context.

Pailliotet (1997) and Shin (2011) argue that cultural differences in ways one conducts themselves should be taken into account in teacher education programs. In some cultures, speaking in front of one's superiors is a sign of disrespect while in the U.S. culture, being silent is read as lack of understanding or low intelligence. Like in the case of Pailliotet (1997)'s participant, for immigrant language minority teachers, often language and communication problems can lead to a lot of frustration and feelings of inadequacy, sometimes so much so that they consider giving up the profession entirely.

As the studies by Haddix (2012), Pailliotet (1997), and Shin (2011) discussed above illustrate, teacher education programs should not only listen and value the contributions of bi/multilingual pre-service teachers but also create spaces for their silenced voices to be heard. Current research on language minority groups has sought to highlight and privilege the voices of members of these groups (see for example Blackledge, 2006; Haddix, 2010; and Weisman, 2001) so that their marginalized voices have an avenue to be heard and marginalized members of these groups have opportunities to initiate change (Blackledge, 2006) that will ensure the wealth of linguistic, cultural, and professional knowledge they bring to the classroom is acknowledged and valued.

While transnational Kenyan teachers in U.S. universities share some of the same challenges faced by other teachers of color in the U.S., they also face unique difficulties as international students. The following three studies (Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Caldwell, & Utsey, 2005; Gatua, 2014; Wamwara-Mbugua & Cornwell, 2010) highlight some experiences and challenges that Kenyan and other African international students in U.S. universities undergo. A common theme among all three studies is that as international students, the participants experienced racist treatment as well as language difficulties in their roles as students and teachers.

Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Caldwell, & Utsey (2005) conducted a qualitative study of the cultural adjustment experiences of twelve African international college students, specifically from Kenya, Ghana, and Nigeria, and found that the participants experienced various challenges in the U.S. Some of the challenges were that they experienced prejudicial and discriminatory treatment from both white and black Americans, as well as international students from other continents. For example, one

Nigerian woman recounted an incident where two of her new roommates at the dorm, one from Taiwan, and the other from Japan, asked to be moved to a different room because they did not want to room with an African. The participants in the study reported feeling lonely and isolated from others. When faced with racism, the participants reported feeling anger and frustration. While some participants took the time to try and educate the offending party (like a participant who tried to argue with a white friend who claimed whites were more intelligent than blacks), some participants ignored instances of racism because, as one Kenyan woman noted, she did not have time to spend trying to make them act right (Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Caldwell, & Utsey, 2005).

Gatua's (2014) narrative inquiry study examined the educational and sociocultural experiences of seven Kenyan women who were pursuing or had recently pursued advanced education in the U.S. The study found that participants dealt with linguistic issues both as students and in their teaching. There was frustration when they felt that they were expressing themselves correctly, and yet people did not understand what they were saying. Some were often asked how long they had been in the U.S. whenever they spoke. In their teaching, they worked to ensure that their students understood their accents. For example, one participant reported that they slowed down when speaking, and yet another reported that although it was exhausting, she would tell her students upfront that if they did not understand her, they should let her know so she could repeat herself or write down what she meant. The women in Gatua's (2014) study also narrated their struggles with negotiating two cultural contexts, especially in adjusting to the U.S. environment.

In a study of Kenyan immigrants' acculturation in the U.S., Wamwara-Mbugua & Cornwell (2010) interviewed 30 Kenyans and found that while the participants came to the U.S. having an excellent mastery of the English language, they quickly found out that their accents marked them as 'other' (Wamwara-Mbugua & Cornwell, 2010). They had previously not had a problem with their accents, but in the U.S., they were constantly made aware of it by comments from Americans. The participants also reported feeling frustrated by being considered "uninformed and unintelligent" (Wamwara-Mbugua & Cornwell, 2010, p. 39) because of their accents. In addition to their accents, the participants also came to realize that their skin color was also used as a marker that determined how they were perceived in the U.S. While obviously they had been aware that they were black before, their blackness had never been an issue for them before they came to the U.S. But faced with the reality of being othered in the U.S., participants in that study took different approaches to negotiate their realities of "living in between cultures" (Wamwara-Mbugua & Cornwell, 2010, p.33). Some maintained their accents, some changed their speaking behaviors depending on who they were talking to, while yet others made conscious efforts to change their accents. One participant, for example, voluntarily enrolled himself in a speech class in order to work on his accent because he believed that in order to be taken seriously in the U.S., one has to "neutralize" (Wamwara-Mbugua & Cornwell, 2010, p. 47) their accent.

Language and accent problems are some of the first challenges that international students experience in the U.S. While some international students, like those coming from Kenya where English is the language of instruction throughout most of their schooling, might come to the U.S. believing that their language is good enough, once

they get here, they are quickly reminded that their language is in fact lacking in some ways. In addition to constantly being reminded that they have an accent, they suddenly become raced individuals, whereas the color of their skin had never been a prominent mark of identity for them in the past.

The studies reviewed in this section provide a picture of the issues surrounding language, race, and power in teaching and in universities in the United States for language minority individuals, including international African students. These studies helped guide the design of the current study, as previously explained, and provided an entry point for this dissertation study to add on to this conversation. From these studies, we know that international students from African nations experience challenges in their classrooms due to the ways that their languages and accents are perceived by their American peers and their students. What we don't know, and what this dissertation aims to find out, is how language and identity is experienced by transnational teachers across contexts; in this case the Kenyan and United States contexts. Putting these two contexts side by side will provide a more holistic picture of these teachers' experiences, which will then aid in our understanding of the meanings that they made of those experiences.

### **Language and Hybridity**

In this section, I will discuss language and hybridity with reference to both the Kenyan and the United States context. The decision to highlight hybridity in the literature review was based on the fact that hybridity is one of the major tenets of post-colonial theories, which guide this study, and it was also prominent in a lot of studies that I reviewed as I was designing this dissertation study. Here, I want to present five studies by Weisman (2001), Haddix (2010), Clark & Flores (2001), Maeda (2009), and Beynon,

Ilieva, Dichupa and Hirji (2003), which highlight the hybrid identities of bi/multilingual teachers and pre-service teachers as they navigate their personal and professional lives.

The first study is a study by Weisman (2001), which explores the bilingual and bicultural identities, and the language attitudes of four Latina bilingual teachers. The participants in this study were four Latina women in their 20s with teaching experience ranging from one to four years, who taught bilingual classrooms located in different elementary classrooms within two separate school districts in the Southern California area. While there is enormous pressure for bi/multilingual and bi/multicultural teachers to conform to dominant ways of knowing, some of the participants in this study recognized that it is important to understand the differences in language and cultures among students and use what is familiar to the students to help them understand new content. For example, two of the teacher participants noted that they recognized that Latino students preferred working with others to achieve a common goal, and as such they engaged them in cooperative learning groups or working with partners. One of these participants also pointed out that she, like her students, switched back and forth between Spanish and English, and that while everything about the school they were in taught the students that Spanish was not a good thing, she wanted the students to be proud of their language. These teachers expressed awareness that the school system's prejudicial treatment of bilingual students contributed to Latino students not doing well academically, and they pointed to a need to challenge the negative images schools have of their bilingual students.

Another study that demonstrates bilingual and bicultural teachers' use of their bilingualism to make important connections with their bilingual/bicultural students is



Haddix (2010)'s study, which focuses on two pre-service teachers, both of whom were speakers of a vernacular language in addition to speaking English. One of the participants was an African American woman, and the other a Costa Rican woman. The study finds that the pre-service teacher participants embrace a hybrid linguistic identity, working with the linguistic capital that they have as speakers of other languages and dialects as well as mainstream English in ways that are reaffirming for them, and for their students. For example, one of the participants, an African American woman that was doing her teaching practicum in a second grade classroom, noted that for her, speaking African American Language was a way to show her allegiance to and to maintain her membership in her African American social circles. She also used African American Language with her students as a way to acknowledge their shared linguistic and cultural norms (Haddix, 2010) and as such, to connect with the students. Haddix (2010)'s study puts emphasis on moving beyond the negative perceptions of bilingualism and biculturalism, to literate and linguistic practices that embrace hybrid identities as assets in teachers' personal and professional repertoires.

The third study that makes important contributions to literature on hybrid linguistic and cultural identities is one by Clark & Flores (2001). Clark and Flores's (2001) quantitative study was conducted with Latina students in a bilingual education teacher preparation program at a university in South Texas. The study was aimed at obtaining profiles of how these pre service teachers identified and defined themselves. The findings from this study, which used a survey that consisted of questionnaires with open-ended questions about who the subjects perceived themselves to be, indicated that there was a strong association between ethnic identity and self-concept. Clark & Flores

(2001) argue that bilingual and bicultural teachers need to have a strong sense and knowledge of their histories and cultures, as well as positive perceptions of their ethnicity and language backgrounds, as this will translate to a higher self-esteem for them and more feelings of competence as teachers as was demonstrated by their participants. This further underscores the need for pre-service teacher education programs to emphasize the value of the linguistic and cultural capital that bi/multilingual students bring to the classroom as this will help to boost their perceptions of the value of not just their own diversity, but that of their students as well. As several recent studies, including the ones outlined here, emphasize, it is important for all teachers to be prepared with techniques to foster positive ethnic self-perceptions among their bilingual/bicultural students, as this is an important factor in their academic success.

In some Kenyan contexts, and especially in rural areas, learning and being rooted in the native language and culture is not just a choice for some children, but a necessity of life. In such contexts, while English is viewed as a “way out” or the means to a better life, the native language still remains the language of every day survival and interaction with one’s immediate community. Maeda (2009)’s study of a rural secondary school in Kenya finds that while students acknowledge the value of and participate in western education and learning the English language, they also maintain strong ties and actively participate in their native languages and cultures because they are aware that for as long as they live in the village, they have to learn important cultural knowledge such as farming as well as the local language. Maeda (2009) borrows Giroux’s use of the term “border pedagogy” (p. 341) to describe the schools’ participation in encouraging a hybrid identity for their students, and also coins the term “border-crossers” (p. 341) to describe the shifting

identities of the students between traditional African languages and cultures, and western languages and culture. This study illustrates a practical way for teachers to foster ethnic pride in their learners. By acknowledging, and celebrating the fact that students have identities beyond the western identity that schools try to instill, teachers give their students permission to be proud of who they are, and the languages that they speak. As Godley, Sweetland, Wheeler, Minnici, and Carpenter (2006) note, learners are more likely to be interested in school and learning when they feel that they, including their languages and cultures, are valued as people.

The need for a positive ethnic perception both by self and by others, like teachers and employers, extends to bilingual teachers in other multilingual settings. Beynon et al.'s (2003) study takes an interesting look at how teachers of Punjabi and Chinese ancestry construct their ethnic linguistic identities both in their personal and professional lives. One of their findings was that these bilingual teachers were more likely to claim their bilingual identity in seeking employment if they believed that the employer would view their bilingualism as an asset rather than a liability. As is the case with students, teachers also often face stigma based on their linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Though in Beynon et al.'s (2003) study, being a full bilingual literate in both one's native language and English was often a positive thing, in some instances, as we have discussed in TESOL and other English related fields, bilingualism often means being a non-native speaker of English, and that is often a point of stigma and doubts about one's ability to teach English.

Beynon et al. (2003) also explore the complexities of bilingualism in terms of who is considered a full bilingual and what effect that has on their willingness to

represent themselves as being bilingual. For example, one can be fluent in the conversational aspect of their native language but not the literate (reading and writing) aspects, and as such have reservations about representing themselves professionally (and sometimes even personally) as speakers of those languages due to feelings of incompetence. This is an important aspect of the work I am doing because a lot of Kenyan, and other African, teachers face the same dilemma. Kitoko-Nsiku (2007) reported the same phenomenon among Mozambican teachers. Because native African languages are more often passed down orally than taught in school, teachers might be able to speak the languages but not read and write in it. And also because of the emphasis on English and Kiswahili in Kenyan schools, Kenyan multi-linguals find themselves in situations where they know a number of languages but do not have native-like command of any one of those languages. In their exploration of this aspect of bilingualism, Beynon et al. (2003) argue that it is important to value bilingualism in its many forms, including bilingualism that might not extend to the literate practices of reading and writing in a particular native language.

Research shows that transnational scholars bring with them a wealth of capital that they can use to challenge the domination of mainstream ways of knowing in the American classroom (Seloni, 2012) and as such, add their voices and experiences to the other voices and experiences that are more readily represented in curriculums.

Seloni (2012), himself a transnational scholar, conducted a case study of his own (as a non-native English speaking international teacher) literate practices in a US college classroom. He illustrates that the inclusion of texts from other parts of the world can help students enter into more global conversations that help them see perspectives from other

people and places as well. Seloni (2012) argues that international faculty members in US colleges need to use their varied cultural and linguistic backgrounds to bring in global experiences to their American classrooms, for example in the form of multicultural texts. While acknowledging the unique challenges that immigrant teachers face in the American university classroom, Seloni (2012)'s work goes beyond the labels in native vs. non-native politics to argue for discourses that recognize the value of the diverse knowledge, and the linguistic and cultural capital that transnational teachers and scholars bring to U.S. university classrooms. Rather than treating one's non-American background and the "non-native English speaker" label as a negative and conforming to feelings of inferiority, immigrant teachers can use their wealth of knowledge to enrich the classroom experiences of their students, opening them up to a world beyond their immediate surrounding.

### **Conclusion**

This literature review has looked at various studies from both the Kenyan and the United States context that add to our understanding of the dynamics of language in bi/multilingual contexts, including Kenya, which is a former British colony with a multitude of African languages in addition to English and Swahili. Kenyan schools have struggled with finding ways to deal with students' home languages, and some of the ways that schools have dealt with this (such as the punishing of these languages) have done more harm than good to the students and their perceptions of themselves as multilingual individuals. In the U.S., language and bilingualism continues to be an important subject that scholars and researchers highlight in the literature. Bilingualism is often treated as a deficit in American schools, and the same is also the case at universities where, as some

studies show, African international students are sometimes read as less intelligent due to their accents and their use of the English language. Together, all these studies provide a glimpse into what we currently know about the topic of this dissertation study. This dissertation study will add on to this pool of knowledge by taking a transnational approach that looks at the experiences of Kenyan teachers across both the Kenyan and United States contexts. The teachers' recounts of their experiences in the Kenyan context will add on to the literature by providing a perspective that is largely missing from the literature; that of the teachers. We will get to find out how these teachers experienced language and identity as students, and also how they experienced the same as teachers later on in their lives. This will be a fresh perspective that will allow us to understand how these teachers felt about the implementation of English-only language policies in their schooling years, and subsequently, what their thoughts and feelings were when they were required, as teachers, to implement these policies. In the United States context, exploring these same teachers' experiences with language will further add on to the literature by offering another layer to existing literature on the experiences of international students in the U.S., which for the most part looks at their experiences in the U.S. without going further back to find out how language and identity was experienced by participants prior to coming to the United States. By looking at the teachers' experiences over the course of their lifetime so far, this dissertation study will attempt to explore the meanings that these teachers have made of their experiences across an extended period of time. In the section that follows, I will discuss the theoretical frameworks (post-colonial theories and linguistic imperialism theories), which guided this study.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

### **Post-colonial Theories**

Post-colonial theories examine how knowledge about “other people” is produced and the role of this knowledge production on the recreation and perpetuation of inequalities in society (Moore-Gilbert, 1997). The major contributors to post-colonial theories are Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak. Edward Said’s contribution focuses on the misrepresentations of the “other”, also referred to as the Orient, by the West. He explores the West’s misrepresentations of the Orient and argues that these misrepresentations are a way for the West to justify their colonial oppressions of Oriental peoples. Homi Bhabha’s major contribution is based on the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. He develops the term “hybridity” and argues that there are third spaces where cultures meet and co-exist in a single individual. Gayatri Spivak writes about the problematic issues of voice and representation in colonial resistance. She explores the questions of who gets to speak for whom, and as it the title of one of her most popular articles, *can the subaltern speak?*

Other contributors to post-colonial theory include Frantz Fanon, whose major works, *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth* have made important contributions to post-colonial thought, Ngugi Wa Thiong’o, Chinua Achebe, among others.

Post-colonial theory also challenges the neutrality and objectivity of academia since academia is for the most part a transmitter of Western thought and Western norms and plays a role in constructing and circulating stereotypes and images of colonial subjects that justify imperialist control (Moore-Gilbert, 1997). Imperial domination stems

from the idea that the inhabitants of the colony are a “primitive other” who require control and improvement (Ramone, 2011). Said (1979) extensively explores this idea of the West representing the Orient as a primitive, backward individual that needs civilizing. Ramone (2011) adds that missionary work is also founded on the same principle of needing to “improve” other people. This is commonly referred to as “enlightenment humanism” (Moore-Gilbert, 1997) whereby a group of people feels like they are doing other people a favor by civilizing them and saving them from their backwardness.

### **Post-colonial theorists and their contributions to the theory**

#### *Edward Said*

Edward Said’s contribution to post-colonial theory focuses on the misrepresentation of the Other, or the Orient by the West. Said’s book, *Orientalism*, is considered a pioneering text in the study of colonial discourses and meaning and issues of marginality (Gandhi, 1998). Orientalism is defined as “the project of studying, teaching, and writing-or simply producing knowledge- about the Orient” (Andreotti, 2011, p. 20). It has also been defined as the representation of the East and Eastern people in western discourse (Moore-Gilbert, 1997). Edward Said adds the definition of orientalism as “an enormous system or inter-textual network of rules and procedures which regulate anything that may be thought, written or imagined about the Orient” (Gandhi, 1998, p. 76).

An orientalist is defined as anyone who teaches, writes about or researches the Orient. Ramone (2011) describes Said’s book *Orientalism* as an attempt to analyze the vast body of work written about the East by the West in order to demonstrate that the motivation for the West representing the East is to “enable Western domination and



restructuring of the Orient” (p. 83). The west deliberately misrepresents the East as being inferior, backward and primitive in order to justify their control over those nations and peoples. The West advances the notion that certain people require, or even beg for, domination (Said, 1979) because those people are inferior and underdeveloped. The East is represented in orientalist discourse as being “voiceless, sensual, female, despotic, irrational and backward” (Moore-Gilbert, 1997, p. 39) while the West is represented as being “masculine, democratic, rational, moral, dynamic and progressive” (p. 39).

This idea of the West being powerful and the East needing domination is unfortunately often taken for granted as scientific truth (Said, 1979), even by the Orient himself. Said argues that it is these discourses that fuel imperialism and colonialism.

Said stresses the relationship between knowledge and power. He argues that by creating knowledge about the Orient that represents him as the inferior Other, the West is able to maintain a superior position (Ahmad, 1994) that enables them to enjoy political, economic and social advantages over the Orient.

### *Homi Bhabha*

Homi Bhabha’s contribution focuses on the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. He argues that racism and other forms of oppression are not based on stereotype of the Other, but rather on the construction of the self as being superior to the other -Gilbert, 1997). In eliminating the possibility that the “Other” might be equal to them, one justifies their control over that person. Bhabha argues that this objectification of the other and the construction of self as superior are the foundations of the “civilizing mission” and the idea of the “white man’s burden” in civilizing the “primitive” Orient

(Moore-Gilbert, 1997). The white man feel that it is his duty to “help” the Orient since he does not view the Orient as his equal, but rather as an inferior being in need of salvation.

Homi Bhabha complicates the notion of hybridity and writes extensively about migration, shifting borders and hybrid identities. According to Bhabha, culture is not static, but rather is constantly changing. Culture and identity are dynamic, and hybrid, and as such a multiplicity of cultures and identities can co-exist in a single individual. Bhabha argues that migration makes it difficult to identify things like authenticity and tradition. He argues that there are no fixed identities that can be imposed on either the masters or the slaves since identity is unstable, dynamic, and fluid (Moore-Gilbert, 1997).

Bhabha writes about both the identity construction of the colonizer and the colonized without separating the two. He argues that the colonizer also learns, grows, and is changed by the colonial experience. While Bhabha has received a lot of criticism for his arguments for hybridity, he maintains that hybridity does not entail giving in to colonial discourses, but rather challenging them and finding third spaces for the co-existing of cultures and identities. Bhabha proposes a post-colonial strategy that ensures there is no danger of power maintenance through a shift in vocabulary (Moore-Gilbert, 1997).

Bhabha argues against the “myth of authenticity” by noting that there is no “pure” culture or “pure” identity and as such authenticity is an unattainable myth. Rather, he argues that there are third spaces where cultures meet and co-exist in a form of hybridity (Moore-Gilbert, 1997). Because of the constant mixing of cultures dies to the world becoming more and more of a global village connected by technology and sophisticated modes of transportation, individuals’ identities are often a mix of the various places

they've been to, the various people they have interacted with, and the various cultures they have encountered and participated in.

Hybridity has been critiqued as a concept that was born out of colonial discourse and could be another strategy for colonial control since it does not leave much room for resistance (see for example Parry, 2002), but Homi Bhabha insists that hybridity does not involve a meeting of the colonizer and the colonized without any tension. Rather, it involves an uncomfortable coming together that challenges oppressive colonial authority (Ramone, 2011). Parry, (2002) argues that emphasis on hybridity and postcolonial thought that advocates for a reconciliation of the two sides (colonizer and colonized) undermines the history of the colonial experience of economic and cultural oppression and rejects the possibility for resistance while advocating for a consensus.

In a conversation with John Comaroff, Bhabha notes that colonized societies had multiculturalism imposed on them and they had to find ways to survive and co-exist with “otherness” (Bhabha & Comaroff, 2002, p. 23). Bhabha goes on to note that current forms of nationalism are about claims to an “authentic” culture thought to be in danger of being lost. Bhabha seems to believe that nationalism is born out of a fear that the authenticity or the pureness of a people’s culture might be tainted by the presence of other cultures such as Western cultures. Bhabha argues that culture is not pure in the first place as it is constantly changing. The mixing and co-existence of cultures forced to be in the same geographic space is inevitable. “For it is by living on the borderline of history and language, on the limits of race and gender, that we are in a position to translate the differences between them into a kind of solidarity” (Bhabha, 2000, p. 641).

*Gayatri Spivak*

Gayatri Spivak's contribution to post-colonial theory focuses on issues of voice and representation in colonial resistance. One of her most important works is the essay *Can the Subaltern Speak*, which explores the issues surrounding the subaltern's voice and the postcolonial intellectual's representation of the subaltern (Spivak, 1994). Spivak's explores questions of whether postcolonial work can only ethically be done within colonial locations, and whether third world intellectuals in first world academies should study third world culture (Gandhi, 1998), a question that I explore in my discussion of my role as researcher in chapter three.

Some of the questions that Spivak and other scholars that are interested in the issue of voice and representation ask include: does the subaltern speak in their own voice or does he mimic the voice of the colonizer? Who can speak as other? Can intellectuals speak as people whose groups they are not members of? (Fee, 2006). Spivak (1994) is interested in the intellectual's ethical responsibility toward the Other. The intellectual is often in a position to represent the subaltern in research and other forums, and they have an ethical responsibility to the people that they are seeking to represent.

Andreotti (2011) notes that often intellectuals think of themselves as the "saviors of marginality" (pg. 41) as they study marginalized groups and represent them in the academy. Often in their representations of the marginalized, they end up reproducing the discourses that work to keep the marginalized at the margins while keeping dominant groups at the top. Of course these intellectuals' work is often aimed at putting an end to the oppressive power structures, but as products and/or members of first world academies, there is often the danger of reproducing these oppressive power structures in their representations of the subaltern (Andreotti, 2011).

Upwardly mobile third world scholars often take part in the commodification of culture, difference, and marginality (Andreotti, 2011; Moore-Gilbert, 1997). The commodification, or what Gandhi (1998) calls “monumentalizing” (p.60) of marginality is of interest to first world academics, who use third world intellectuals to produce knowledge that further works to classify people and produce “exotic culture” (Gandhi, 1998, p. 60). Although they are part of the Orient, third world scholars in first world academics are seen as operating in the colonizer’s academy within first world scholarship and as such reproducing colonizing knowledge. However, Gandhi (1998) reiterates that it is not very productive to be overly critical of academic activism and the important work that postcolonial intellectuals in first world academics do, because the contributions of these postcolonial intellectuals are invaluable in the creation and facilitation of democratic dialogue between Western and non-Western academics.

Spivak (1994) also talks about the role of colonization in the subaltern’s perception of himself. She argues that colonization worked to suppress pre-colonial cultures through assimilation while pushing orientalist discourses of the West as more civilized, and as such superior to other peoples. These orientalist discourses had the effect of changing the subaltern’s image of himself and his reality and legitimizing the West’s control and claim on cultural superiority over the “inferior” Other (Moore-Gilbert, 1997). The colonizers were able to naturalize these discourses and convince the subaltern of their own inferiority.

Spivak (1994) notes that colonialism and globalization had the effect of impoverishing the third world and universalizing western interests in the rest of the world. Even after colonization was technically over, the West continues to exploit the

third world economically and use the third world to create wealth for the first world (Moore-Gilbert, 1997). Meanwhile, colonialism and its effect on former colonies is brushed aside and ignored.

### *Frantz Fanon*

Frantz Fanon's most influential works include the books *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*. Fanon talks about language in relation to culture and notes that "to speak means... above all is to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization" (Fanon, 1963, p. 17-18). Language ownership, speaking a particular language means you take on some aspects of the identity associated with that language.

Like Thiong'o, Fanon asserts that to take on a language means to take on the culture of that language as well. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon (1952) discusses the Negro of the Antille who, having learned the language of the colonizer, the French language, and having taken on the French culture, distances himself from his blackness and his native language and begins to perceive himself as being white, or at least whiter than the other black people who have not assimilated to the French as much as he has. By distancing himself from those, he considers himself more civilized, more like the white man. The Negro of the Antille renounces his blackness and takes on a white identity, which he believes to be superior to his own blackness. As Fanon puts it:

Every colonized people- in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality- finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is with the culture of the mother country. The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in

proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle (Fanon, 1952, p. 18).

Thiong'o (1994) posits that to rob a people of their culture is to rob them of their tools for self-definition in relationship to other people. As Fanon (1952) observes in the quote above, when people are colonized and their languages and cultures suppressed, they may develop an inferiority complex due to the suppression and rejection of their culture, and as a result, they may come to believe that the way out of their "backwardness" is to assimilate to the colonizer and shed off as much of their black as they can. Fanon (1952) goes on to note that "the negro of the Antilles will be proportionately whiter- that is, he will come closer to being a real human being- in direct ratio to his mastery of the French language" (Fanon, 1952, p. 18). In order to regain his humanity, the Antillean Negro distances himself from Africans and sees himself as being more European because of his grasp of the French language. Ramone (2011) reiterates that although the Antillean's skin is black and his physical characteristics look much like those of other Africans, he adopts racial prejudices against blackness and distances himself from it.

True to Edward Said's argument about Orientalist discourses, the colonialists managed to convince the colonized that their opinions were Truth and were eternal with no possibility for human error (Fanon, 1963). As such, the colonized had no choice but to believe them. This is not to say that all colonized populations, or all formerly colonized Africans believe and succumb to these effects of colonization that Fanon (1963) describes. Many formerly colonized peoples continually resist and push back against the suppression of their languages and identities, and they refuse to believe the deficit

perceptions of themselves that they are constantly being pushed to believe as truth. Like any other populations, Africans cannot all be lumped together as a homogeneous group with the same experiences. There are nuances to the ways that different people within groups respond to marginalization, including the major types of marginalization of colonized populations' languages and cultures that occurred as a result of the colonization of Africa. In fact, many formerly colonized people came to the realization that the colonizer was not better than them (Fanon, 1963). They then began to regain some of their lost self-esteem. As Fanon (1963) puts it: "his (the colonizer's) look can no longer strike fear into me or nail me to the spot and his voice can no longer petrify me" (Fanon, 1963, p. 10).

However, even after independence, former colonies were forced to maintain economic ties with colonial nations because the colonial regimes made it so that their former colonies would have to depend on them economically or risk severe consequences (Fanon, 1963). The colonialists were interested in their colonies' natural resources, their wealth and whatever they could get in order to advance themselves and their industries, and when colonialism was over and they had to leave, they put systems in place to ensure they would still be able to suck the resources out of their colonies without actually physically colonizing them (Fanon, 1963). Similarly, in terms of language and identity, as Wa Thiong'o (1986) notes, physical colonization is over but the colonized individual's mind is still coping with the effects of colonization. Africans still work to suppress their own languages and identities, as was evident in the review of the literature above, while glorifying Western languages and identities.



## **Post-colonial theory and issues of identity**

*A man is never more defeated than when he is running away from himself....*

*Africa has had such a fate in the world that the very adjective African can call up hideous fears of rejection. Better then to cut all the links with this homeland, this liability, and become in one giant leap the universal man (Achebe, 1973, p. 626-627).*

Issues of identity are prominent in post-colonial studies. Each of the contributors to post-colonial theory touches on identity to some extent. In talking about Orientalism, Said talks about the misrepresentation of the Orient and the identity forced on him by these misrepresentations. Bhabha's work on hybridity is all about the identity of the post-colonial individual that has to live with opposing cultures, languages, and as such, identities. Spivak's work on the post-colonial intellectual is also to some extent about identity because she talks about the post-colonial intellectual's ethical responsibility in their representation of the subaltern's voice, which is part of the subaltern's identity. In more obvious ways, Wa Thiong'o, Achebe, and Fanon's work on language and culture are about identity as well.

While most post-colonial scholars separate the identities of the colonizer and the colonized into opposing binaries, Bhabha's work tries to bring the two binaries closer together by suggesting a co-existence of their identities and cultures. Gandhi (1998) notes that there is a "postcolonial desire for extra- or post-national solidarities" (p. 123) and therefore some scholars, like Bhabha for example, are trying to suggest alternatives to anti-colonial nationalism by forwarding discourses of hybridity and ideas of mixed cultures or global cultures.

However, Gandhi (1998) also observes that “celebrations of hybridity generally refer to the destabilising of colonized culture. The West remains the privileged meeting ground for all ostensibly cross-cultural conversations” (p. 136). Gandhi (1998) warns that celebrations of ‘cultural diversity’ and ‘enlightened hybridity’ (p. 136) disguise oppressive imperialism and the political and economic disparities that exist among nations and cultures. By embracing hybridity, often the dominant culture (usually the colonizer’s) consumes the marginalized culture and the colonizer succeeds in his quest to suppress what he has all along labeled an inferior Other.

Despite his misgivings about the celebration of global cultures and identities, Gandhi (1998) agrees with hybridity theorists that there is no “pure identity” of the colonizer or the colonized, but rather that there is continuity between the two identities. The colonizer is victimized and decivilized in his own oppression of the colonized, and on the other hand, the colonized is a “sometimes-collaborator, sometimes-competitor” (p. 138) of the oppressive system. This is in line with Bhabha’s argument that both the colonizer and the colonized are transformed by the colonial experience. The colonial encounter led to a mutual transformation of both the colonizer and the colonized. It is however important to confront the fact that colonization did have an effect on colonized individuals’ perceptions of themselves and of their languages and cultures, and as such there is need for continued conversations on ways the negative discourses concerning Africans and other formerly colonized peoples and their languages can be broken down, so that blackness and bi/multilingualism will no longer be seen as a deficit, but rather as assets in the personal and professional identities of those that possess them.

## **Linguistic Imperialism Theories**

This study was also framed by linguistic imperialism theories (Phillipson, 1992). I was also guided by Anzaldúa's (1987) work on linguistic terrorism and her work on hybridity, as well as work by theorists and scholars in bilingualism, language, and identity studies (e.g. Delpit, 2002; Lippi-Green, 2004; Moll, 2004; Nieto, 2002). Together with post-colonial theory, which is discussed above, these theories provided a framework for the study that looked at language within both the Kenyan and the U.S. contexts.

As a former British colony, Kenya has English as the language of instruction from the fourth year of schooling onwards. Although the British encouraged the use of African languages in the early years of schooling (unlike the French who totally ignored African languages), these languages were delineated to a low status, while English was credited the ability to civilize colonized populations (Phillipson, 1992). Over fifty years since Kenya's 1964 independence, English continues to be at the top of the linguistic hierarchy while African languages stay at the bottom of the hierarchy. Phillipson (1992) refers to this as a "legacy of linguicism in which the colonized people have internalized the language and many of the attitudes of their masters, in particular their attitude to the dominant language and the dominated languages" (p. 128). Phillipson (1992) continues to argue that it is this linguicist legacy that forms the basis of neo-colonial imperialism. He defines English linguistic imperialism as when "the dominance of English is asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages." (p. 47). Which the British are heavily implicated in the domination of English in former British colonies, Phillipson (1992) observes that America is joining forces with the British Council in an effort to make

English a “world language” (p. 133) while legitimizing this endeavor as being in the best interest of both the national and international community. According to Phillipson (2002), this endeavor is a contemporary version of the dominating powers’ desire to civilize the dominated, otherwise known as the “white man’s burden” (p. 163). There is a belief that in order to “help” developing nations, the dominant powers need to “civilize” them, and that civilization involves putting an emphasis on English, often at the expense of native languages.

The U.S. has not been spared either when it comes to the domination of English. In the U.S., the tension is more on the dialects of English that various groups speak, and on the accents when it comes to immigrants from various nations. Stubbs (2002) observes that “[w]e hear language through a powerful filter of social values and stereotypes” (p. 66). Speakers of standard English are often perceived to be more intelligent, and more confident as compared to those who speak other dialects of the English language, or those who speak English with certain stigmatized accents (Delpit, 2002; Lippi-Green, 2004; Stubbs, 2002). In a discussion of African American vernacular language and how it is perceived in American schools and the American society, Delpit (2002) observes that the language is a source of a lot of mixed emotions for African Americans, as it is a language that is close to their hearts and souls, but at the same time, it is perceived by some as a source of “collective disgrace” (Delpit, 2002, p. 35). Middle-class African Americans, or those aspiring for the middle class worry about other people, specifically “the white folk” (Delpit, 2002, p. 37) perceiving them as “ignorant and unworthy” (Delpit, 2002, p. 37) because of their language. These worries are not unfounded because, as Delpit (2002) illustrates with examples, language plays a big role in how one’s intelligence and

expertise is perceived even in the workplace. When one's language deviates from standard forms, and especially when it deviates towards a stigmatized form of the language, then it becomes difficult for some to hear past the dialect or accent and access the person's intelligence and expertise (Delpit, 2002).

In his essay, *Rethinking Resistance*, Moll (2004) argues that it is important for both teachers and students to disrupt race and class ideologies that are limiting to students as these ideologies assign notions of deficit to black students and students from low-income backgrounds. Teachers and students can practice and document "counterexperiences" (Moll, 2004, p. 128) about their lives and schools in order to begin the work of redefining their identities. As Moll (2004) asserts, "race and class ideologies may always be "in the air," as inescapable realities of life, but their most damaging consequences are not inevitable, they can be mediated by purposeful alternative scripts." (p. 129). It is therefore important that resistance involves a redefinition of self, where students as well as teachers produce counter narratives in the face of racism and marginalization.

Nieto (2002) argues that children who do not speak English, but come to school with different languages, cultures, and experiences, should not be treated as blank slates, but as learners with a wealth of linguistic and cultural capital that can be useful in the learning process. While students value their own languages and cultures, these are often not acknowledged or valued in the schools (Nieto, 2002). However, when students feel that who they are is not valued in the schools, they feel a disconnect with the school environment. As Delpit (2002) aptly put it, "[s]ince language is one of the most intimate expressions of identity, indeed, "the skin that we speak," then to reject a person's

language can only feel as if we are rejecting him.” (p. 47). Delpit (2002) suggests that in order to help students to be willing to adopt standard forms of English, it is imperative that teachers show love, care, and respect for not only the children, but also their languages and cultures. Only when the children trust that their teachers perceive them with care and respect will they be able to learn from the teachers.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have presented a comprehensive literature review with a discussion of what we currently know about language and identity in the post-colonial Africa. I have also presented studies from the U.S. context, with a focus on African international students’ experiences in U.S. universities, as well as the experiences of other marginalized bilingual/bicultural groups such as African Americans and Latinos in U.S. universities. In the Kenyan context (and other post-colonial African countries), the studies showed that African languages are actively suppressed in schools, and that there is often deficit discourses about these languages and their speakers. As a result of colonization, Africans were taught to devalue their own languages, just like the colonizers did, and so schools put a lot of effort into eradicating these languages while assertively promoting the English language. The studies also indicated that parents are also complicit in this dynamic because they believe that English is the language of success and upward mobility, and African languages are an obstacle in the learning of English, and so they insist on English for their children, both at home and at school.

On the other hand, some studies showed teachers successfully using African languages in their classroom to support their students’ learning. In lower primary levels, which goes from standard one to standard four, teachers in rural schools drew of the

literacies that their students already had in their African languages to support their learning of English and content area subjects.

In the U.S. context, studies showed that African international students faced linguistic and cultural challenges in their roles as students and teaching assistants in the U.S. International students from Kenya reported struggling with language as they were perceived to have accents, which were sometimes used to judge them as ignorant and lacking in intelligence. The studies also showed that the African international students experienced racism, and were often isolated from other groupings in the U.S. The African international students maintained transnational ties with their families back in their home countries, and sometimes this provided some relief from the challenges that they faced in the U.S. Other studies conducted with African American and Latino pre service and in-service teachers indicated that the teachers enacted hybrid identities, and used their hybridity and memberships in different discourse communities to support their students in various ways.

The research and theories discussed in this chapter demonstrate that there can be a merging of languages and cultures to create hybrid spaces where linguistic and cultural differences are not viewed as disruptions, but rather as points of conversation and dialogue where everyone's contributions are welcome and valued (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-Lopez, & Tejada, 1999). In the Kenyan context, where there are multiple languages pushing to co-exist whilst the politics of language, globalization, and power advance English and suppress African languages, it is important for teachers, parents, and communities to not lose sight of the benefits of a positive ethnic identity and self-perception (which includes positive attitudes towards native African languages and

cultures) for bi/multilingual learners. Studies like the ones carried out by Campbell and Walsh (2009) and Campbell and Walsh (2010) show that despite the push for standard English in Kenyan schools (which often includes the suppression of, and the punishing of students for speaking in, African languages) students still value their native languages and outside formal classroom settings, they shift seamlessly from one language to another, and sometimes even mix three or more languages in a conversation to demonstrate affiliation with different linguistic and cultural groups.

Examination of the literature and the theories above indicates that dominant languages, like English, often accrue their power through the suppression of other languages. The literature and the theories also indicate that deficit discourses about non-dominant languages and their speakers are a hindrance to the educational success of the students that speak those languages, because as Nieto (2002) asserts, teachers cannot make meaningful connections, that will lead to academic success, with their students unless they understand and respect the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of those students. While there is a lot of research on language in the Kenyan context, there is a clear underrepresentation of the personal experiences of both students and teachers with regards to how they experience language and multilingualism in their lives. A lot of studies are based on classroom observations and interviews on classroom practices. The individual experiences of the students and the teachers are left underrepresented. This dissertation study will endeavor to present the experiences of participants regarding their experiences with language and identity both as students and as teachers in the Kenyan context, as well as their experiences of their experiences as students and teaching assistants in the United States. The aim of this dissertation is not to compare their



experiences in the two contexts, but rather to look at their experiences across contexts with the aim of understanding what those experiences looked like in Kenya, and in the U.S. As will be extensively discussed in chapter three, qualitative interview research provides a powerful methodology for studying the personal experiences of individuals because qualitative interviews allow a lot of room for people to tell of their experiences, and build their own identities.

In Kenya, this study is significant because the suppression of African languages is alarmingly common in Kenyan schools, and highlighting the experiences of Kenyan teachers with language and identity will encourage the continuing of important conversations on the place of African languages in Kenyan schools. While this is a topic that has been extensively theorized in the U.S. context with regards to linguistically diverse learners, the same is not true for Kenya. In Kenya, very little attention is afforded to English Language Learners (who, in essence, are a majority of Kenyan learners, considering that Kenya is largely multilingual with most people learning their African languages and Swahili before learning English). This reality underscores the importance of this and similar studies that seek to highlight this important issue in Kenyan education that we can no longer afford to ignore. This study has Kenyan as one of its contexts, but the language in education issues faced in Kenya are echoed in other formerly colonized African nations that are still reeling from the continuing effects of colonization on the ways that language and multilingualism are treated in literacy and education.

In the United States, this study is significant because with increasing migration across contexts, there is a growing number of international students from African nations in U.S. universities, (and with reference to the specific population of participants in this

study, in education), and these universities need to recognize the value of the multilingualism of their international students (both Kenyans and other nationalities) in order to work collaboratively with them to create mutually respectful and beneficial learning environments.

As established in this chapter, the scholarly literature and the theories reviewed help us see that there is need for more to be known about transnational Kenyan teachers' experiences in each of the domains that I have stated in the research question (i.e. primary and secondary schooling in Kenya, teacher preparation in Kenya, teaching experiences in Kenya, and graduate education in the United States). While there is some rich research on language and identity in post-colonial Africa's education (see for example Campbell & Walsh 2010; Jones & Barkhuizen, 2011; Kitoko-Nsiku, 2007; Maeda, 2009; Muthwii, 2004; Tembe & Norton, 2008), few focus on the personal experiences of teachers. Additionally, in the United States, few studies look at the language and identity experiences of transnational teachers from post-colonial African nations, and even fewer look at those experiences across contexts from their experiences in the country of origin to their experiences in the United States. I see the audience of this work as teachers, administrators, parents, and other educational stakeholders in Kenya who are invested in the educational success of bi/multilingual learners in Kenya. In the United States, this work may be of interest to universities with bi/multilingual international students, as well as domestic and international graduate students interested in interrogating ways to make their classrooms more welcoming and inclusive of diversity in their roles as graduate students, and as teaching assistants.

In the chapter that follows, I will discuss the methods and procedures of this

dissertation study, including a detailed explanation of how the scholarly literature and the theories discussed in this chapter informed the designing of the interview protocols and the data analysis processes for this dissertation study.

## CHAPTER THREE:

### METHODOLOGY

#### **Introduction**

This dissertation study explores the language and identity experiences of transnational Kenyan teachers currently pursuing graduate education in the United States, with a focus on their experiences throughout their schooling and teaching lives in Kenya, and the United States. In chapter two, I reviewed the literature and theories that informed this study. In this chapter, I will discuss the methods and procedures for this dissertation study and show some examples of the connections that I made with the literature and the theories reviewed in chapter two. I introduce this chapter by providing a discussion of qualitative interview as the method of inquiry that was used for this dissertation study. This is followed by a discussion of the participant recruitment and selection processes and an introduction of the ten participants. I then outline the data collection procedures, followed by a discussion of the data analysis process. Finally, I discuss my researcher subjectivities as an insider (Collins, 2004a) within the group that I am studying.

For this dissertation research study, I employed qualitative interview as the method of inquiry. The choice of a research method depends largely on the research question being asked in a study, and according to Seidman (2013), if the research question, like is the case with this study, is concerned with participants' experiences and their "subjective understanding" (p. 10) of those experiences, then qualitative interview is an appropriate method of inquiry for the study. The research question in this dissertation study was: What are the post-colonial language and identity experiences of transnational

Kenyan teachers in graduate education programs in the United States in the following domains: a) their primary and secondary schooling in Kenya b) their teacher preparation in Kenya c) their teaching experiences in Kenya; and d) their graduate education in the United States?

This research question was formulated based on the literature and theories that were reviewed in chapter two. From the literature, I determined that school was one of the major sites of linguistic suppression in post-colonial African nations, and that teachers were often charged with the responsibility to enforce English-only policies in school, thus making them complicit in this undermining of African languages. Therefore, I wanted to know what the experiences of these teachers were with language and identity, both in their time as students, and in their time as teachers. The theories also made strong connections between language, race, and power. Because issues of race are not at the forefront of most Kenyans' lives, I decided to interview Kenyan teachers who are currently in the United States in order to find out what their experiences were after having lived in both the Kenyan context, where race is not immediately central, and the U.S. context, where race issues are more a part of the day-to-day lives of people of African descent. Therefore, the literature and the theories determined the four domains that are included in the research question. And qualitative interview was the most appropriate method for me in conducting this study because of its focus on participants' personal experiences and the meanings that they make of those experiences (Wengraf, 2001).

## **Participants**

Participant recruitment for this study was by word of mouth. I chose to recruit by word of mouth because I initially made attempts to recruit from social media groups for Kenyan students in the U.S. but did not get any responses. As a Kenyan graduate student in the United States myself, I believe this might be because graduate students are often very busy and might not be in a position to respond to calls to participate in the research of a person they have no connections with. Therefore, I decided to use the network of personal and professional connections that I had to find participants that met the criteria for this study. The set criteria was that a potential participant had to be black, a Kenyan that went to school in Kenya, multilingual, a certified teacher in Kenya, and enrolled in a graduate program in the U.S. While I had some connections with people that fit these criteria, I wanted more participants, and so I reached out to other professional connections, and they introduced me to more potential participants. In total, I had an initial count of fourteen potential participants. Of the fourteen, three withdrew before the study begun because they could not commit to the amount of time that the study required. One completed three of the five interviews but had to withdraw from the study due to time constraints and difficulty scheduling meetings. This dissertation study was therefore conducted with a total of ten participants. All the participants that met the criteria, were recruited, and were able to commit to conducting five interviews, each about an hour long, were included in the study.

The ten participants in this study came from different linguistic, cultural, and family backgrounds. Table 3.1 below provides an overview of the ten participants,

including their teaching backgrounds. The table is immediately followed by more detailed profiles of the participants.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Native African Language</b>	<b>Teaching Subject</b>	<b>Years Teaching in Kenya</b>	<b>Years in the U.S.</b>
Nicole	Female	Early 30s	Meru	English/Literature	5	2
Daniel	Male	Early 40s	Embu	Physics/Chemistry	16	3
Kariuki	Male	Late 30s	Kikuyu	Mathematics Chemistry	11	3
Eva	Female	Early 40s	Luhya	French Education	1	11
Jackline	Female	Early 30s	Kamba	Mathematics	4	1
Mercy	Female	Early 50s	Luo	Mathematics	15	2
Valerie	Female	Late 30s	Luo	English Literature	2.5	16
Isaac	Male	Mid 40s	Duruma	Mathematics Geography	13	7
Faith	Female	Early 30s	Kikuyu	Mathematics Chemistry	7	3
Sally	Female	Early 40s	Kikuyu	Special Education		2

				Agriculture		
				Geography		

*Table 3.1: A summary of participant profiles*

Below, in no particular order, I will introduce the ten participants that were interviewed for this dissertation study. The profiles include basic information about each participant’s family background, their linguistic backgrounds, and their schooling. The decision to introduce the participants prior to going into the findings chapter was based on my desire to foreground the participants and their experiences as the focus of this qualitative interview study. It is for this reason too that I privilege participants’ own words in chapters four and five. I wanted the participants and their experiences to be central to this work. To protect the confidentiality of the participants, all the names used for participants in this dissertation are pseudonyms.

*Mercy*

At the time of this study, Mercy was a PhD student in Mathematics education at a public university in the Midwest region of the U.S. I was introduced to Mercy by a mutual professional contact in 2014. When I contacted her about the study, Mercy was enthusiastic about participating. She wanted to help and was very generous with her time. Mercy and I did both phone and Skype interviews due to distance. Mercy grew up in Nairobi. Her mother was a housewife and her father was a fuel attendant. She was one of eight siblings, three of whom died in infancy. Her father passed away about five years ago, but her mother is still alive in their rural home in Western Kenya, near Lake Victoria. Mercy is from the Luo community. In communicating with their parents and



some uncles and aunts that lived with them, Mercy and her siblings spoke Luo. However, amongst themselves, they spoke a mix of Luo and Swahili as they picked Swahili from their friends in the neighborhood. Both of Mercy's parents understood Swahili, and her father understood a little bit of English.

Mercy went to a nursery school where the language of instruction was a mix of both English and Swahili. At standard one though, she went to a day school where English was the language of instruction, and the only language that was generally spoken in the school. The school had students and teachers from a variety of linguistic backgrounds, with about two thirds of the student population consisting of Indians, and a majority of the teachers being either European nuns, or Indian.

Coming from a home where they spoke Luo mostly, Mercy struggled with English for the first year, but she quickly caught up and did not grow up with struggles in English. Mercy stayed in this school, which was run by catholic missionaries and nuns, all the way from standard one to form four. For her A levels, she went to a school in Kisumu where students spoke English in class and Luo outside of class.

Mercy went into teaching because it was the only opportunity that was presented to her at the time. After her training, she taught in both rural and urban schools for a total of 15 years before getting her masters' degree and getting a job as a lecturer at a private university in Kenya. She took a study leave from her lecturing job to pursue her PhD in the United States. By the time of this study, she had been in the states for just over one year. She also communicated regularly with her professional colleagues in Kenya, and also with her family back in Kenya, including her husband and children.

After completing her PhD program, Mercy's plans were to go back and teach at the university in Kenya where she was still employed as a lecturer at the time of this study.

### *Jackline*

At the time of this study, Jackline was a PhD student in mathematics education at a university in the Northeast region of the U.S. I met Jackline in the summer of 2014. She was newly arrived in the U.S., and was just getting used to her new environment and settling down into the routine of taking and teaching classes in a U.S. university. Jackline's father was a teacher and her mother was a hospital attendant before becoming a housewife and farmer. She has five siblings, including one who is currently an engineer, one who works for the UN, a teacher, and three that are university students. She is also married with a young son. At the time of this study, Jackline was making plans for her family to join her in the U.S.

Jackline was born and raised in a village in Kitui, which is in the Eastern parts of Kenya. She went to local schools all the way until she completed form four. As a child, Jackline kept to herself a lot and did not socialize much, except with her elder brother, who was her best friend. Her mother tongue, Kamba, was their language of communication at home and in the community, as most people in the area were Kambas. At school, Kamba was the language of instruction for the first three years of school, and English was introduced at standard four. For high school, Jackline went to a boarding school within the area where she grew up.

Being a teacher, Jackline's father was very fluent in English, and he encouraged them to learn English by speaking both English and Kamba at home once they started

learning it in school. He would also correct their accents when they spoke English with a Kamba accent.

Jackline went into teaching because that was the degree she was accepted into a public university with. Her dream was to become a doctor, but she accepted teaching when it was offered to her. She trained as a mathematics teacher. Shortly after her graduation, Jackline got a scholarship from a Kenyan university to pursue a Masters degree in pure mathematics. She also worked as a graduate assistant during that time, before getting a job as an assistant lecturer at the same university. After about four years of teaching in Kenya, Jackline was accepted into a PhD program in the U.S.

### *Daniel*

At the time of this study, Daniel was a PhD student in Science teaching at a university in the Northeast region of the U.S. I first met Daniel about four years previously through a mutual professional contact. He was friendly and talkative. He cracked a lot of jokes and was the kind of person that had no problems laughing at himself. Daniel's parents were career farmers from Embu, and although they were both literate in English, his father did not speak English, mostly because of lack of confidence in his fluency.

Daniel was born in Nairobi, but his family moved back to their rural home when he was young. He grew up the second of four brothers in a household where Kiambu was the language of communication initially. English, Swahili, and sheng' was the languages of communication between him and his siblings, while Kiambu was reserved for communicating with their parents and other members of the community.

Having spent the first years of his life in Nairobi, Daniel learned English before he learned Kiembu. But when he moved to Embu, there was pressure to speak the way everybody else was speaking, and he developed some of the Kiembu accent in his English. After high school, Daniel moved back to Nairobi for college, where he trained as a Physics teacher. Daniel taught at various schools, including a rural school in one of the most remote areas of Kenya, and a national school in Nairobi, for a total of sixteen years before being accepted into a PhD program in the United States.

### *Isaac*

At the time of this study, Isaac was a part-time PhD student in mathematics education at a university in the Midwest region of the United States. Prior to this, he had been a full time PhD student at a different university, but was dismissed from the program. Isaac was born and raised in Kwale, at the coastal region of Kenya, where his father worked for the county council as an accounts assistant. His father had dropped out of school at form two, and spoke only a little bit of English, and his mother only had a primary education and spoke no English at all. In his family, they spoke Duruma. The unique thing about Isaac was that he considered Swahili somewhat of a mother tongue to him. His actual mother tongue was Duruma, which along with Swahili, stems from the Mijikenda language. So although Duruma was his actual mother tongue, and each Mijikenda language had its own slight variations, he could speak any other language in the Mijikenda family.

Isaac went to a local public primary school in his community that was run mostly by the nuns at a nearby mission. The language of instruction in the first three years of school was Swahili, but beginning at standard four, students were no longer expected to

speak Swahili in school. Isaac went through the old 763 education system, and for high school, he went to a boys only boarding junior seminary school that prepared young catholic boys to join the vocation of priesthood if they so chose. Isaac did not choose priesthood, but instead pursued a career in teaching. He had not planned on becoming a teacher, but because that was the only choice he was given, he accepted it and trained as a Mathematics and Geography teacher.

Isaac taught at various secondary schools and a teachers' training college in Kenya for several years before moving to the U.S. to pursue a PhD in curriculum and instruction with an emphasis in mathematics.

### *Faith*

At the time of this study, Faith was a PhD student in Mathematics education at a university in the Northeast region of the U.S. Faith was born and raised in Central Kenya to a family of four children. Her parents did not have a formal education but did some business for a living. While Kikuyu was the main language spoken in her family, she and her siblings would sometimes speak Swahili and English amongst themselves. They would however not speak a word of English to their parents, even though her father encouraged them to, because they felt it would be intimidating for their parents, who did not speak any English. At school, there was an emphasis on students speaking in English.

From my interactions with Faith, I noticed that she had a strong Kikuyu accent. She said to me that English was never a strength for her. Although her grammar was good, she pronounced her words with an accent, which was never a problem for me because I could understand her perfectly well, given the fact that I am highly familiar with the Kikuyu accent. Faith taught mathematics and chemistry in Kenya for seven years

before coming to the U.S. as a masters student in teaching and curriculum- mathematics education.

*Eva*

At the time of this study, Eva was a PhD student in education, and a Kiswahili language teacher at a public university in the Mideast region of the U.S. I first met Eva at a conference about three years previously. Subsequently, we kept in touch and talked on the phone a number of times. Eva came from a family of nine, with a father who held a college degree in English and Literature, and Philosophy and Religion. Her mother worked for the ministry of education in Kenya. Two American missionaries adopted her father when he was young and raised him in Kenya. Her father was born in 1947, and during that time, missionaries were looking for young Kenyan children to adopt (including children who already had families capable of raising them) with the intention of converting them to Christianity, and eventually training them to be priests. Her father did train to become a Catholic priest, but then he left to marry her mother.

Eva's parents raised a number of her uncles and aunts and paid for them to go to school since both of her parents had jobs. As a result, Eva was greatly influenced by these extended family members in her life. She would read the books that her uncles and aunts, who were slightly older, were reading, and as such was reading at a higher level than other children her age. Her father having a degree in literature also meant that they had an abundance of books at home that she liked to read. At some point, her father was the principal of a school, and they had Peace Corps coming to the school, and one of the Peace Corps ladies lived with them. She would buy Eva some books and encourage her to

read. At age nine, Eva was reading Maya Angelou books, and she was exposed to slavery and African American history.

Although Eva spoke in English with her parents, she also had a good grasp of Swahili as her family lived in a part of Nairobi inhabited by a lot of Tanzanians and Somalis before moving to Kakamega in Western Kenya. For high school, Eva went to a girls-only national school comprising of some of the country's best performing students. When she graduated high school, Eva was offered a place at a public university to study French and Education. Although teaching had not been her first choice, she went for it and studied French and education. The only teaching that Eva did in a high school was for her teaching practice, and when she graduated, she found a job with an NGO in Kenya where she worked until she moved to the U.S. to pursue graduate studies in education. To support her studies, Eva got a teaching assistantship teaching Kiswahili at her university.

### *Sally*

At the time of this study, Sally was a Certificate of Advanced Studies (CAS) student in Special Education at a university in the Northeast region of the U.S. Sally was also enrolled in a PhD program in Kenya, and she was in the CAS program through a collaboration project between her university and the university she attended in the U.S. I was introduced to Sally by a mutual acquaintance about two years ago. Sally was born in Nyeri to a family with five children. Her father was a high school teacher, and her mother was a housekeeper at a school. As a child, Sally picked up a lot of Kimeru, which was her mother's native language, because she spent the first few years of her life living in Meru district. Later on, her family moved to her father's home in Nyeri, where she learned

some Kikuyu, her father's native language. In their household, the children would speak Kimeru with their mother and amongst themselves, and Kikuyu with their father. The two languages were however close enough that they could all understand each other regardless of what language one was speaking. They would also mix the two languages if needed because her younger siblings, who were born after the move to Nyeri, were not very fluent in Kimeru, and her mother was not very fluent in Kikuyu. Sally was more fluent in Kimeru because that was also the language of instruction at school during the first three years of her schooling.

Being a school teacher, her father coached them in math and science at home, and that involved a lot of speaking in English as well. He bought them storybooks, and even subscribed to a children's magazine so that they could read at home. Sally corresponded with pen pals that she found on the magazine and filled out crossword puzzles, in addition to reading. As a result, Sally developed strong language competencies in English early on. Once Kimeru was dropped as the language of instruction in her standard four, the students were expected to speak only in English at school. Sally went to a high school where a majority of the students spoke a different mother tongue than her own. She learned a little bit of the language but spoke in English for the most part throughout high school.

Sally had always wanted to be a teacher. Her father was a teacher, and throughout her life, she had had admiration for her teachers and the work that they did. When she completed her A levels and failed to make the requirements for a public university, she applied and got into a diploma teacher training college. She specialized as a Geography and Agriculture teacher. After teaching high school for four years, she went back to



school to pursue a bachelor's degree in library science and special education, followed by a master's degree in education psychology. Once she completed those degrees, she worked as a special education teacher for several years before enrolling for a PhD program at a university in Kenya. It was in the course of pursuing her PhD in Kenya that she landed the opportunity to come to the U.S. to take some course work for a certificate of advanced study in disability studies.

### *Kariuki*

At the time of this study, Kariuki was a PhD student in Mathematics education at a university in the Northeast region of the U.S. Kariuki was born in the Korogocho area of Nairobi, which he described as a slum area. His parents did different kinds of semi-skilled work before eventually his father became the representative of a church at an NGO and his mother started a shop business. Both of Kariuki's parents are Kikuyu, and he associated himself with his father's clan, the "Wethaga". Kariuki explained that the legend of the origin of the Kikuyu community has it that the original mother and father of the Kikuyu community, Gikuyu and Mumbi, had nine daughters. One of the daughters was called Wethaga, and that is the daughter that his family is descended from. A descendant of Wethaga was called a "Mwithaga", and so Kariuki referred to himself as such.

As a city kid, Kariuki grew up speaking sheng' with his peers. He interacted with children from different linguistic backgrounds and picked up bits and pieces of many different languages. Within his family, Swahili was the language of communication most of the time. His mother had also grown up in the city and she spoke fluent Swahili. His father on the other hand, had moved to the city after high school, and although he spoke

some Swahili, he preferred English. His father bought newspapers, and so Kariuki read a lot of newspapers, and books, and he listened to the radio a lot.

Kariuki went to school in Nairobi, and the languages of instruction at the lower primary level were Swahili and English. After lower primary, English took over as the sole language of instruction. For high school, Kariuki decided to move from Nairobi and go to a high school around his rural home.

Kariuki's dream had been to either be a doctor or to study business. But after high school, he was offered a place at a public university to study mathematics and chemistry education. After graduating, Kariuki taught at various high schools in and outside Nairobi, and got two masters' degrees, one in teacher education and the other in guidance and counseling. He then moved to the U.S. to pursue a PhD in Mathematics education while his family stayed behind in Kenya.

### *Valerie*

I first met Valerie in Kenya about seventeen years ago when she was an English teacher at a high school in the western region of Kenya. I was about thirteen years old at the time, and I greatly admired Valerie's vibrant personality and her love for English. I aspired to be a writer at the time, and so I was drawn to Valerie's impeccable use of language. Valerie left for the U.S. shortly after our initial meeting in Kenya. I reconnected with her when I began this study. At the time of this study, Valerie was a PhD student in education at a university in the Southern region of the U.S.

Valerie was born and raised in Nairobi. She was the third of four children, and both of her parents were career people. Her father owned his own business and worked in the pharmaceutical arena, and her mother for a large communications corporation in

Kenya. Her grandparents also lived in Nairobi for a while, with her grandfather working for the railway company. Her extended family played a big role in her growing up. She would spend a lot of school vacations living with her cousins in any one of the cousins' houses or her own. They would move around to each other's homes and live there for a month or two at a time.

Although she grew up in Nairobi, her parents often insisted to her and her siblings that they did not belong in Nairobi. They wanted Valerie and her siblings to maintain strong ties with where they were really from, which was their rural home in Nyanza, and with their native language, Luo.

Valerie did not have much trouble with the English language in school. She went to schools where English was the dominant language of communication among both teachers and students. She was taught by teachers from Indian, European, and African backgrounds, and the student population was equally diverse, with Indian, white, and black African students. Valerie learned to speak some Luo because her parents made sure she spent some time in their rural home among relatives that spoke Luo. However, she noted that up until today, she still speaks it with an English accent. With English being the dominant language in her life, the English accent would creep in even when she was trying to speak Luo.

Valerie pointed out that after completing high school, she fell into teaching "by default". University admission into public universities came with a degree program already chosen for you based on your results from the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education examinations. She had wanted to go into journalism, but when she was admitted into the education program, her parents encouraged her to go for it, citing that

her grandmother had been a teacher too. Valerie decided to specialize in English and literature. She did some teaching at a private school in Nairobi, and an all girls boarding school in rural Nyanza before coming to the U.S. to pursue higher education.

### *Nicole*

At the time of this study, Nicole was a PhD student in literacy education at a university in the Northeast region of the U.S. Nicole was born and raised in the Eastern region of Kenya as one of nine children in her family. Her father was a veterinary officer and her mother was a housewife. At home, Nicole spoke Kimeru with her family members, and when she started school, Kimeru was the language of instruction for the first three years, though English and Swahili were also gradually introduced during that time. Beginning at standard four, English became the language of instruction and students were expected to speak in English while at school.

Her parents encouraged Nicole and her siblings to speak in English as much as possible. They never questioned it when she or her siblings were caned in school for speaking Kimeru. In fact, they would ask them why they were speaking Kimeru at school in the first place. However, at home, her family spoke Kimeru.

Nicole's plan after high school was to study law, but due to some technicalities, she ended up in education. She decided to specialize in English and literature. For her teaching practice, Nicole taught at a school in Nairobi for one school term. She did not teach high school after her graduation, but instead enrolled into a masters' program. As a masters' student, she taught some university level courses at her university in Kenya and also did some work with an NGO in Kenya. After completing her masters' program, she moved to the United States to pursue a PhD in literacy education.

## **Data Collection**

This dissertation study was conducted in the United States, with Kenyan teachers from different universities across the country. I conducted a total of fifty semi-structured qualitative interviews, five each with ten participants. The five interviews all consisted of open-ended questions that would allow for participants to tell their experiences in ways that best represented their experiences. The interview questions stemmed from the review of the literature and from the theoretical frameworks used in this study. For example, the literature indicated that parents viewed English as the language of upward mobility, and as such, they emphasized the speaking of English with their children, both at home and at school (Tembe & Norton, 2008; Jones & Barkhuizen, 2011; Campbell & Walsh 2010; Kitoko-Nsiku, 2007). Therefore, with each participant, I asked questions about his or her childhood, what his or her parents did for a living, what languages they spoke at home, what his or her parents' attitudes towards each of the languages they spoke were, what kinds of reading and writing they did at home, and so on. While the questions did stem from what was in the literature, and the theories, I was careful to frame the questions in open-ended and non-leading ways in order to avoid influencing what the participants did or did not say. The interview protocols for this dissertation study can be found in Appendix A.

The interviews progressed chronologically from the first one that asked about their early education, to the last one that asked about their future plans. The first interview protocol focused on the participant's experiences growing up in their families, and during their primary and secondary schooling in Kenya. As previously pointed out, this domain of interview protocols was informed by the literature that showed that

schools were some of the major sources of linguistic suppression (see for example Campbell & Walsh 2010; Jones & Barkhuizen, 2011; Kitoko-Nsiku, 2007; Muthwii, 2004; Orwenjo, 2012; Tembe & Norton, 2008). The second interview protocol focused on their experiences with teacher preparation. I chose to include this domain because I wanted to find out if the participants received any training in their teacher preparation programs that prepared them to work with multilingual learners.

The third interview protocol asked questions about their experiences with teaching after completing their training. Like with the first domain, this domain was informed by the same literature cited above, which showed that teachers in post-colonial African nations are often charged with teaching in English and enforcing English-only policies.

The fourth interview protocol was focused on their experiences in the United States, both as students, and as teaching assistants. This domain was informed by the literature from U.S. universities that showed that African international students (e.g. Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Caldwell, & Utsey, 2005; Gatua, 2014; Wamwara-Mbugua & Cornwell, 2010) and other linguistic and cultural minority students (e.g. Pailliotet, 1997; Shin, 2011) often experienced stigmatization of their vernacular languages and identities in their U.S. universities. Other literature shows that when African-born youth get to the United States, they get raced in ways that often don't make sense to them (Ripley Crandall, 2012). What we don't know is how people charged with teaching in English experience race in the United States. The fourth domain in this research was therefore designed to find out what the transnational Kenyan teachers'

experiences were in the United States with regards to language and identity, both of which are highly raced in the United States (Lippi-Green, 2004).

The fifth and final interview protocol asked the participants about their plans for the future. This interview protocol was not part of the four domains in the research questions, but I included a fifth interview with each participant in order to find out what their plans for the future were, and what their hopes for the future were given their experiences that they had shared in the first four interviews. This fifth protocol was deemed important because these teachers are future teacher educators, who will likely be charged with training other teachers to teach multilingual learners in English-speaking settings. And so their plans and their views on what they saw as ways they wanted to uphold those responsibilities in the future were central to this study.

The participants were interviewed over the course of seven months. Because I had a group of participants that was made up of graduate students who were very busy with their own work, I scheduled interviews for whenever they were available. However, I made sure to have at least a few days in between interviews for each participant so that I would have time to go over the interview again and take note of things I wanted to follow up on before conducting the next interview with the same participant.

Interviews were carried out face-to-face, over the phone, or via Skype, depending on the participant's location. The participants that lived and studied close enough that I could have face-to-face interviews with, I often met for the interviews and then spent some time socially with, often an hour or so to grab coffee or lunch. Some participants invited me into their houses, and on one occasion, which I mention in chapter five, a participant invited me to a party she was attending with other Kenyans. Some participants

lived out of state, and for these participants, I conducted either phone or Skype interviews. I did not spend as much time with these participants outside of our interviews, except for one, Eva, who took a deep interest in my research and contacted me often after our interviews were done to chat about various topics of mutual interest. One of the limitations of conducting interviews with some participants on Skype and over the phone was that these interviews were a little less personal in comparison to the interviews that were conducted face-to-face.

I arranged face-to-face interviews at various locations depending on what was most convenient for the participant. For example, some participants invited me to conduct interviews at their houses, some met with me on campus, and some met with me at various locations in the community, including one who met with me at her church. Each interview was audiotaped, and lasted about one hour. Naturally, some interviews got more data than others. Particularly, I got the most data from the first (primary and secondary schooling), third (teaching experiences in Kenya), and fourth (graduate education in the U.S.) interviews with participants, and the least data from the second (teacher training in Kenya) and the fifth (future plans and aspirations). This is because most participants did not have much to say about their teacher training since most of them did not recall receiving any training that focused on supporting the literacy learning of multilingual learners. The fifth interview was naturally shorter because it focused on the participants' plans and aspirations for the future. I also found that I did not need to ask some of the questions in the interview protocols, because in answering one question, participants often ended up answering one or more of the other questions that I had planned to ask. Because the interviews were semi-structured, and rather than stop them



when they answered more than one question at once, I let them keep talking, readjusted my protocol, and followed up accordingly to ensure that each of the questions was eventually covered, even though it might not have been in the order that they were arranged in my protocol.

All interviews were subsequently transcribed. I transcribed some interviews myself, but also employed the services of a transcriber for some interviews. I checked all interviews that were transcribed by the transcriber for accuracy by comparing the transcripts to the audio recordings. I then sent each participant a copy of their interviews to check for accuracy and also to keep for their own personal records.

### **Data Analysis**

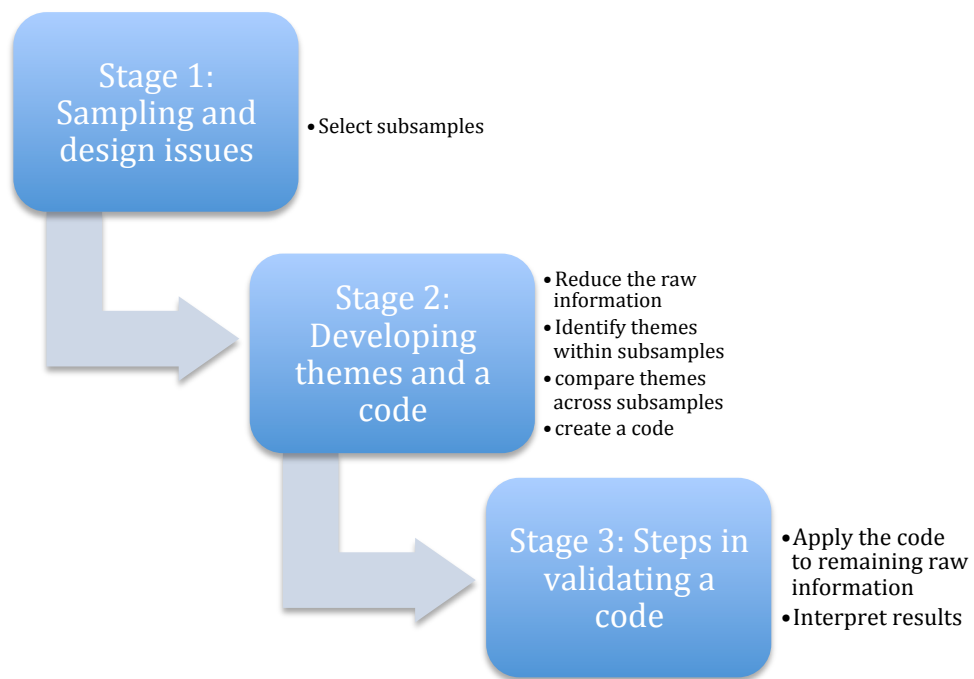
Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, and was also informed by post-colonial and linguistic imperialism theories. The decision to use thematic analysis was informed by the nature of this study, which looked at the language and identity experiences of ten Kenyan teachers. I was interested in finding out if there were themes that ran across their various experiences, so I selected thematic analysis as a method of analyzing the data. In thematic analysis, groups of qualitatively similar data are categorized together and labeled for the dominating qualities that make them similar (Boyatzis, 1998). These categories then form the anchors from which themes and codes are developed. I went into this dissertation study with a research question that was heavily influenced by my own positionality as a multilingual Kenyan teacher pursuing graduate education in the United States. The interview protocols that I created for this study were also heavily influenced by the literature and the theories that frame this study as was explained earlier in this chapter. Therefore, the data analysis process was also

heavily influenced by the literature, and the theories. I chose to follow Boyatzis' (1998) model for thematic analysis because his model has been successfully used by other researchers in education, including Skolaski (2012) and Ortaçtepe (2013), and also because of the level of detail that he provides in his book (Boyatzis,1998), which focuses exclusively on thematic analysis and discusses in great detail each step for analyzing data using this method. I was therefore able to follow this model and personalize it to my specific study by drawing from the specific theories that frame this study while also constantly returning to the research question as I analyzed the data.

In thematic analysis, the themes can be derived from existing theories and logical possibilities, or inductively from the data (Boyatzis, 1998). This dissertation study employed inductive, or data-driven methods to develop the themes and codes for the analysis of data. While the themes and codes in this dissertation study were developed from the data, the data came from interview protocols that were developed based on the theories that frame this study. For example, because post-colonial theory talks extensively about the domination and suppression of colonized languages and cultures, the protocols were designed to get participants talking about their experiences with their native languages as well as English, which in this case was the dominating language. I asked participants about the attitudes and ideologies that surrounded these languages in their homes and in their schools. In the analysis stage however, the themes were developed inductively from the data.

In analyzing the data, I was guided by Boyatzis' (1998) methods for conducting thematic data analysis because I was interested in looking at participants' experiences in terms of the themes that emerged across participants. Rather than focusing on individual

participants separately, I wanted to focus more on themes across participants and then examine how those themes manifested in individual participants' experiences. Having every participant's experiences represented individually was not possible because of the high number of participants and the large amount of data that was collected. Additionally, there were a lot of parallels in the experiences of the participants, and so it made more sense to consider those parallels in the form of themes across participants' experiences. The steps that I followed in conducting thematic analysis are summarized in figure 3.2 below.



*Figure 3.2: Stages and steps for thematic analysis*

I transcribed each interview as soon after the interview was conducted as possible. That provided me with an opportunity to hear the participant's interviews again. For the interviews that were transcribed by someone else, I listened back to the interview audios while comparing with the transcripts to check for accuracy while simultaneously building a deeper familiarity with each participant's experiences. Once I had a complete set of

interview transcripts for a participant, I read the transcripts over from the first one to the last in order to get a complete mental picture of each participant's experiences.

Boyatzis (1998) recommends that in the first stage of thematic analysis, a subsample be selected from the samples in the research data and used as the basis for developing a code. In the case of interviews as data sources, the interview transcripts form the basis for developing the codes. When I had all fifty interviews transcribed and I had read them over and established a mental picture of each participant's overall experiences, I picked a subsample of four participants' transcripts to use in the process of developing a code (Boyatzis, 1998). Of the four, I felt that two had fairly consistent positive feelings towards their African languages and identities, and the other two, at least at some points in their lives, had some negative feelings towards their African languages and identities. This categorization was in following Boyatzis' (1998) recommendation that groups of qualitatively similar experiences be grouped together in analysis. The participants picked were Faith and Sally (as the two that had fairly consistent positive feelings towards their African languages), and Daniel and Eva (as the two who at some points in their lives sought to distance themselves from their African languages). Note that all participants' names were changed to pseudonyms in order to protect their confidentiality.

The purpose of grouping participants in this way was not to categorize or label them but rather to help me process the data in a way that would make it possible for me to better understand each participant. In fact, none of the four participants fit perfectly into either category, because like every human, every participant in the study had contradictions and inconsistencies in their life experiences. While Faith had some

vernacular-influenced accent in her spoken English, and both she and Sally were very proud of their African languages and identities, Daniel had a barely noticeable accent and did not feel the need to highlight his African language or African identity. Eva was somewhere in between, not having had a lot of constant exposure to her African language growing up. Daniel was the only participant from all ten participants, to maintain the position of distancing himself from his African language and identity, although Eva did the same as a high school student before changing her perspective. Participants with relatively high connections to their African languages and participants with relatively low connections to the African languages became the anchors (Boyatzis, 1998), and the source for the subsamples for code development. Although this study was not concerned with measuring the degree to which the participants were connected to their African languages, but rather on their overall experiences with language and identity, following Boyatzis' (1998) recommendation for using subsamples to create a code was useful as a guide for creating a common code that could then be applied to all the interview data.

The second stage in Boyatzis' (1998) thematic analysis is the developing of themes and a code. In this step, I reduced the raw interview data by re-reading the interview transcripts and making a summary of each of their interviews. By doing this, I was mentally internalizing each of the participants' experiences as well as "consciously processing the information" (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 45). Although Boyatzis (1998) recommends doing this step with just the subsample, I made summaries of all ten participants' interviews, which then served as a roadmap for me in looking at each participant's complete profile and determining which themes were most prominent in their interview recounts of their experiences.

During this process, I was being guided by my research questions: What are the post-colonial language and identity experiences of transnational Kenyan teachers in graduate education programs in the United States in the following domains: a) their primary and secondary schooling in Kenya b) their teacher preparation in Kenya c) their teaching experiences in Kenya; and d) their graduate education in the United States? Therefore in my summaries, I used these questions as a guide, organizing the summary in the order of the research question, starting with their primary and secondary schooling experiences in Kenya and ending with their graduate education experiences in the U.S.

The summaries included information about their family background, such as their linguistic and cultural background, the occupations of their parents, the languages they spoke at home, and the languages that were emphasized within their families. I also included information about the languages they spoke at school, and how different languages were treated within their schools. If a participant said that they were punished for speaking a certain language in school, I included that information. If they said that they were not punished for speaking any particular language, but that it was expected that they speak a certain language, I also included that information. None of the participants said that there were neither specific expectation nor specific consequences for speak African languages in school. Next, I included information about their teacher training, which included their teaching practice. All participants said they did not take any specific courses that focused on preparing them to teach in multilingual/multicultural classrooms. Therefore, the information about their teacher training that was included focused on their experiences with teaching practice, which is the time they spent in schools as student teacher. Finally, I included information about their experiences with language and

identity in the United States. I included information they shared about how their languages, nationalities, race, and accents were perceived and treated in the classes they took as students as well as in the classes they taught as teaching assistants. I also included general information that they shared about how they experienced race, language, and identity in the United States.

While the organization of the summaries was influenced by the research question, the information that was included was heavily a result of the theories that guide this dissertation study. For example, English linguistic imperialism theory (Phillipson, 1992) is concerned with the ways that English, as a colonial language, dominates and suppresses other languages. With this theory at the back of my mind, I looked for instances where participants talked about their relationships with English and with the other languages in their linguist repertoire. Since the interviews protocols were also influenced by theory, it was only natural that although data analysis was data-driven, theory had an influence on the data collected.

After reducing the raw data, the next step was to identify themes within the samples. In identifying the themes in the data, I was guided by the theories that frame this dissertation study (post-colonial theories, and linguistic imperialism theories). For example, in post-colonial theory, Said (1979) talks about the idea that the West misrepresents colonized peoples to themselves and makes them believe in their own inferiority by constantly telling them that they are primitive and less than. In reading through the transcripts, I identified instances of this misrepresentation, and the subsequent belief in one's own inferiority in the participants' interviews. I would identify instances of this, for example, when a participant talked about laughing at his or her peers

when they spoke African languages or with African accents. Or when people got upset and disassociated themselves with someone because that person liked to speak in an African language. Kariuki, for example, said that his colleagues would get upset with him when he spoke Kikuyu, deeming it inappropriate for the workplace. As a student, Sally also talked about laughing at her peers when they spoke with mother tongue accents.

The theories (post-colonial theories and linguistic imperialism theories) also elucidate the suppression of non-dominant languages and identities by dominant Western languages and cultures (see for example Bhabha, 2000; Phillipson, 1992; Said, 1979). Given this knowledge from the theories, one of the questions that I asked participants in interview protocol one was: How was the language policy enforced in your K-12 schooling? In responding to this question, one of the participants, Sally, said the following:

First there was this thing we used to call *monto*. *Monto* was like a big piece of round metal, which was very difficult to hide. And so if you were heard speaking it, I think it would start with the class prefect at the beginning of the day. So the first person he hears speak Kimeru gets the *monto*. If you get the *monto*, it was so embarrassing. So you don't really want anyone to know you have the *monto*. And you try as best as you can so that you don't use Kimeru anymore. And you hide it and you keep looking out for other people when they talk. You find a group talking or a pair, if they mention a Kimeru word like this, you just give them and you run away very happy. And the teachers also used to cane us if they heard you speak in Kimeru. They would cane us severely. (Interview 1 with Sally, 7-5-2015)



So as I was reading this data from Sally during analysis, I was looking for words and phrases that fit in with or went against the knowledge that we have from the theories reviewed in chapter two. And so I marked up and made notes on the data as in the text below. My notes are in bold italics.

First there was this thing we used to call *monto* (***This is consistent with Wa Thiong'o (1986). He had the same object as a student during colonization period in Kenya. Monto was like a big piece of round metal, which was very difficult to hide (Was this intentional, so other students could see who had the monto? The theories say othered populations are often taught to associate their languages and cultures with shame).*** And so if you were heard speaking it, I think it would start with the class prefect at the beginning of the day. So the first person he hears speak Kimeru gets the *monto*. If you get the *monto*, it was so embarrassing (***shaming them for speaking African languages. Consistent with what the theories say colonial powers do in order to maintain the power hierarchies).*** So you don't really want anyone to know you have the *monto*. And you try as best as you can so that you don't use Kimeru anymore (***Both post-colonial and linguistic imperialism theories say the effects of suppressing the colonized is that they start to distance themselves from their languages. Silencing?).*** And you hide it and you keep looking out for other people when they talk (***Another aspect of colonization is that the colonized are turned against each other. Sounds here like now they had to pass on the embarrassment of the monto to their peers).*** You find a group talking or a pair, if they mention a Kimeru word like this, you just give them and you run away very happy. And the

teachers also used to cane us if they heard you speak in Kimeru. They would cane us severely (*Severe punishment for speaking in African languages*). (Interview 1 with Sally, 7-5-2015)

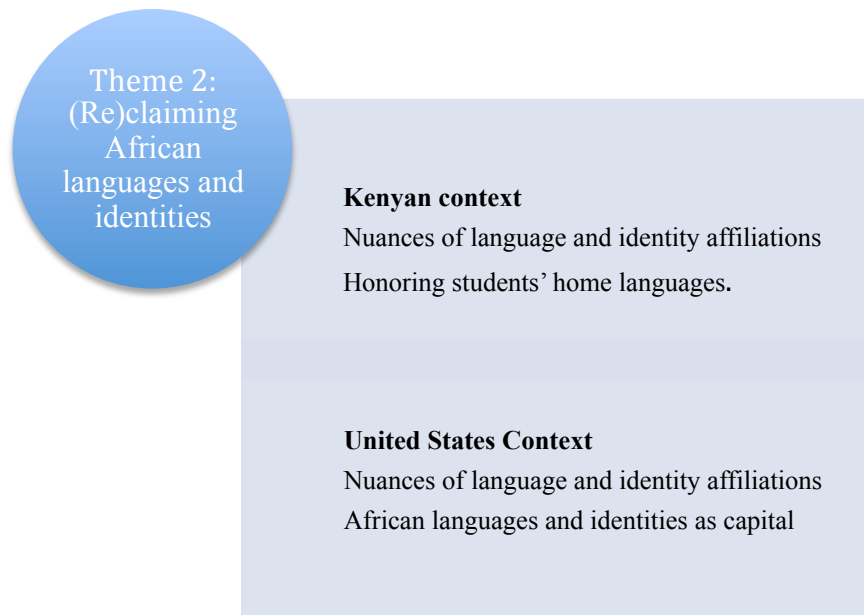
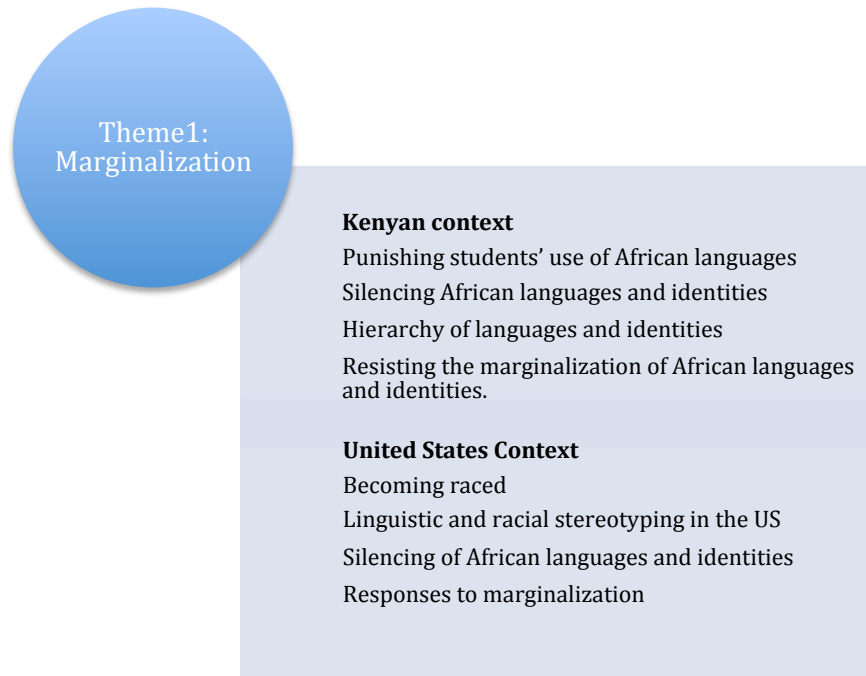
In this example, both post-colonial and linguistic imperialism theories provided a way for me to think about the data and a way for me to make sense of what the participants were saying. In doing this, the theories determined how I analyzed the data by determining the way I understood their words and the way I coded the data.

Although I made summaries for all the ten participants, I initially focused on the four that I had selected as my subsamples in trying to identify the themes. I found that most of the participants had experiences that were quite similar, and so it made sense to follow Boyatzis' (1998) suggestion and focus on the subsample to start with as I worked on identifying themes. I compared the summaries made from the interviews of participants in the subsample that had relatively high connections with their African languages and identities (Sally and Faith), looking for similarities and patterns within the subsamples. I also did the same comparison between the two participants from the subsample that had relatively low connections to their African languages and identities (Daniel and Eva). As a point of emphasis, the focus of this dissertation study was not to measure the degree of connection to their African languages and identity, but this anchor was used simply as a guide in the development of themes and a code for analysis. As a result of the comparisons made within subsamples, I identified the themes that arose in each of the two subsamples.

After identifying the themes within subsamples, I moved to the next step, which involved comparing the themes that arose from the data across subsamples. The themes

in Faith and Sally' interviews were compared to those in Daniel and Eva's interviews. At this point, I was looking for similarities and differences in the themes that emerged from the data of the two anchor groups (Boyatzis, 1998). I found that the themes were relatively similar in both groups. What varied was mostly the amount of importance or significance that the different participants placed on the various themes. For example, all participants experienced marginalization in some form as black, international students in the United States. But not all participants thought it was a significant part of the way they experienced their lives in the U.S. Some participants actively took notice of the marginalization while others ignored it or found ways to give the situations the benefit of the doubt. An example from the Kenyan context would be that all participants were proud of their African languages and identities. But while some participants felt it was a big part of who they were as individuals, some felt their African languages did not play a significant role in how they thought about themselves.

Once I completed coming up with a list of themes, I moved on to the next step, which involved creating a code. For this step, I wrote a list of the preliminary themes while keeping in mind the differences in the way the two groups of subsamples expressed this theme. The overarching preliminary themes were identified as the theme of marginalization, and the theme of (re)claiming African languages and identities. These larger themes were then broken down into subthemes, as outlined in figure 3.3 below, which then became the code that informed what got included from the data.



*Figure 3.3: Themes and subthemes from the data*

The third and final stage in the thematic analysis process was the validation of the codes. Boyatzis (1998) points out that “[t]he strength and power of the data-driven approach is that it uses, as much as possible, the way in which the themes appear in the

raw information as the starting point in code development. The validation with the entire sample is a cross-check” (p. 51). To validate the codes developed from the data, I applied the codes to all the data. That means that while I had focused on the four participants that were picked as a subsample in identifying themes and creating the code, at this stage, the codes were used to check for the identified themes in all the remaining participants’ interviews. The subthemes changed a few times throughout the coding and writing process as multiple subthemes got compressed into one and vice versa. The themes and subthemes represented in figure 3.3 are however the final themes and subthemes that were used as the final codes that were applied to the data and that determined the data included in, and the organization of, the findings chapters in this dissertation.

### **Researcher Subjectivities**

Like all of my participants, I am a multilingual, black, Kenyan student in a graduate program in education at a U.S. University. The languages that I have in my linguistic toolkit are English, Swahili, and Kisii. Conversationally, Swahili is my most comfortable language as it is the language I grew up speaking, and the language I use with those closest to me. English is my most comfortable language in writing. I can write all three languages well, but since English has been the language of instruction throughout my schooling life, I have developed more academic literacies in it than any of the other languages. Kisii is my native African language. While I can understand almost anything that is said in Kisii, I can speak only a very basic amount of the language.

I spent some time thinking about who I am in relationship to my chosen topic of study. My shared background with my participants makes me an insider to the experience of being a black, African-born, multilingual teacher in a western university. However, I

do not assume that my experiences and those of my participants are the same. Kenyan people are diverse and their experiences are diverse as well. Throughout the study, I was aware of my own personal investment in the topic because as a multilingual language teacher, I have obvious subjectivities regarding issues of language and identity. I was deeply aware that somehow, I did have an agenda going in to do this work. I wanted to challenge the deficit mentalities that, as the literature reveals, institutions, societies, and even we as Africans, have about our own languages.

I was born in a rural farming village in western Kenya in the mid 1980s before my family moved to Malaba, a small town bordering Kenya and Uganda. Both of my parents were multilingual in Kisii, Swahili, and English. My mother spent a few years as an untrained primary school teacher before I was born, but gave up teaching to be a stay-at-home mother. My father was an immigration officer before starting his own insurance business. Because my father worked in the city, I spent the first few years of my life living with my mother. She spoke a mix of Kisii and Swahili to us, but we always answered her back in Swahili, regardless of what language she spoke to us in. This was largely because we lived in an area where the predominant languages were Teso and Swahili. Teso was the language of the local community, but being a border town with a lot of business happening at the border of Kenya and Uganda, Swahili was also widely spoken.

Both of my parents died when I was about ten years old. My oldest sister, who was a sophomore in college at the time, took on the responsibility of raising me and four other siblings. In the absence of our parents, nobody ever spoke Kisii in our house, except

when members of our extended family visited. My older siblings were fluent enough in Kisii, but they did not go out of their way to speak it.

Fifteen years ago, I would probably have been quite proud of the fact that I am not very fluent in Kisii. I learned from an early age that it is more prestigious, and more classy, to be able to speak English, or even Swahili, than one's native tongue. I was taught, in many direct and indirect ways, that my native tongue was primitive, and that it was something I should disassociate myself with. For example, in primary school, we had a disk that was passed around to those who spoke African languages and Swahili in school. Those who got the disk would then be caned or given some manual work to do at the end of the school day. Since I did not speak Kisii conversationally, whenever I got the disk, it was because I spoke Swahili. My fluency in English was very minimal before high school, and I did not fancy making a fool of myself by trying to speak in English, so the only way I could avoid the disk was to be quiet in school. Additionally, instruction was largely teacher-centered, and we were not expected to speak much in class.

I went to all-girls boarding schools from standard five all the way through high school. This alienated me even further from the Kisii language and identity since the boarding schools I went to were predominantly Luo. In boarding school, there were cliques of girls, and they tended to be based on social backgrounds. Girls from the city had their own cliques, and they spoke English and sheng'. Girls from small towns also had their cliques and they spoke Swahili. Girls from rural areas also stuck together and spoke their mother tongues whenever they could, since speaking African languages was generally not allowed. I was a loner. I could fit in with just about anybody when I was being social, but for the most part I was distant and dreamy. I liked to read. I read any and

every novel I could get my hands on. I read novels even during instruction in class, and that got me in trouble a lot. I also liked to write stories, which I was happy to share with anyone that would read them. I gained a reputation as a good writer, and teachers sometimes asked me to help other students with their writing. Although I was considered very good in English, I did not feel comfortable speaking it. I spoke as much of it as was required of me in class, but outside class I spoke Swahili. My discomfort with spoken English was mostly a fear of slipping and saying something with a Kisii or other vernacular accent. I worked hard not to let my Swahili or my English be tainted by a vernacular accent. A mother tongue influenced accent was often reason enough to be teased and bullied by other girls. In high school for example, the majority of the girls were Luo, and being a rival neighbor to the Kisii community, Kisii in the school were often teased and called names, especially if they had a Kisii accent. Fortunately for me, I did not have a Kisii accent. My accent was quite neutral, so it was hard to tell which community I was from just from my accent. As such, even though everyone knew I was Kisii, I never got bullied for it. But I still had the fear at the back of my mind that I might accidentally say something with a Kisii accent if I tried to speak in English.

As a teacher, I worked at a high school in the heart of Nairobi where vernacular languages were almost never spoken. The school had both the regular Kenyan 844 education system, and the British system housed under the same roof. The British system had mostly Indian students while the 844 system had mostly black African students, with a few Indians. The two systems had separate classrooms, but the students interacted with each other during break time and lunch time. I worked with form one and form two students in the 844 system as a French and Literature in English teacher. The students in



my classroom spoke a mix of sheng', English, Swahili, and French during French lessons. The school had the same English-only policy as most other schools, but this policy was almost never enforced, except in cases where students spoke Swahili or sheng' in a disruptive or disrespectful manner. For example, some students would use disrespectful sheng' words for teachers because they believed the teachers did not understand the language due to the generational gap. In such cases, students would be caned, or suspended, but not necessarily because they spoke sheng'.

Being a city school, there were not many students that struggled with language. Language issues were usually connected to discipline issues. There was a tendency among teachers to have stereotypical beliefs about the students that spoke sheng'. They were mostly from the East side of the city, mostly from poor backgrounds, and mostly black African. The Indian students did not speak sheng'. They came from affluent homes, and were mostly in the British system. Some black African students also came from affluent homes, and these students tended to speak English, with some of them being in the British system, and some in the Kenyan 844 system. Teachers' perceptions of students' abilities were highly prejudiced against the sheng' speaking students from poor backgrounds.

After my training, and the subsequent time spent in teaching practice, I moved to the United States to pursue a Masters degree in creative writing. I still wanted to pursue work in the field of education, and so after graduating from the masters program, I decided to pursue a doctorate in literacy education.

I became interested in the topic of language and identity because ever since I came to the United States, I have been constantly made aware of my identity as a “non-

native speaker” of the English language, especially given the fact that I am a language teacher currently studying for a doctorate in literacy education. When I first arrived in the U.S. in 2007, I could barely understand what anyone was saying. Americans seemed to speak very fast, faster than what I remembered from watching American shows on TV. Part of it was being face to face with them and having to communicate with them, as opposed to the distance that TV creates. They could barely understand what I was saying either.

Throughout the first few years of being a graduate student in the U.S., I experienced many moments of doubt that were a result of my accent. My language was actually fluent, and my writing was good, but I had an accent that often came in the way of my confidence in expressing myself in front of non-Kenyans. I was that quiet, black African woman in classrooms that were almost always over 90% white. Luckily, through the years of being in the U.S., my spoken English became a little clearer, and I developed the ability to switch accents depending on the context I was in. Additionally, in my doctoral studies, I was introduced to a rich array of literature on bilingualism and biculturalism, race, and other topics that opened up my mind to the invaluable assets that my multilingualism and multiculturalism are. I am no longer as concerned about my accent when speaking out in public, although inevitably, given the politics of race, language, and nationality that are pervasive in the United States, I face many situations in my roles as student and teaching assistant where colleagues and students stereotype and stigmatize me as an international scholar.

However, when it comes to real life, the issues of language and bilingualism in the United States are complicated. I am the mother of three children now, including six-

year-old twin boys who are enrolled in public schools here in the U.S. Before the twins started school, we spoke to them exclusively in Swahili. We noticed that the language barrier made it difficult for them to interact with other children. This became a real problem once they started school and the teachers expressed concern about their language skills. Both boys received speech therapy for two years. As their parents, my husband and I had to make the difficult choice to switch to speaking to them in English rather than Swahili at home. As much as I had read the literature on the benefits of bilingualism, I wanted to see my sons succeed in U.S. schools. I wanted them to be able to speak the language that their friends spoke with a fluency that would afford them confidence among their peers and their teachers. It became a dilemma of whether we should instill cultural and linguistic pride in our children by teaching them Swahili, or whether we should make their lives as American children easier by focusing on their English first. In considering the options, I was reminded of Delpit (2002)'s words, written about when she faced a similar dilemma with her daughter suddenly starting to speak Ebonics after moving to a predominantly African American school:

So when my child's language reflects that of some of her peers, I feel the eyes of "the other" negatively assessing her intelligence, her competence, her potential, and yes, even her moral fiber. So I forgive myself for my perhaps overly emotional reaction, my painful ambivalence, for I know that it is less a rejection of the language form created by my people, and more a mother's protective instinct to insure that her child's camouflage is in order when she must encounter potential enemy forces. (Delpit, 2002, p. 38)

We chose to make our Kenyan American children's lives easier by focusing our efforts on teaching them English. While my husband and I still spoke to each other in Swahili, we spoke to the children in English, and with time, they were fluent enough that they did not need speech services anymore at school. Once we passed through that hurdle with English, we started to introduce Swahili. The children were mostly amused by the language, but they were also curious to learn it.

Conducting this study allowed me an opportunity to reflect on these opportunities and the language choices that I have made for myself and my family through the years. I regret that I never made a serious effort to learn my vernacular language, Kisii. And that the language will, in all likelihood, not be passed down to the next generation of my family. I hope that my efforts to pass Swahili on to my children will be successful. My experience has been that the reality of the current world sometimes pushes parents to make choices they believe to be in the best interest of their children, even when ideologically, they might not be the best choices. In sharing about my background and positionality, I would like to be upfront about who I am in relationship to this study.

In conducting this dissertation research study, I considered the subjectivities that might come with my background, and thought about how those subjectivities might affect my research. As an insider, there was the danger that I might be too close to the experiences of my participants to really dig deep into their own experiences. In choosing qualitative interview as the method of inquiry therefore, I was deliberately taking steps to pick a methodology that would center the participants' experiences while guarding against the obstacles to listening (Wengraf, 2001) that might come as a result of my insider positionality. I kept in mind that I had my own subjectivities in this research as an

insider, and as such, I reminded myself every step of the way that my research question was concerned with the participants' experiences, whether or not they aligned with my own, and this ensured that I kept the focus of the study on the participants.

I came into this study with this insider status that offered both advantages and challenges to my work. One of the advantages was that my insider status made it easy for me to talk about this topic with the participants. They opened up to me in ways that might not have been possible with an outsider interviewer. The participants and I had a shared background that connected us in a mutual understanding of the experiences that they shared with me in this research. Additionally, once in a while, some participants would switch to Swahili during the interview, and I would go with the flow, speaking in whatever language they initiated. All my participants were fluent in English, and the few times they switched to Swahili, it was usually in an attempt to emphasize a point. In these instances, during transcription, I transcribed their words in the language they said them in and then added translations in parenthesis. I was able to quickly establish trust with each participant, something that might have taken an outsider researcher a longer time to do. I had a genuine interest in hearing about my participants' experiences, something that is crucial in qualitative interview methodology (Seidman, 2013), and I found the process of interviewing them quite satisfying.

On the flip side, one of the disadvantages that came with my insider status was that because the participants knew that I understood what they were talking about, they sometimes neglected to explain what they meant by certain references. And I often had to ask questions that I already knew the answers to. For example, if a participant told me that after high school, they were "called to the university to study education", I already

knew that that meant they went to a public university, and education was chosen for them as a program of study. But I had to ask them to explain it to me in more detail. My insider status however served me more than it did otherwise, because in addition to helping to make establishing trust with my participants easier, it made the study more comfortable and mutually enjoyable for the participants and me.

In her contributions to post-colonial theory, Gayatri Spivak talks about the subaltern's voice and the representation of the subaltern voice in research (Spivak, 1994). As researchers, we are faced with the challenge of how we conduct and represent research with participants from marginalized communities. We have to question whether we are highlighting their voices or silencing their voices and promoting the orientalist colonial agenda of misrepresenting their lives (Said, 1979). Recognizing that I had a responsibility to my participants, I approached this dissertation study with sensitivity and a determination to make the process respectful of the participants and their experiences, in order to avoid falling into the danger of colonizing their voices, as Spivak (1994) warns in her essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?*.

Spivak (1994) talks about the third world intellectual in western academies and questions whether these intellectuals represent the subaltern in ways that allow for the subaltern to “speak” while making their experiences and interests known, or whether they only further the agendas of their western academy mentors in their representations. Collins (2004a) also talks about the “outsider within” dilemma of African American women intellectuals, which often renders them invisible while also serving as a tremendous source of strength for them as they do the necessary work of resistance that is needed to remedy the injustices faced by their communities. Faced with the “outsider

within” dilemma, it is often tempting to suppress one’s difference and conform to the pressures of the academy to promote dominant ways of knowing, but Collins (2004b) argues that another option is to use that tension to encourage the institutionalization of outsider within ways of knowing as well.

As an “outsider within” (Collins, 2004a) in my academic program (being a black woman from a third world country, and operating within a field that is largely dominated by white Americans), I went into this research work knowing that I had a great responsibility to my participants, all of whom can also be said to be outsiders within in education programs in the United States. It was important to me as a researcher, to ensure that my representation of the participants’ voices was as genuine and as reciprocal as possible. While my interviews were semi-structured, I allowed a lot of room for participants to talk about their experiences on their own terms. If, for example, a participant was very interested in talking about a particular aspect of the interview at length, I would let them. And if they did not wish to pursue a certain aspect as closely, I respected that as well. As a researcher, it was my responsibility to read the body language of my participants in order to be able to tell what interested them and what made them uncomfortable. It is worth noting though that all the participants in this study were quite enthusiastic about sharing their experiences and I almost never had to back away from a line of questions since the topic seemed interesting to the participants, and our shared backgrounds made for a comfortable interviewer-interviewee relationship.

I worked to maintain the interest and trust of my participants by trying to make the experience as flexible and mutually beneficial as possible. For example, I understood that I was asking a lot by asking them to share their experiences with me. And so, I tried

to spend some time chatting informally with them after the interviews. Given our shared national background, some participants were interested in knowing what my experiences were regarding the topic of this study. After the interviews, I spent some time chatting with them, trying to keep the focus on them and their experiences but also cautiously sharing bits of mine (Seidman, 2013) in order to maintain trust. Lincoln and González y González (2008) suggest that one of the ways western and non-western scholars can engage in decolonizing methodologies when working with colonized populations is to understand the researcher as a living part of the study. They note that

To understand the interpretation of the results, and even to try to get the most of the meaning from the study, we as readers need to know as many details of the author's life and her stance regarding the study. The author, as a living part of the study, has to introduce himself/herself to the reader, "opening" his/her presence within the study, giving us some clarity about how the study was developed, how the analysis proceeded, the results, the participants, and then giving a big and transparently clear picture of the "story." (Lincoln & González y González, 2008, p. 794)

In working to ensure that I was respecting my participants and their experiences, I constantly reflected on my own positionality in this study. I also decided to include detailed information about my background in this chapter as a way to acknowledge that my background was a "living part of the study" (Lincoln & González y González, 2008). (Seidman (2013) cautions that it is pointless to pretend that the interviewer has no effect on the interviewing. Instead, he advocates that interviewers should recognize and affirm the possibilities of their influence as human instruments of the interview process.



Qualitative interview recognizes that “the human interviewer can be a marvelously smart, adaptable, flexible instrument who can respond to situations with skill, tact, and understanding (Seidman, 2013, p. 26). Furthermore, qualitative researchers manage their own subjectivity by collecting rich data and reflecting on their positionality within their studies (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). I recognized my insider positionality to this study and let that work for me as an asset throughout the research process.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter started off with an introduction where I reiterated the focus of the study and provided a description of qualitative interview as the method of inquiry that was used in this dissertation study. I provided a rationale for why I picked qualitative interview for this study by indicating that qualitative interview is concerned with participants’ personal experiences and the meanings that they make of those experiences (Wengraf, 2001), and I pointed out that after reviewing the literature, I discovered that there was a gap in the literature where teachers’ personal experiences were often not highlighted. I also provided a rationale for the four domains that are included in the research question, and explained how the literature informed the formulation of those domains.

Next, I discussed the participant recruitment and selection processes. I outlined the criteria that was used to recruit the participants, and noted that ultimately, everyone that met the criteria, was recruited, and was able to complete the study was selected as a participant. Ten transnational Kenyan teachers participated in and completed all five interviews, making a total of fifty interviews for this dissertation study. I provided an

introduction of all ten participants that included some biographical information about each of them.

The next section discussed the data collection processes. I described what each interview was about and how those interview protocols were created, as well as how and where the interviews were conducted. I pointed out that because the participants were spread out in different universities across the country, I conducted some interviews face-to-face, and others on Skype or over the phone. Each interview lasted about an hour. I also pointed out the ways that the data was transcribed and managed after it was collected.

A description of the data analysis processes followed. In this section, I provided a step-by-step description of how I analyzed the data. I explained what I did for each step and provided examples for how I incorporated the theories that guided this study in the data analysis process.

Finally, I discussed my own subjectivities in relationship to this dissertation study. In an attempt to be upfront about my positionality, I provided a detailed account of my background and the experiences that I have had with the topic under study. Drawing from various theorists, including Collins (2004a) and Spivak (1994), I explored my subjectivities as both an insider and an “outsider within” (Collins, 2004a), as well as my being a third world intellectual in a western academy (Spivak, 1994) in relationship to the issues of representation in post-colonial research.

The methods described in this chapter resulted in the findings that I will present in the next two chapters. Chapters four and five are organized by theme, with chapter four covering the theme of marginalization, and chapter five covering the theme of

(re)claiming African languages and identities. The main idea that came from analysis of data in this dissertation study was that the transnational teachers interviewed experienced marginalization of their African languages and identities in both the Kenyan and the United States contexts, but they reclaimed those languages and identities as important assets in their teaching of literacies in English. Chapters four and five illustrate these findings.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### “THE WHOLE DAY THEY NEVER OPENED THEIR MOUTH”: THE MARGINALIZATION OF AFRICAN LANGUAGES AND IDENTITIES IN KENYA AND THE UNITED STATES

Chapter four explores the theme of marginalization, which was one of two major themes that emerged from the data in this study. As a theme in this dissertation study, marginalization refers to the ways in which participants’ identities as speakers of African languages were suppressed and/or devalued while dominant linguistic and cultural identities were promoted as superior. In the Kenyan context, participant’s experiences with linguistic and identity marginalization included the punishing, shaming, and silencing of African languages in their schools. In the U.S. context, their experiences of linguistic and identity marginalization included the ways in which participants were made to feel “less than” because of their cultural and linguistic backgrounds, as well as their accents.

The theme of marginalization was evident in both the Kenyan and United States context interviews of all participants. The analysis of data in this dissertation study was guided by the research question and the theoretical frameworks in this study (post-colonial theories and language imperialism theories), and was done using thematic analysis. The theories informed the interview protocols, and as a result, the interview process in itself (and by extension the data collected) was influenced by post-colonial theories and language imperialism theories. Thematic analysis, as was used in this dissertation, drew from the work of Boyatzis (1998). I followed his recommended steps to thematic analysis while ensuring the process was guided by the research question and

the theories specific to this study. The data analysis process for this dissertation study is explained in more detail in chapter three.

During the analysis process, marginalization emerged as a major theme across all participants' interviews, and under this theme, the following subthemes were identified: punishing students' use of African languages, silencing African languages and identities, hierarchy of languages and identities, and resisting the marginalization of African languages and identities. While the theme of marginalization ran across all the participants' interviews, each participant had unique experiences as will be evident throughout this chapter.

This chapter draws on post-colonial theories and linguistic imperialism theories, which are discussed in greater detail in chapter two, to frame the discussion of the theme of marginalization of African languages and identities in the Kenyan and United States contexts. The findings under this theme will be organized by context, with the Kenyan context coming first, followed by the United States context. Because the data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, which is concerned with themes emerging from the data (Boyatzis, 1998), the presentation of the findings will go back and forth between the participants' experiences as students, and as teachers, with themes and subthemes being the major points of organization. Below, I will begin with participants' experiences of marginalization in the Kenyan context by discussing the subthemes a) punishing students' use of African languages, b) silencing African languages and identities, c) hierarchy of languages and identities, and d) resisting the marginalization of African languages and identities.

## Kenyan Context

*“The teachers also used to cane us. If they heard you speak in Kimeru, they would cane us severely. After that you wouldn’t concentrate well in your studies. So the whole time you are just thinking about the pain and hating the teacher”*(Interview 1 with Sally, 7-5-2014). These words were spoken by Sally, a Special Education teacher from Kenya. At the time of the interview, she was taking courses at a university in the U.S. while simultaneously enrolled in a PhD program in Special Education at a university in Kenya. Sally was narrating her experiences of being severely beaten and shamed for speaking her mother tongue in primary and secondary school. Sally’s experiences were echoed by most of the teacher participants in this study. All ten participants in the study experienced punishment in some form for speaking African languages in their primary and/or secondary schools in Kenya. For most of the participants, as will be revealed in more detail below, punishment was by corporal punishment, manual labor, or public humiliation. But for some, like Eva and Mercy, punishment for speaking their African languages in school was more covert. For example, Eva went to a high school where speaking African languages was viewed with contempt, and led the speakers of those languages being perceived as belonging to a lower social class. In Mercy’s racially diverse primary school (the student population composed of about two thirds Indian students, and one third black African students), speaking African languages was considered “bad manners”, as it was viewed as a way for black African children to exclude the Indian students in the school. The black African students therefore had to leave their African languages at home and speak only in English at school, in order for the Indian children to feel comfortable. These, and other experiences of marginalization

will be discussed in the sections that follow. The subthemes that came up under the theme of marginalization were: punishing students' use of African languages, silencing African languages and identities, hierarchy of languages and identities, and resisting the marginalization of African languages and identities.

### **Punishing Students' Use of African Languages**

In many formerly colonized African countries, a majority of teachers are bi/multilingual, as are most people in those nations, but the negative attitudes towards native African languages conspire to make the instruction these teachers provide continue the colonial agenda of stripping students of their native identities (Kitoko-Nsiku, 2007; Wa Thiong'o, 1986). Participants in this study narrated their experiences with teachers rounding them up for speaking African languages, and then caning, humiliating, or making them perform manual labor for that "offense". A common system that was used to identify students that spoke African languages in the participants' experiences was the use of the *monto*. In the excerpt below, Sally explains how the *monto* worked in her primary school when she was a student.

First there was this thing we used to call *monto*. *Monto* was like a big piece of round metal, which was very difficult to hide. And so if you were heard speaking it, I think it would start with the class prefect at the beginning of the day. So the first person he hears speak Kimeru gets the *monto*. If you get the *monto*, it was so embarrassing. So you don't really want anyone to know you have the *monto*. And you try as best as you can so that you don't use Kimeru anymore. And you hide it and you keep looking out for other people when they talk. You find a group talking or a pair, if they mention a Kimeru word like this, you just give them and

you run away very happy. And the teachers also used to cane us if they heard you speak in Kimeru. They would cane us severely. (Interview 1 with Sally, 7-5-2015)

Sally described the extent of the corporal punishment that was inflicted on them for speaking Kimeru as being severe. In fact, in the quote at the beginning of this section, she mentioned that the caning was so severe that the whole day the student would be thinking about the pain and hating the teacher. To top off the pain from the caning forming a distraction for the student that lasted throughout the day, the students in Sally's school were also forced to find other students to give the *monto* in order to get rid of the embarrassment of holding the *monto* and instead pass it on to somebody else. In addition to creating bad feelings in the students about their teachers, and potentially creating animosity among students, this practice took valuable time away from the students that could have been used more productively on their academics.

The word *monto*, as explained to me by participants, came from the English word "monitor". The "monitor" was used in schools during colonization to monitor those who spoke African languages so that they could be punished for speaking those languages (Wa Thiong'o, 1986). This practice continued in schools way after independence, and still continues to be practiced in some schools today. Gathering from descriptions by various participants, the *monto* is often a physical object, such as a piece of wood, a bone, a piece of metal, or something that is hung around the "language offender's" neck. Sometimes it has inscriptions on it to the effect that the holder of that object does not speak English. The *monto* worked in similar ways in most participants' experiences. The object started off with the class monitor (a student who was given a leadership role among her peers). The class monitor gave it to the first person they heard speaking an



African language. This person passed it on to the first person they heard speaking an African language, and on and on till the end of the day when the last person to receive it handed it in to the teacher in charge. The last person to handle it would have to name whoever gave it to them, and the naming would follow the chain backwards all the way back to the person that got it from the class monitor. All the “language offenders” would then be punished by use of corporal punishment, manual labor, or whatever punishment the teacher chose.

In Kariuki’s secondary school, they had names for people who appeared on the list of people who spoke African languages in school, as described in the excerpt below:

We used to be caned. And we had a principal whose name was Mr. X (*name changed for confidentiality*), and he wouldn’t tolerate you speaking in mother tongue. So we used to have evening assemblies, being a day school. And you are tired, you are in a hurry to leave to go home. Those who speak in Kikuyu used to be referred to as “mother tongue speakers” or “vernacular speakers.” So there used to be a special list, and woe unto you getting to that list! (Interview 2 with Kariuki, 9-17-2015)

In this case, the caning was done at the end of the day when students were tired from the day’s work and were eager to go home. In addition to caning, which Kariuki described as “the immediate caning, six canes. There was no compromise.” (Interview 2 with Kariuki, 9-17-2015), the teachers in Kariuki’s school also used reading and writing as a form of punishment, as in the excerpt that follows. This punishment was however reserved for those that were viewed as likely to be successful enough academically to make it to the university. The teachers did not expect much from a majority of the students in this local

district school, and so for the majority, they were caned and sent on their way while those viewed as having some kind of potential were given additional punishment. Kariuki describes this in the excerpt below:

After the caning, you still have to go buy books sometimes. Well, this was more for those who were let's say well advanced in English. Like my colleagues who would do very well, if you were caught speaking in vernacular, then you would be punished through those means. But those who were, you know like the category of our school I would say even the society nothing much was expected from the majority. Not everyone who went there, because it was a local school, would make it to the university. Only 20 would make it to the university, let's say at most. So the rest, nothing much was expected, maybe just go to maybe middle level colleges. So that intense punishment of reading, writing was rare. That's why it was only specific to those who the teachers had a hope that they would make it to the university. Those ones would get an extra punishment other than the caning. They would be told, "You know why this is useful for you!" Maybe write a composition, maybe write an apology letter. (Interview 2 with Kariuki, 9-17-2015)

In addition to displayed high academic expectation for only certain students while writing other students off as incapable, the teachers at Kariuki's secondary school seemed to be sending the message that competencies in English was expected only of those students that were likely to succeed academically, and so only those students were asked to read books and write compositions as punishment. Using reading and writing as punishment is problematic in itself, but by having different expectations of students in the same school,

the teachers in Kariuki's school were creating a divide that placed some students above others. Kariuki described these teachers as also asking students to write apology letters for speaking their African languages, implying that speaking those languages was wrong.

Years later, as a teacher, Kariuki taught at a prestigious provincial school. In this school, as in the school he had attended as a student, students were caned and made to write compositions for speaking African languages. But in the school he worked at as a teacher, the speaking of African languages was rare, as seen in the excerpt below:

They would be caned and caned again. The policy was strict. You would even buy books. You would write compositions. Caning was instance justice, there and then. And then a follow-up. In this context, (*name of school removed for confidentiality*), there was no *monto*. And prefects were not kind of following you. And even speaking in vernacular was rare. And this one, I have found, it all has to do with context. This was a provincial school, so there is that prestige first. What is the expectation in the Kenyan school system of a national school? They would even presume that there is not an incidence of vernacular speaking. These are students whose expectations are university bound. Professionals. So it is a training ground. I don't think there was intentional vernacular speaking. So that is why the policy is there, if you are caught, but very few victims if any. (Interview 2 with Kariuki, 9-17-2015)

As is evident in this excerpt, there was a clear expectation in the school Kariuki described above that since it was a prestigious provincial school, students were not to speak African languages. The students in this school were viewed as professionals who were university-bound, and as such, they did not even need teachers to follow them up about not speaking

African languages in school. On the rare occasion that someone did speak an African language in the school, they are quickly set straight with caning and forced writing exercises.

Another participant, Jackline, described punishments that ranged from caning to being made to squat in awkward positions that were meant to embarrass those students that handled the *monto* as a result of getting caught speaking African languages in school.

[The punishments included] slashing the field or something. And there was digging, digging holes for planting things, and maybe for throwing waste or something. You could be told to wash classes, or you could be given some strokes of a cane. Or you could be ... there was something we used to do, you are asked to put your hands through here and then you put them here (demonstrates an awkward squatting position where the hands go through the back of the legs and then touch the ears). So you stay in that position. (Interview 1 with Jackline, 9-16-2014)

In addition to being embarrassing, the squatting position was quite uncomfortable, and staying in that awkward position would require a lot of physical endurance. Jackline did not question authority when it came to the school's enforcement of the language policy. She accepted punishment as an acceptable, and to some extent effective, method of ensuring students learned English. But her motivation for wanting to learn English was heavily tied to not wanting to get "that thing", which refers to the "*mbuli*", a local word that they used to refer to the *monto*.

I think it was a nice idea. English being the language for instruction, people really ought to learn how to speak it so that they are able to communicate and

understand. So for me, I took it positively and tried to understand it as much as I could and not to get that thing. (Interview 1 with Jackline, 9-16-2014)

As can be gleaned from this excerpt, Jackline wanted to learn English, and she also wanted to avoid the punishment that came with getting the *mbuli*. So she understood the punishments as a way to try and help students learn English. Additionally, Jackline viewed speaking African languages in school as a discipline problem among her peers. She believed that those that kept speaking African languages in school did so out of lack of concern for the consequences of getting caught, as is evident in the quote below:

Some people were just too much. They held that thing almost every day. They did not care. So, others were careful but others they did not care. There are people who are naturally “don’t cares”. So I feel it was just being reckless or something. (Interview 1 with Jackline, 9-16-2014)

Jackline fell in line as was expected of her when it came to language use in her school. Because she recognized that the school rules forbade African languages in school, and that there were consequences for disobeying this rule, she perceived resistance among her peers as “being reckless”, or having a disregard for authority.

Anzaldúa (1987) argues that linguistic identity is closely tied to one’s sense of self, and a person’s identity cannot be separated from their language. “Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity- I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself.” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p.81). As will be evident in the findings in the subsequent sections, some of the participants in this study had negative experiences as a result of the English-only language policy in their schools. Some participants were

silenced by this policy while others worked to find ways, including hiding and bribing, to be able to speak their African languages within their schools.

### **Silencing of African Languages and Identities**

A second subtheme that emerged from the interviews of the participants was the subtheme of silence. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the participants were often subjected to physical, and other kinds of punishment for speaking African languages in their schools. One of the major effects of this that came from the data was that some participants were silenced. By punishing their use of African languages, the participants were taught that those languages were inferior, and by extension, as speakers of those languages, they were inferior.

Scholars have argued that you cannot separate the individual from their language (see for example Anzaldúa, (1987); Nieto, (2002); Wa Thiong'o, 1986). Therefore, in teaching a child to despise their language, teachers are failing to value the learners in their classrooms as people with an identity. Anzaldúa (1987) wrote that “in childhood we are told that our language is wrong. Repeated attacks on our native tongue diminish our sense of self. The attacks continue throughout our lives.” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p.80). For some participants in this study, as will be evident in this section, silence was preferable to suffering punishment and humiliation for speaking their vernacular languages in school.

The participants all noted that silencing students was likely not the intention of the teachers in punishing students for speaking African languages in school. Most of their teachers were simply enforcing a school policy that was set in place in order to get students to learn and speak English. The teachers perceived vernacular speaking as a problem, a hindrance to the students' ability to learn English, and they set out to fix it in

order to help their students perform better academically. Unfortunately, as Nieto (2002) asserts regarding bilingualism in schools where English is the dominant language, “the problem is defined as fluency in a language other than English. In this case, the major purpose of education becomes the elimination of all signs of the native language”, p. 82). Nieto (2002) points out that even well meaning teachers sometimes perceive bilingualism in their students as a handicap that gets in the way of the students learning the English language. Intent on ensuring that students muster the English language, which is indisputably important for educational success in Kenya, the teachers used methods that had a counterproductive effect on the students’ learning of English. For example, the *monto*, discussed earlier in this chapter, rather than enhance the learning of English, in most cases created fear in the students, because getting it meant one had to look forward to corporal punishment, humiliation, or manual labor. In one of our interviews, Sally indicted that in her experience as a student, rather than help her and her fellow students learn English, the *monto* made them withdraw and refrain from speaking at all while in school.

It made them stop talking. But I would say it did not encourage them very much to speak English. Because what most of the students did was just shut up, not speaking at all. And there are students who the whole day they never opened their mouth. (Interview 1 with Sally, 7-5-2014)

In another excerpt, below, Sally described herself as having been “ahead” in comparison to some of her peers when it came to speaking in English. She and other students like her who were a little more fluent in English, laughed at and ridiculed the students who struggled. From the information I gathered from Sally’s descriptions of her experiences

of how African languages and identities were looked down upon in both her primary and secondary schools (ironically, because a lot of students still spoke those languages) this could have been a symptom of the culture that had already been established in the schools that treated African languages as humiliating and punishable. Sally's descriptions below provide a picture of the humiliation that students underwent all day long simply because of their vernacular-influenced accents.

We would laugh at each other. I remember we used to laugh at each other because when it came to English words, we were trying to pronounce them as if they were Meru names. And then we would laugh at each other. They sound very odd. And then again that made us not feel free to speak out in English because we might be laughed at or ridiculed. At least some of us were ahead. It was not homogenous. There are those who I think they learnt faster than others. So they knew probably how to pronounce this in English. So when the others pronounced it the wrong way, they would know and then the whole day we would just give... the way you pronounce a word in a very different way, you would even be given that as your nickname. (Interview 1 with Sally, 7-5-2014)

Speaking with Sally about these experiences, she laughed a lot as she recounted the way they laughed at and ridiculed each other because of their vernacular-influenced accents. But although she laughed about it, she was also clear about the way those experiences silenced them. In the excerpt above, she said that as a consequence of the laughing and ridicule, they did not feel free to speak out in English. They feared making mistakes in pronouncing the words, and as such, they avoided speaking in English, which was of course the language of instruction at her school.



In the excerpt that follows, Sally describes that when it came to reading, some students in her school did not want to read aloud in front of their teachers and peers because they were fearful of being laughed at. She recounts that the students with vernacular-influenced accents and those that struggled with the English language came to dislike English, because for them, their perceived inadequacies in the English language, which were heavily linked to their African languages, became a source of pain.

It used to weigh very heavily, negatively, on the students. Because now people stopped, when it came to class participation, like reading in turns. It used to be very difficult for some students to just read, make an attempt to read. And as they started reading, you would hear the class just burst in laughter as if they anticipated how the next word would be pronounced. I realize it never used to be a good experience. These students never looked forward to English lessons actually. Most students never looked forward to English lessons, and English was never popular. (Interview 1 with Sally, 7-5-2014)

Evidently then, while what Sally describes above were English classes where students were supposed to be learning English, the opposite was happening because being made to shy away from speaking in English was silencing them, and as Sally noted, they did not even like English lessons. As Nieto (2000) puts it, “[w]hen particular languages are prohibited or denigrated, the voices of those who speak them are silenced and rejected as well” (p. 82). When students feel that who they are has been rejected in the English classroom, it is unrealistic to expect that they will be motivated to learn English. It is therefore no wonder what Sally pointed out above, that English was never popular in her

school. And the teachers did not make it any easier, as Sally narrates in the excerpt below:

Nyaboke: So what would the teacher do when people were laughing at a student for pronouncing a word differently?

Sally: They would just get on the student, not those who were laughing. Ok, they would get concerned if the laughter was very much extended, but then they would blame the reader for not reading properly. It's like, "Why can't you read? The rest can read!" And actually they would be punished. (Interview 1 with Sally, 7-5-2014)

In addition to the laughing and ridicule that Sally talked about in previous excerpts, in the excerpt above, Sally added that the teachers in her school also gave similar treatment to the students that struggled with the English language. Sally recounted that the teachers in her primary school also participated in the marginalization of students who did not speak good English. As is evident in Sally's words above, rather than support those students and encourage them in their learning of English, their teachers blamed them and punished them, thus alienating them even further.

Anzaldúa (1987) writes that "because we internalize how our language has been used against us, we use our language differences against each other." (p. 80). This argument is evident in the way the participants' teachers, as is evident above and in participants' recollection of their experiences throughout this chapter, who were themselves active speakers of African languages, taught students to associate these languages with shame and academic inferiority. Like in studies conducted by Kitoko-Nsiku (2007) and Chimbutane (2011) in Mozambique where society, including teachers,

had internalized the idea that their African languages were only fit for “dogs”, in using shame to suppress students’ vernacular languages, the Kenyan teachers in participants’ interviews seemed to demonstrate similar disdain for the very languages they spoke and identified with. This disdain was then projected onto the students as is evident in Sally’ narrative.

Sally went on to describe the insults that teacher threw at students as a consequence for their silence. Because of the stigma associated with their languages and accents, the students chose to be silent, but their silence was scorned as well. They were damned if they spoke, and damned if they didn’t. Sometimes, as in the excerpt from an interview with Sally that follows, the teachers would resort to speaking in vernacular themselves while insulting students, although speaking in vernacular or vernacular-influenced accents was the very reason the students were in trouble in the first place.

Nyaboke: Did the teachers do anything to try and encourage them to speak?

Sally: Not really. It’s like they were already labeled as incapable. So these were students who were just ridiculed. If anyone talked about them, it’s when they were ridiculed and even the teachers ridiculed them in the classroom.

Nyaboke: Can you give me an example, like how would they ridicule them?

Sally: They would use like Kimeru names like “kiaa”. “Kiaa” means foolish, a fool, or a moron. So “kiaa gike” “you fool”.

Nyaboke: And how would the students respond to that?

Sally: Of course they would just withdraw more and sometimes cry. These students would actually be found at a corner crying.... The teachers would reach a point where they feel they have now to drive their point home. They would also

result to Kimeru, especially when they are annoyed. It's like this English is not doing it. (Interview 1 with Sally, 7-5-2014)

In the excerpt above, Sally points out that the teachers would call students “fool” or “moron” when they did not speak due to their limited competencies in English or their accents when they spoke English. This is consistent with the tenets of post-colonial theory, whereby the more like the colonizer a person becomes (e.g. by mustering their language), the more intelligent they are perceived to be. Those that are further away from the colonial ideal of being as similar to the master as possible, are positioned as being ignorant, or “fools” as Sally’s teachers called them. Ironically, the teachers themselves felt that English did not adequately express their sentiments, and so they had to resort to Kimeru to call the students fools for not speaking out of fear of being ridiculed for speaking Kimeru or with a Kimeru accent.

The irony of this situation calls to mind Moore-Gilbert’s (1997) observation that in an attempt to secure their perceived superiority to other peoples and cultures, the West creates knowledge that presents the Orient as backward, different, exotic, and incapable of rational thought, while presenting themselves as the opposite. They then advance this as universal truth, and are often successful in convincing the Orient of their own inferiority (Fanon, 1952), getting them to join forces with their own oppressors in oppressing themselves. Kitoko-Nsiku (2007) notes that in Mozambique, the colonizer worked to convince multilingual Mozambicans that they had the minds of dogs and their languages were only fit for dogs. Once convinced, the Orient begins to perform the texts that have been taught to him, and he begins to aspire to be like the colonizer in an effort to humanize himself (Fanon, 1952). This can be likened to the case Sally recounted above

of her teachers insulting students and calling them fools for speaking African languages or speaking with African accents.

While I have focused on Sally' interviews in presenting the findings on and discussing silence in the Kenyan context, hers were not the only interviews with this subtheme. Most participants talked about either going silent in school, or hiding when they spoke, so as to avoid punishment for speaking their African languages, which in some cases came most naturally to them. The ways that the participants resisted the marginalization of their languages and identities will be discussed in further detail under the subtheme of resisting marginalization of African languages and identities. Before getting to that however, the section below presents findings on the hierarchy of languages and identities as emerged from the data.

### **The Hierarchy of Languages and Identities**

The English language holds an extremely powerful place in education around the world. Wa Thiong'o (1986) talks about the power of the English language in the Kenyan education system. He describes the colonial education system in Kenya at the time as having "the structure of a pyramid: a broad primary base, a narrowing secondary middle, and an even narrower university apex." (p. 12). Selection to move up the educational pyramid was by examinations that are written in English. If one does not muster the English language, they cannot move up. The process of elimination ensures that only the elite few (aka those who are able to muster enough English to successfully complete and pass examinations written in English) get to the top. This system of elimination is unfortunately still the way Kenyan education is organized. A lot of students fall through

the cracks and fail to secure places in secondary schools because of lack of proficiency in English, which is the language of instruction, and examination.

A consequence of the power of the English language in education in Kenya is that policies are put in place that criminalize the use of other languages in school. These policies are evidently remnants of colonial policies that were aimed at stumping out African languages and cultures by labeling them backward, primitive, and not fit for humans (Kitoko-Nsiku, 2007). As Nieto (2002) aptly articulates, “privilege, ethnocentrism, and racism are at the core of policies and practices that limit the use of languages other than officially recognized high-status languages allowed in schools and in the society in general” (p.81-82). The result of these policies in Kenyan schools is that a hierarchy of languages is created, with English at the very top, and African vernacular languages at the very bottom. As a national language, Swahili lingers somewhere in between, as it is reluctantly tolerated.

For all participants in this study, African languages were not allowed in school, so some of them only got opportunities to speak those languages at home, or not at all. For Mercy, whose native language is Luo, most communication was in English as she grew up. She went to the same high-end school for both primary and secondary levels, and the school had students from diverse backgrounds, including Indian students, black African students, and white students. Speaking Luo in school was not an option, even though there were other children in the school that had similar linguistic backgrounds. As a result, Mercy did not have enough opportunities to adequately develop her fluency in Luo as she narrates in the excerpt below:

We realized that when we started going to school, our vernacular was suffering. So by the time we were grown ups, we used to go upcountry and people would say that we talk Luo as if we are not Luos. We are talking Luo like people from another tribe who are learning Luo. So for us that was, the consequence was that we sacrificed our mother tongue. We continued talking it, but we did not quite develop like a deep vocabulary, like good vocabulary. And even the Swahili and the English just took over. The Luo was left more as a way of us communicating with our parents and that was it.” (Interview 1 with Mercy, 6-15-2014)

Mercy noted that she and her siblings “sacrificed our mother tongue” as they learned Swahili and English in school. Their mother tongue, Luo, was relegated to a secondary position, viewed as only a way for them to communicate with their parents. While the language was viewed as important when they visited their relatives upcountry, and when they spoke with their parents, beyond that, English was the language that dominated most of their everyday conversation, in and out of school.

Another participant, Valerie, also had similar experiences. For her, her parents were highly educated and took her to elite schools in Nairobi. She spoke English fluently from early on in her life, and although her father made a point to teaching them Luo and insisting that they speak it, Valerie did not understand her father’s efforts to make her speak Luo until later on in life. She could speak fluent Luo, but she spoke it with an English accent. In the excerpt below, Valerie recounts her distress when her mother yelled out to her in Luo in front of her friends.

I grew up in Kileleshwa and we grew up in a very diverse neighborhood and all that stuff. It used to be very odd to me when we were outside playing, and we

were speaking English, and then you are being called inside to come and do homework using not only the Luo language, but they also used my Luo name. And I'd say, "Ok, when I'm out here, it's Valerie." But to my mum it didn't matter. When you're being called to the house it is (middle name). So my friends would make fun of me and say, "you're going native". So you see when you have that peer pressure as a teen in primary school. You want to be known for speaking English and speaking with the inflections that come with the slang and all that stuff. (Interview 1 with Valerie, 7-19-2015)

As a young teenager, Valerie did not want to be associated with the Luo language or her Luo name in front of her friends. Her middle name, which was a Luo name, made her feel embarrassed in front of her friends and her friends made fun of her for it, remarking that she was "going native". At that age, she wanted to be associated with her English name and with the English language.

The power of the English language is not limited to just either speaking English or a different language. This power hierarchy extends to accents and varieties of the English language one speaks (Lippi-Green, 2004). In one of my interviews with Sally, she recounted how the different accents in English were treated in the high school that she went to. Like with other schools, the divide was not merely on whether a student spoke English or African languages. Among students, there were grouping based on where one came from, and by extension, what variety of English they spoke. The students that came from large cities like Nairobi were perceived as speaking a superior variety of English compared to those students that came from rural areas. As is evident in the excerpt below,



there was a glorification for the kind of English that the “Born Town” students spoke because it was not tainted with vernacular-influenced accents.

We had a lot of kids from Nairobi, from rich families. And some could even note they were Kikuyu, but they didn’t even know how to speak Kikuyu. So probably us from the village, I think probably kind of admired that. And probably we tried to emulate them. They used to be called “Born Tao.” Oh, that’s a BT. So you could just watch them the way they were behaving, like “That’s a BT. *Ebu* listen the way she is speaking English.” Then we also start imitating. I think English was associated with those who were from Nairobi. Probably the interpretation was, from Nairobi, English. So if we are to look like we come from Nairobi, we also have to have good English. There was even a name for those who came from the village. There was, you could actually feel it, you could sense the divide. Because of the lifestyle. And again when it came to speaking English, the Born Towns felt superior.” (Interview 1 with Sally, 7-5-2014).

In the above excerpt, Sally notes that the other students worked to imitate and try to sound like the “Born Towns”, who were perceived as being superior. In an effort to be viewed in a similar light, the kids from the village tried to speak English in the same way that they Nairobi kids spoke it. Additionally, some of the Nairobi kids were Kikuyu, but they did not understand Kikuyu. They were admired and emulated for their English.

Another participant, Eva, went to an all girls national school where the majority of students were from affluent backgrounds and spoke English exclusively. Eva noted that there was a discomfort among those students with other students who spoke Swahili. In my conversations with Eva, I learned that for her, being in a national school, the

underlying message was that girls in that school were of a certain class, and that class of girls did not speak Swahili, or other African languages. In order to fit in, the girls had to speak English. The excerpt below offers a picture of the language situation at Eva's school.

Eva: I used to hear comments from girls, they would say, "Those girls speak Swahili." People would be so uncomfortable with those girls who speak Swahili. So it's coming out of those people who live in Nairobi.

Nyaboke: What was the discomfort that they had with Swahili?

Eva: Some of them didn't speak Swahili themselves. But already they are bringing... most of these kids would have gone to Valley Road, international schools, or Consolata. Underneath it all, there was a message of class. That if you spoke Swahili, you came from Eastlands. And if you spoke sheng' you also came from Eastlands. You know, the girls in the school did not value speaking Swahili. Also because they did not grow up with it. And also because it was looked down upon. And I can imagine in their homes they would hear their parents speaking to their workers in Swahili. So it was a language they did not value. (Interview 1 with Eva, 7-11-2014).

Eva described Swahili, along with Sheng', as being perceived in her school to be indicative of a lower social standing. Speaking those languages betrayed one's status as someone coming from Eastlands, which is a part of Nairobi that is inhabited by poorer people. Being a national school that attracted some of the country's best achieving students, and also students from affluent families who went to expensive private primary schools like those Eva listed, there was an expectation that students in that school were of

a certain class, and therefore they were not expected to speak Swahili, let alone other African vernacular languages. As Eva continues to describe below, the desire to distance themselves from Swahili and African vernacular languages while embracing English led the girls to be divided along linguistic hierarchy lines.

There were some girls who went to the same boarding school with me. When we came to high school, they could never speak to me in Swahili. But there was a push for you to speak English, and indeed with a British accent even, or with an American accent. We have never travelled outside the borders of Kenya, so you spoke English with a little bit of (accent), you know, depending on your community. Some people have got the influence of their mother tongue. People would laugh at them. So there was really a push for you to speak English in a certain diction. It was kind of valued, you know? And it was the tradition of the school. There was a lot of partitioning of the groups and the languages people spoke. (Interview 1 with Eva, 7-11-2014).

Eva revealed above that not only was it expected that the girls in that school would speak English, there was also considerable pressure for them to speak English with an American or a British accent even though most of them had never been outside the borders of Kenya. American and British accent were perceived as putting someone higher up in social class. The girls that had vernacular-influenced accents were laughed at, and the girls grouped themselves by perceived class, which also had a lot to do with which languages they spoke, and how they spoke those languages.

When it came to socializing with boy schools, the girls in Eva's school socialized with boys from national schools "and those boys wanted you to speak English in a certain

way” (Interview 1 with Eva, 7-11-2014). Eva internalized this hierarchy, and even when she went home, she isolated herself from people she perceived as being of a lower social class. In our interviews, she described herself as having been a snob. She did not talk to people who spoke languages other than English, and when someone spoke to her in Swahili, she answered them back in English.

There were other girls from other families who go to national schools and I saw they didn’t socialize with everyone. I insisted on talking to these other girls in English. And some other girls who went to other high schools did not speak English too, which means they were not fluent. They (other students who went to national schools) already had a set culture of how you are supposed to be. And ultimately you are supposed to be a snob. And I participated in that until when I got to go to college. Then I stopped. So it meant even if a guy talked to me, if someone was interested in me and talked to me in Swahili, I talk to them back in English (Interview 1 with Eva, 7-11-2014).

From the excerpt above, Eva felt that there was a script she needed to follow as a national school student. That script involved picking and choosing who to associate with based on what language they spoke and how they spoke it. In order to maintain the prestige of being one of the country’s most elite students by virtue of being in a national school, she had to speak in English, even when people spoke to her in Swahili. The exaltation of English, and devaluing of African languages in Kenyan schools is reflected in the Kenyan society as well. In the following excerpt, Eva observed that in offices, the subordinate workers tend to speak in Swahili while the upper level employees tend to speak English.

In Kenya, I know so well Kiswahili is not... if I went to an office and spoke Kiswahili to people, I have done an observing that when you are talking to them and the little ones and the watchman they talk in Kiswahili. But in some levels of offices and communities, they talk to each other in English. I always say when I worked in the NGO world in Kenya, I spoke less Kiswahili than I have in the U.S. to the other teachers of Swahili. I have spoken more Swahili in the U.S. than I did in Kenya as an adult (Interview 4 with Eva, 7-21-2014)

Eva used the words “the little ones” above to refer to the lower level workers in Kenyan offices, whom she observed tended to speak Swahili, while the upper level employees tended to speak English. This observation is a stark reflection of the hierarchy of languages in Kenya. In fact, although Swahili is a national language in Kenya, Eva observes that she spoke less Swahili working in Kenya than she has in the U.S. with her colleagues as a Swahili teacher in a U.S. university.

The participants all expressed that a good mastery of the English language affords one many opportunities and privileges in Kenya. One participant, Daniel, highlighted the positive experiences that he has had throughout his life because of his mastery of the English language. He got opportunities and promotions, and was popular among colleagues and students because he was not only fluent in English, but also very eloquent in his speech. Because of the positive experiences that English has afforded him, and because he would like for his children to have positive experiences making their way through the world, Daniel was staunch in his belief in the importance of the English language. However, this belief in English was accompanied by a belief that African languages were not useful. Rather, as in the excerpt below, Daniel expressed the

conviction that African languages serve to diminish a person's prospects by putting them in a "small cocoon."

I would emphasize to my children to know how to speak good English. Is it good to be able to speak nice Kikuyu speeches? Well, yeah, so that you can be like who? I don't know. I have never seen. Everyone else is likely to, even the churches by the way, they are just changing. Things are changing. Even public places will no longer be like single language areas, you know? So I feel like it's language, English, not language, English is.... The more a language cuts across, the better you need to be in it. The more a language brings you to a more sealed and small cocoon, the further away I think you should get from it. (Interview 1 with Daniel, 6-2-2014)

The idea that African languages bring you to "a more sealed and small cocoon" that Daniel expresses in the excerpt above shows the suppression of African languages that happens by the propagation of myths about African languages (Orwenjo, 2012), which often have the effect of keeping African languages at the bottom of the linguistic hierarchy in an effort to promote dominant languages like English. Not unlike Said's (1979) arguments about orientalism, which involves the misrepresentation of othered communities and their cultures by dominant communities, the misrepresentation of African languages as placing their speakers in "sealed and small cocoons" is characteristic of modern day colonialism. As a remnant of colonization, and a reflection of neo-colonialism of the mind, Africans internalize the ideas of the colonizers that their languages and cultures are backward, and they enact those beliefs in their treatment of, and their attitudes toward, African languages.

The experiences of participants in this study showed, as previously illustrated, that their schools often perpetuated the colonial practice of devaluing their African languages in an effort to promote their learning of English. Teachers in Kenyan schools are often tasked with the responsibility of ensuring students speak English in schools (Orwenjo, 2012). Some parents also insist on their children speaking English as much as possible, especially in school. As studies by Tembe and Norton (2008), Jones and Barkhuizen (2011), Campbell and Walsh 2010, and Kitoko-Nsiku (2007) show, a lot of parents in post-colonial African nations believe that in a world that is becoming more and more globalized, it is important that their children become as good in English as possible, even if that means sacrificing, or relegating their African languages to a secondary position, in order to achieve that end.

As a parent of two Kenyan children, currently living in Kenya, Daniel similar beliefs. Daniel felt that his African language, Kimeru, was “nice” but not important in the current world. He felt that rather than spend time teaching his children Kimeru, he would rather teach them Chinese, as he believed Chinese is the language of the future, alongside English. Daniel emphasized that he would want his children, currently in primary and secondary schools in Kenya, to learn Chinese for “the commercial bit of it” (Interview 1 with Daniel, 6-2-2014). He stated that the world is changing and therefore, “you want to prepare your children for their time, not for your time, you know? The future is likely to have a lot of Chinese. Yes, and it might be important to be able to cross between English and Chinese” (Interview 1 with Daniel, 6-2-2014).

Daniel had a lot of positive experiences with the English language as it afforded him privileges and high social status throughout his life and career. On the other hand, he

had a number of negative experiences with his African languages, including problems with his father when he brought home a wife that spoke a different African language, and problems with his peers during his undergraduate training because of his accent.

Throughout all five interviews with Daniel, he was passionate about putting distance between himself and his African language while emphasizing the importance of English in today's world. On occasion, he questioned himself on whether his beliefs were right, and pointed out that he had not given the topic a lot of thought before, and that it was possible he might feel differently in the future. But for the duration of this study, he took a firm stand with few contradictions in the ways that he represented his experiences.

In contrast to the high regard in which the participants felt the English language is held in Kenya, they also noted that speaking African languages is often thought to be not just wrong, but also insulting, as will be illustrated by Kariuki's experiences below. Kariuki, recounted the push back that he received for speaking Kikuyu with colleagues as a teacher.

You will find that people get irritated or pissed off like, "Why are you speaking in your mother tongue?" But people have this idea that when you are speaking, you are either discussing them or that notion. But for me, I am just having this conversation. And I feel like I am communicating more with that colleague. So why should I, if it's not an official duty we are undertaking, or we are just having a cup of tea, why shouldn't we have the freedom to converse with our language? And for me, if you ask me what language I am comfortable conversing with in terms of conversation, I would say Kikuyu. So I love the language. I like the proverbs because even the proverbs, you know, there is a way I found they



communicate with me so much. And there is so much counseling in the Kikuyu proverbs, and they used to entice me. (Interview 1 with Kariuki, 6-14-2014)

Kariuki pointed out that people erroneously assumed that when someone spoke a language they did not understand (due to coming from different linguistic communities), then they were talking about or backbiting them. On his part though, he believed that if he was just relaxing and not conducting official business, he should be able to speak Kikuyu, his most comfortable language, without being chastised for it.

The speaking of African languages is sometimes erroneously linked to tribalism (Orwenjo, 2012). After the 2007 post-election violence in Kenya, and even before that, speaking African languages in public places to some extent became politicized as different communities became untrusting of other communities. Speaking African languages in government offices in Kenya was recently forbidden, and everyone is now expected to speak in either English or Swahili in government offices. Even prior to the outlawing of vernacular languages in government offices, in some cases, especially in cities where there is a mix of workers from different linguistic backgrounds, speaking African languages in the work environment was sometimes frowned upon. As Kariuki pointed out above, when one speaks their African language in the office, sometimes people take offense to it, especially if they don't understand the language. When a group speaks together in a shared African language, other people that do not understand the language are bound to feel left out, and so those speaking the language could be accused of tribalism. However, while decrying the common practice in Kenya of linking African languages to tribalism, one participant, Isaac, emphasized that tribalism is more about politics than language.

I believe politics have influenced all these aspects. Because given that most politicians would use tribalism because it is tribalism that helps them to, I think, galvanize their bases, which are their communities. It originates more from the rich, the elite, who are well off. The only problem with them is that they do it just for their personal gains, their political positions. When you see them in the city or when seen together with people from different communities, and you see them like they are easily integrating. And probably even in the city, in the estates where they are living, different communities are staying there and they are in harmony. But they are the same people who used to get the same tribal aspects when they go out of the city to the rural areas.” (Interview 5 with Isaac, 7-19-2014)

In the excerpt above, Isaac notes that politicians promote tribalism for their own selfish gain, because they need tribalism to exist in order to garner votes based on their tribal affiliations. To paraphrase Isaac’s words, motivated by their own political interests, politicians stir up divisions among communities (which naturally get extended on to the languages those communities speak), and the communities consequently take issue with each other and with each other’s languages.

Orwenjo (2012) argues that the myth that African languages are the cause of the problem of tribalism in Kenya is not only false but also damaging to the country, as it creates negative ideologies about these languages, which then prevents schools and teachers from exploring the possibilities of using these languages to enhance students’ learning.

The fear of tribalism that leads some people, like Kariuki’s colleagues in Kenya, to be upset by people speaking African languages in Kenya, is misplaced when it is

linked to African languages. This, and other negative ideologies about African languages, perpetuate the colonial agenda as described in Wa Thiong'o (1986)'s book on the colonization of the mind, which continues way past the actual physical colonization is over. Kenya has been independent from British rule for over 50 years, but this undermining, shaming, and humiliation of students' native languages and cultures is an ongoing phenomenon in schools (Muthwii, 2004; Maeda, 2009). As has been illustrated in this section, the participants experienced a hierarchy of languages in their schools in Kenya, which exalted English as the language of academic and economic success, while devaluing Swahili and other African languages as being less useful and less desirable.

### **Resisting the Marginalization of African Languages**

The first three subthemes discussed above, under the theme of marginalization, have had to do with the ways that the participants recalled being punished for speaking African languages, the silence that resulted from those practices of punishment, and the hierarchy of languages that they felt was propagated by all this. In this section, and as a fourth subtheme, I will present findings on the ways that participants resisted the marginalization of their African languages and identities, both as students and as teachers.

Despite the physical punishment, the manual labor, and the humiliation that students suffered as a result of speaking African languages in school, some students still found ways to speak those languages. They went to great lengths to find spaces where they could speak their languages, even with the ever-present danger that someone might hear them, and they might be punished for it. In the excerpt below, for example, Jackline

describes how her peers would hide in secluded areas just so they could speak their vernacular languages.

Some could go during games time and hide in some secluded places and speak their mother tongue without anybody noticing them. But it was a requirement that whether you are inside class or outside you need to speak in English (Interview 1 with Jackline, 9-16-2014).

Although it was games time, a time when students are supposed to be outside playing and having fun, Jackline points out that some students spent that time in hiding so that they could speak their language. And this was after spending all day in the classroom, forced to speak English. Because the language policy required them to speak English whether they were inside or outside the classroom, they chose to sacrifice their games time so that they could hide and speak their language.

Similarly, in Isaac's primary school, students came up with ways to protect themselves from the humiliation, pain, and suffering that was bound to befall them when they were caught speaking the languages that came naturally to them. As Isaac explains in the excerpt below, some students even resorted to bribing other students in order to avoid punishment for speaking their African languages.

Sometimes even the person who has it, you'd rather bribe him or her so that you are not given the button to pass to the next person. So that you are not in the line. So those were some of the things you do. Or befriend the class monitor, bribe, more or less of bribe. You buy a few things. I remember those days some of the key things we used to like, we used to buy sugar cane, what else? *Mandazis* used

to be sold around. So if you could afford one or two, and you give to the class monitor so you may skip for a day or so.” (Interview 1 with Isaac, 7-2-2014)

Isaac recalled that the students in his school learned to manipulate the system to avoid punishment. Because the enforcement of the language policy relied heavily on students reporting each other to the teachers, they found that they could make friends with the class monitor (usually a student given some authority over their peers in the classroom), or bribe them with food. They could also offer to buy some treats for whoever had what Isaac refers to as “the button”, which is basically the *monto*, in order to escape being put on the list of those who spoke vernacular languages, even just for a day. The actions of the students in both Jackline’s and Isaac’s school are powerful, because the students were choosing to resist the marginalization of their languages and their identities. They were choosing to find ways around the system so that they could enact their African identities while avoiding the punishment that came with it.

Ironically, although teachers went to great lengths to implement the language policies in their schools, which forbade the speaking of African languages, the teachers themselves could not adhere to this policy. In both the primary and secondary school contexts for most participants, they remembered their teachers speaking African languages on a regular basis when they did not think the students were within earshot. Jackline pointed out that in her primary and secondary schools, teachers struggled with the English language as well. In speaking English, the risk of humiliation was equally present for the teachers as for the students. Students would laugh at teachers when the teachers attempted to speak English and ended up making pronunciation mistakes due to mother tongue interference. Students were however fearful of the teachers, and so they

felt the freedom to laugh at the teachers' language mistakes only in the anonymity of crowds. Jackline explains this in the excerpt below:

In high school, students used to really laugh. And especially if we are in the assembly and somebody, a teacher made an announcement and did not speak correctly. People could laugh. But you see that is a crowd. You could not know who exactly was laughing. But in class, people could just keep quiet and maybe talk about it later.” (Interview 1 with Jackline, 9-16-2014)

Because, as Jackline pointed out above, the teachers had some of the same issues expressing themselves in English that the students had, there was a sense of understanding in some cases. Unlike in Jackline's case where the students laughed at the teachers when they made vernacular-influenced mistakes when speaking English, Isaac paints a different picture in the excerpt below:

I wouldn't even give credit to the teachers. Even the teachers used to struggle. Okay, they were definitely much better than the students, but even they were not as fluent as they were expected to be. So people understood. We understood each other. They understood the difficulties because then they weren't as good. As much as they would emphasize on people speaking it, they knew the difficulties.” (Interview 1 with Isaac, 7-2-2014)

Because, as illustrated by Jackline's and Isaac's experiences above, English was difficult even for the teachers, the allure of the mother tongue was always present for both students and teachers alike.

Years later, as teachers, the participants found themselves on the other side of the language policy enforcement struggle. Participants recounted that they quickly found out

that even as teachers expected to enforce the schools' language policies, they still felt the pull of their African languages. They could not help but speak their African languages themselves when conversing with colleagues who shared their vernacular language backgrounds.

Kariuki and Isaac noted that as teachers, when they were just “relaxing” informally in the staffroom with other teachers, speaking in their African languages (and Kiswahili in some cases) felt more natural. English was viewed as more formal and appropriate for formal events like staff meetings. The rest of the time, teachers fell back to the languages that came naturally to them, as Isaac explains below:

Our staff meetings, we were formal. We spoke English during staff meetings. Informal gatherings in the staffroom, we are talking to each other, normal issues, that was predominantly Swahili. Even though a few cases of English were there. And then you'll always see people who come from the same community will always have that opportunity to speak their mother tongue. You could see, especially upcountry, it is so common with upcountry people than it is with coast people mainly because people even speak Swahili if you come from the same community. But mainly upcountry you will always find Kikuyus speak Kikuyu.

(Interview 3 with Isaac, 7-11-2014)

To explain some of the references in Isaac's excerpt above, coastal people, like Dennis, often refer to all other parts of the country as upcountry. This has nothing to do with a place being rural or urban, but is rather just a term they use for non-coastal people. Being from a coastal community, Isaac spoke Swahili as a mother tongue. His mother tongue, Duruma, is one of the languages, like Swahili, that fall under the Mijikenda language. As

such, Swahili is often used among Mijikenda speakers as a mother tongue. So, for Isaac, Swahili was the language he spoke informally in the staffroom, while some of his colleague from other communities spoke in their respective mother tongues as well. In the excerpt that follows, Kariuki expressed the same sentiments about their language practices when he was a teacher in Kenya:

Teachers speak, like back home, they speak in vernacular. The normal conversation, staffroom conversation, it was hard to find teachers speaking in English or Kiswahili. Even the language teachers themselves, it's like, okay it is a relaxing mode. So English is like formal. (Interview 2 with Kariuki, 9-17-2014)

As Kariuki pointed out, even the language teachers spoke their African languages informally in the staffroom, because they felt that those languages were the appropriate languages for “relaxing mode”. Although, as teachers, they could not extend the same courtesy of allowing students to speak their African languages when they were in “relaxing mode”, they did recognize that there could be a space in the school context for African languages, hence their having no problem speaking those languages in school. Echoing Isaac and Kariuki’s observations, Faith asserted in the excerpt below that as teachers, they found it difficult to speak in English while in the staffroom.

Although now as a teacher you really want to emphasize to your student and you want to set that good example, you cannot just keep on talking in vernacular. But let me say it's not easy. It's not easy. Because I remember even in the staffroom where teachers could meet and sit together, majority being Kikuyus, we found ourselves just speaking in Kikuyu. And I think it is very, very common, especially in average schools. (Interview 2 with Faith, 6-19-2014)



When Faith said that “you cannot just keep on talking”, she was referring to the difficulty in speaking English all the time. The teachers, including Faith, “found ourselves” speaking in Kikuyu, thus illustrating the natural, and sometimes involuntary, nature of the act of speaking one’s native language.

In the last sentence of Faith’s excerpt above, Faith linked the speaking of African languages to “average schools”. From the data analysis, it was evident that the speaking of African languages among students, and teachers, in schools was more common in the interviews of participants that went to or taught at district and provincial schools than those that went to or taught at national schools or elite private schools. This is evident throughout this chapter in looking, for example, at the experiences of Eva and Mercy on the one hand (as participants that went to elite schools), and Sally and Kariuki on the other (as participants who went to more regular schools). Despite the discrepancy in how African languages were viewed and treated, which is discussed in the section on the hierarchy of languages, it is still evidently clear that in some ways, some teachers were pushing back against the marginalization of African languages and identities, even as they participated in the suppression of these languages among their students. In most district and provincial schools, both teachers and students spoke African languages in school, and although students were punished for it, it was understood that those languages were there to stay.

Faith suggested, as seen in the excerpt that follows, that teachers should rethink the idea of trying to get student to move away from their African languages in an attempt to get them to speak English or Swahili.

I remember during the staff meeting, one of the staff meetings, we were like “If we always speak in our mother tongue, and here we are we want our students to speak in English or Kiswahili, what picture are we portraying to the students?” So it has really been a challenge. As much as we try to tell people to shun away from speaking their mother tongue, it is not always easy because we were really here emphasizing to our students to use these languages in their classroom sector, but even they could pass by and hear us speaking vernacular, you know? And we could try not to speak in vernacular but we were finding ourselves speaking it. It’s a challenge.” (Interview 3 with Faith, 6-24-2014).

Faith articulates in the excerpt above that it is not easy giving up an important aspect of one’s identity, such as one’s mother tongue, and as such there will be push back and resistance when schools, and teachers, take the approach of trying to force students to give up their mother tongues in order to learn English. Faith notes that even the teachers themselves understood how difficult it was to completely shed one’s mother tongue in favor of another language, even when there were severe consequences for speaking the mother tongue.

In the above section, I have presented findings from the Kenyan context under the theme of marginalization. In the section that follows, I will present findings from the United States context under the same theme. The subthemes that emerged under the theme of marginalization in the United States context were: becoming raced, linguistic and racial stereotyping in the U.S., silencing of African languages and identities, and responses to marginalization.

## **United States Context**

In this section of chapter four, I will present findings from participants' experiences with language and identity in the United States. The theme of marginalization came through as strongly in the U.S. context as it did in the Kenyan context, with participants sharing experiences about the ways that they felt marginalized, isolated, and silenced as students and as teaching assistants in U.S. university classrooms. Under the theme of marginalization, the subthemes identified in the U.S. context interviews were: becoming raced, linguistic and racial stereotyping in the U.S., silencing of African languages and Identities, and responses to marginalization. Below, I will present findings from each of these subthemes.

### **Becoming Raced**

While race might be one of the most obvious markers of identity for a lot of people, for the participants in this study, race did not rank very high in their definitions of themselves before they came to the U.S. Because most of them (with the exception of Mercy) did not have much contact with other races growing up and working in Kenya, and because race is generally not an issue or a construct most Kenyans have to think about on a day-to-day basis, the idea of being defined and sometimes stereotyped based on the color of their skin was foreign. Faith shared some thoughts on this:

As far as race is concerned, I didn't have much experience. Because I had not really met so many people from different races. Maybe from other tribes, that one I was like very open to all people after leaving my undergrad. And even in my last working station, I worked with teachers from other tribes. So that one kind of

opened me to other tribes. But for the races, I didn't have such, you know, much experience. (Interview 3 with Faith, 6-24-2015)

Faith came from a rural background, surrounded mostly by people from her own community, the Kikuyu community, for most of her childhood. As she points out above, while in Kenya, during her undergraduate and after, she was exposed to working closely with people from other communities, and that opened her up to other "tribes". But even then, she never had experiences with people from other races before coming to the U.S. Similarly, as expressed in the excerpt below, another participant, Daniel, did not give much thought to race prior to coming to the U.S.

I have never thought about race until I came to the U.S. Have I ever interacted with a white person before? Yeah, just a bit. I had the same curiosity. It's just recognizing that this is different from me.... I had never seen myself as lower than anyone. When I came here I was almost like neutral. To me, I find like it's normally a good point to start with, at the point where you have not seen anything good or bad about this. So let's start there until you see. (Interview 1 with Daniel, 6-2-2014)

Although Daniel had had some interaction with white people before, the extent of his thought on race at that point in his life was just curiosity. He used the words "I had never seen myself as lower than anyone" to describe his perception of himself with regards to race at that point. He saw himself as being equal to everyone else, and was "almost like neutral" to the issue of race in the U.S. By neutral, Daniel meant that since he had not had any good or bad experiences that he attributed to race at that point, he was not making any judgments as to whether or not racism was a problem he would face in this country.

With time though, Daniel did face situations where he was treated a certain way because of his race, as he narrates in the excerpt below:

So I have seen expressions, I have seen actions that actually try to bring me down. I know I can't go down and I feel pity for that person. I actually feel sad for that, you know? So I have seen it, I have worked with a person for one year and three distinct episodes that you can tell, Jesus, this guy still thinks this way, you know? And I have a lot of pity for him. But it doesn't make me feel bad or it doesn't bring me down (Interview 1 with Daniel, 6-2-2014)

Daniel was referring to a white colleague of his who tried on several occasions to undermine him because of his race. This colleague, although they were both doctoral students at the same level, treated him as a subordinate, and would sometimes contradict him in front of students. In saying, "Jesus, this guy still thinks this way?" Daniel implied that he had previously thought that racism was over in the U.S., and that people no longer thought a certain way about other people based on their race. Because of this, Daniel found his colleague's behavior surprising, as is evident in the expression referenced above.

Not unlike Daniel, Valerie was also surprised when she first arrived in the U.S. and found that she suddenly had to take on and be a part of a history she had previously not been a part of. Valerie's quote below explains this:

I think the way was for me to realize that the environment that I had come to study was not the ideal place for an international student coming to study in the college of education. It made me feel like I had accidentally been part of a history that I had no control over. For me to study here, I had to take ownership of that

history and educate myself. I was very educated on the race issues and all that. But it is one thing speaking about it, and another thing living in it. So it made me realize that I was not just here for a book education but a life education. Knowing how to survive in this new environment with all its nuances that have to do with race or class and all that stuff. (Interview 4 with Valerie, 7-28-2014)

Valerie found herself in the middle of a history (the history of race and racism in the U.S.) that she felt she “had no control over,” and she felt that in order to survive here, she had to educate herself in that history and “take ownership” of it. While she had had a lot of knowledge about race prior to coming to the U.S., she was now “living in it” and that proved to be a whole lot different than simply knowing about it. She realized that she was about to get a “life education” in the U.S., and it was not long before some of that life education presented itself. In fact, as Valerie narrates in the excerpt below, as soon as she landed in the U.S., she had some realizations about how she was perceived:

So landing in Cleveland and having to realize for the first time that, talking, that I have a Kenyan accent. I’m a minority. So everything in my entity that may not have been awakened was awakened by other people’s perception of who I might be. So the first impression was, wow everything is big in this country. It is amazing! The cars are wonderful. That very quickly dissipated to what the hell am I doing here? I am not in control of my environment! I have to constantly keep explaining who I am. (Interview 4 with Valerie, 7-28-2014)

One of the first realizations that Valerie made regarding how she was perceived was that she had a Kenyan accent. This was news to her because in Kenya, she did not perceive herself as having an accent. In fact, Valerie was one of the participants, along with Eva

and Mercy, who went to elite schools, and as such, spoke very fluent English with almost no vernacular influence at all. It therefore came as a shock to her when the excitement of arriving in the U.S. quickly turned to a panic at being in a new environment that she did not fully understand. For Valerie, the reality of being identified in terms of race, the idea of who she was being something that needed explaining, and being considered a “minority”, were all new and somewhat unsettling.

As illustrated by Faith, Daniel, and Valerie’s experiences above, becoming raced was a disconcerting reality for participants once they arrived in the United States. Not only did their skin color become one of the most note-worthy aspects of their identity, but their language and accents also came into the spotlight as different, and as will be seen in the subtheme that follows, lacking.

### **Linguistic and Racial Stereotyping in the United States**

A second subtheme under the theme of marginalization that came through strongly in the participants’ U.S. context interviews was the subtheme of linguistic and racial stereotyping. I coded under linguistic and racial stereotyping instances where participants talked about the ways that they were perceived in the U.S. based on their linguistic and racial backgrounds. As will be revealed in the experiences below, participants talked about experiencing prejudice, deficit assumptions, and sometimes even hatred, based on their linguistic and racial background. Although the expression of prejudice and racism was not always overt, participants were highly aware of it. In the excerpt below, Daniel talks about the “silent prejudice” that he experienced:

I have a problem with the silent prejudice, things that people have in their hearts. I can see it, but they are not so conscious to tell me. But I can see it in the eyes, you

know? I can feel your hatred. You've not really said you hate me. I don't know how to react to that. And I've started seeing it, especially when I started teaching, especially because the person I was working with could show it. I think that is the first time I have experienced it. I tried to complain about it and two people, one person told me "hao watu achana nao" (Translates to: Those people, leave them alone). That was a friend who is also in grad school having similar identical issues and is teaching. All right, so I also asked an American friend of mine and they told me, "You know Daniel, you have to fight for yourself." That was a very good statement that was the best advice. So I learnt how to fight for my space. And I can tell that this prejudice is just alive. It's just that some people have learnt how to block it at the mouth of the tongue, you know? They just swallow it, but it was already in the mouth. (Interview 4 with Daniel, 6-17-2014).

At this point, when Daniel started teaching, he had his first experiences with racism. Whereas earlier in this chapter, Daniel described himself as having been "neutral" in regards to the issues of race in the U.S. when he first arrived in the country, having not seen anything good or bad yet, at this point, he was beginning to see racism manifested in his relationship with his colleague. Although the colleague never said outright that he hated him, Daniel said "I can feel your hatred." It was clear to him in the way that his colleague treated him that he was prejudiced against him.

Additionally, when Daniel complained about this to a Kenyan friend who was experiencing similar issues in their own teaching, the friend advised him to leave "those people" (meaning white people) alone. This is a stance, as will be discussed in more detail later in this section, that many participants took when faced with racism. They



often chose not to speak up about their frustrations around issues of perceived racism. On the other hand, when he confided in an American friend about the racism that he was facing, the American friend advised him to fight for himself. Americans have had more experience dealing with racism, and fighting against it, and as such, the contrast in the approaches of Daniel's Kenyan friend and his American friend is telling of how they perceived and reacted to racism. Gibson & Ogbu (1991) note that Africans may downplay racism because they see America as a land of opportunities for them, and as such, they are more willing to avoid speaking up against, or directly confronting issues of racism, in order to focus on pursuing their interests in the United States.

Another participant, Faith, was often distressed by the racism she faced from her students as a teaching assistant. She felt that once some students heard her accent, they brushed her off and did not make any attempt to try and learn from her. Below is an excerpt from one of our interviews where she talks about this:

Faith: It (teaching in the U.S.) has been another training ground for me, and especially to learn to listen to students who majority come from USA. And it was not easy at first for me. Because I felt that I don't know whether I will go and attend this group, try to explain to them. And at times you also realize they have some attitude sort of. Some attitude towards the accent that I'm using. So it has not really been easy. But I keep on encouraging myself and try to use my English and just help them.

Nyabokeye: Tell me about this attitude that they have towards your accent.

Faith: I think you just note, you know? You just know how they behave. Like when you are trying to explain to them something they are like they are not there.

It's like they want to brush you off, you know? It's like they are telling you, we are fine. Like they really want you to move on and leave them. You know that sort of an attitude. (Interview 4 with Faith, 6-28-2014).

In the excerpt above, Faith recounted her initial nervousness about teaching “this group” of students, which was made up of mostly American students. She observed that the students had “some attitude towards the accent that I’m using.” Faith followed this by taking a step back and saying that despite this observation, she just kept encouraging herself and using her English to try and help her students. When I asked that she tell me more about the attitudes that she felt her students had towards her accent, she drew me in as an insider to the experience of being a black, African international student in a U.S. university by saying “You just know how they behave,” implying that I must also have had similar experiences. Faith went on to explain that her students often brushed her off, and did not pay attention when she was trying to explain something to them. Instead, they would act like they were fine and they just wanted her to move on and leave them alone.

Another participant, Mercy, had similar experiences in her teaching. I asked Mercy what her experiences with race have been in her teaching in the U.S., and she gave me an example of student behavior that she perceived as racist. Given the choice between her and another tutor, the students in the class for which she worked as a teaching assistant would avoid her and walk straight to the white tutor for help. Mercy described this in the excerpt below:

Sometimes a white student would walk in, and if they find me and a white tutor in the lab, they will walk straight to where the white tutor is. It's like if it's a choice between me and the white tutor, they will go to the white tutor. It may happen that

if they lift their hand and I go to them, they will not tell me, “No go away, I want the white.” They won’t say that. But if they walk in, usually because they find us seated at different positions, we all just sit randomly. So I noticed when they walk in and they find a white tutor, they will walk straight to the white tutor. Between me and the white tutor, they walk straight to the white tutor. (Interview 4 with Mercy, 6-28-2014)

Mercy noted that she was often bypassed by white students in favor of white tutors when the students had a choice, especially in the lab setting where students walked in and there were several tutors to choose from. She recognized the act of students bypassing her as a commentary on her race, a sign of the preconceptions that they had about her based on racial stereotypes. Like the other participants in this section, Mercy noted that the racism was covert. For example, she observed that in the classroom situation, if a student raised their hand up for help and she walked over to help them, they wouldn’t refuse her help in favor of a white teaching assistant. But in the lab, they could display covert prejudice by walking past her to choose a white tutor when they needed help.

Another participant, Nicole, also echoed similar experiences of people brushing her off once they heard her accent, even though, in her case, they had initially approached her for assistance. The excerpt that follows is from one of my interviews with Nicole.

Some of the people might not tell you directly that they are racists. But you can see how they behave. For example, if you ask a question, how they respond to that question tells you there is something that is deeper than just the question you asked. So other times you meet somebody and you are asking for directions, and maybe it is on the street and they tell you they have no time. Or somebody is

asking for directions, and when you start explaining, go right, turn left, then they realized I don't seem to understand this accent. They say, "Oh thank you. I have got it." And then they start walking away, and when you turn they are asking the next person. (Interview 4 with Nicole, 9-4-2014)

Much like Daniel's, Faith's, and Mercy's experiences, Nicole also noted in the excerpt above that although the racism that she experience was not overt, she could see it in how people responded to and behaved towards her. She gave the example of either her asking for, or someone asking her for directions on the streets. In both cases, she was ultimately brushed off. In the cases of someone asking her for directions, they would quickly thank her and walk away once they heard her accent, only to ask the same question to the next person.

While racism was obviously a problem for all participants, some participants, like Faith, took the stance that they did not have to "note it" or pay much attention to it. As Faith notes in the excerpt that follows, racism was "an issue, but we don't really note it." But even while trying to not to pay attention to it, it was a part of how Faith was perceived at her U.S. university, as she explains below:

I think that (racism) is an issue but we don't really note it. But you realize at times like people can just look at you and they don't want to talk to you so much. I don't know whether it is the culture of this place. And you just realize that at times it has been hard, like they really want to keep to themselves. The whites want to keep to themselves, the African Americans want to keep to themselves, the international students from other nationalities want to keep to themselves. And it has not really been easy interacting all along. So you realize there are some

people who will look at you to see that you are black. Sometimes they even think that you are still black maybe when it comes to thinking (Interview 4 with Faith, 6-28-2014).

In this excerpt, Faith points to the groupings that she observed around her in the U.S. The whites kept to themselves, as did the African Americans, and other international students from other places. Faith also observed that people looked at her as an African international student and “they don’t want to talk to you so much.” She attributes this isolation to her black skin, which she believes some people “even think that you are still black maybe when it comes to thinking.” In saying this, Faith is alluding to the idea that the color black or simply dark skin might be associated with negative things, including a lack of intelligence. As Faith explains further in the excerpt that follows, in her classes, her American colleagues often treated her as lacking in the same intelligence that they possessed.

You will experience some kind of, you know, that gap. Especially in some of the courses we take. And you realize that other students, especially from here, they may look at you and they see as if you don’t have so much to give. They really want to feel like they are the only ones who can contribute and their points are well understood. And yours is just there.” (Interview 4 with Faith, 6-28-2014).

She felt that her American classmates perceived her intelligence to be lower, that her classmates saw her as not having “much to give”, and that they felt that her contributions to classroom discussion were “just there” while their own contributions were “well understood.”

Similarly, as in the excerpt that follows, Sally pointed out that she was also read as having “nothing to contribute” in her classes, especially early on before her classmates got to know her.

Especially to start with, a certain group feels like this individual has nothing to contribute. There is that attitude, which seems to wear off with time. I realized because as the discussions continued day after day, kind of people realized some people may be having more knowledge than us. And then their acceptability begins. And people want to be in the same discussion group with you or doing a project with you. (Interview 4 with Sally, 7-17-2015).

Although at the beginning of her courses Sally was assumed to be less intelligent, and to have nothing to contribute, Sally noted that this perception changed with time after her classmates came to realize she may actually be knowledgeable as well. At that point, there was a shift in how she was perceived, and her classmates began to seek her out for discussion groups and projects.

Like Sally, and as previously shown, Faith was also often stereotyped as lacking in the same intelligence as her American classmates. Faith also proved these stereotypes wrong and took comfort in the fact that she did equally as well, or even better than the white classmates that stereotyped her, when it came to academics. In the excerpt that follows, Faith explains this:

One thing that really encourages me is to find myself doing better than even some of them in class. That one really gives me some morale. Just keep moving on! Some of them they may look at the color of the skin and they think that maybe the way the skin appears to be a little bit dark, even the mind also is a little bit dark

the same. But in the real sense, I feel like we are, as far as thinking is concerned and academic-wise is concerned, we are equal. We are at par. Maybe even better than some of them. There is that attitude of feeling like they are good and all.

(Interview 4 with Faith, 6-28-2014)

In this quote, Faith repeats the idea that some of her white classmates perceived her dark skin to mean that her mind was also dark, or that she was not a bright student. But regardless of how her classmates perceived her, Faith felt that they were “equal” and “at par”, and that maybe she was doing even better than them academically. She noted that the white students had that attitude that they were “good and all.” Faith and Sally both used their brains to prove their intelligence in environments where they were assumed to be lacking in intelligence.

Another participant, Nicole, faced racism of a different kind. Her colleagues expressed ideas that they had about her, about Africa, and about Africans, that were based on stereotypes about Africa. She gave some examples in the excerpt below:

Like this one now who asked me about the elephant, and this one who also told me that they met a Nigerian man they wish I was there because we could have spoken the same language. First I felt like that was ignorance. But because the girl was very excited that they found me somebody from my country, I thought that was maybe the much they knew. And then, do you know another one said the first day I saw you, I looked at your face and said, “Oh my! This girl’s face is even smoother than mine!” That means they expect that girls from Africa have very rough faces, which are not cleaned. Because they have been shown that in Africa

there is all dirt. As in, you know, they are very genuine. (Interview 4 with Nicole, 9-4-2014)

The examples that Nicole gave above, such as the assumption that Africa is one big nation where everybody speaks the same language, the assumptions that there are wild animals roaming everywhere in Africa and people keep them as pets (this was the story behind the reference to the elephant in this first sentence of the above excerpt), and the assumption that African girls have rough skin, are all some of the misconceptions that Nicole experienced some Americans having about her identity as an African. Nicole attributed some of these assumptions by her colleagues in her classes as stemming from genuine ignorance of what it meant to be African.

The experiences of participants presented in this section indicate that participants had racist and deficit assumptions made about them based on stereotypes that are often based on race, nationality, and linguistic background. There are growing numbers of African international students in U.S. universities, and language is one of the major issues that multilingual international students face in U.S. university classrooms (Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Caldwell, & Utsey, 2005; Gatua, 2014; Wamwara-Mbugua & Cornwell, 2010). Coming into a context where their languages and accents are often stigmatized, international students, and especially international students from Africa, often find themselves marginalized and isolated (Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Caldwell, & Utsey (2005), with both their students and colleagues making deficit assumptions about them based on their race and their accents (Gatua, 2014; Wamwara-Mbugua & Cornwell, 2010). These studies, which show the experiences with linguistic



and racial prejudice that other African international students have had in the U.S., are discussed in more detail in chapter two.

Lippi-Green (2004) argues that language is heavily linked to race and racism in the U.S. While overt discrimination based on someone's skin color is frowned upon in the U.S., discrimination based on one's language and accent has become a disguise for things that are really based on race and nationality. As Lippi-Green (2004) points out, "many have come to believe that some types of English are "more English" than others; that there is one perfect and appropriate kind of English that everyone should speak; that failure to speak it is an indication of stupidity, willfulness, or misguided social allegiance (p. 293). Lippi-Green's (2004) argument is reflected clearly in the participant experiences presented in this section. The assumptions made about the participants' intelligence were based on their race, nationality, and the accents with which they spoke the English language. The fact that participants were perceived as having a Kenyan accent added another layer to the discrimination and marginalization that they experienced as black international students in U.S. university classrooms, leading to their being ignored and brushed off, and also being dismissed as having nothing to contribute. Although some participants, like Faith and Sally, chose not to focus much attention on issues of race, they did observe and recognize those issues. And they understood the stereotypes and assumptions made about them to be based on their race, nationality, and their accents. Linguistic and racial stereotyping was therefore one of the major subthemes, under the overarching theme of marginalization, in participants' descriptions of their language and identity experiences in the United States.

## **Silencing of African Languages and Identities**

The third subtheme in the U.S. context interviews that was identified under the theme of marginalization is the subtheme of the silencing African languages and identities. Upon arriving in the U.S., language immediately became a major concern for participants. This was especially the case once they started taking, and in some cases, teaching classes in the U.S. They had a hard time understanding their professors and their peers, and their professors and peers had an equally hard time understanding them. Language difficulties and cultural differences in the classroom became a source of much discomfort for the participants.

Isaac, for example, struggled with English throughout his schooling in Kenya. Although after his teacher training, and working as a teacher in Kenya for many years, he was fluent in English by the time he came to the U.S., he found that his colleagues often did not understand him because of his accent. He also had a hard time understanding their accents. In the excerpt below, Isaac outlines the situation he found himself in as an African international student in a U.S. university classroom:

There were really difficult times in terms of participation. You know you get to be vetted based on the way people are speaking and the way, you know, how you speak. So many a times, yes, you would want to contribute, but you lack the words. You just feel like no, I may not express it as well as I am supposed to. But I would honestly tell you, in the first few weeks, it was not even more of my participation. It was more of whether I was getting what they were talking about. I really wasn't getting much of what was happening. Sometimes the professor would just talk. I hear a few words, so you just assumed that word meant

something else. I mean, it is a lot of discomfort when you are in class and you are not getting much of what is being said. When others are nodding, you are simply like “what did he really say?” nodding in agreement or whatever. You are not comfortable. And then in some of the discussion classes, especially some of my education classes were a lot more discussion classes. You would hear your colleagues trying to say something. But when you cannot say something, you feel like, one either you did not understand. Like there were times I wasn’t sure whether what I feel is supposed to be discussed, because I may be just in my own assumptions based on the few words that I’ve heard. And I think I know what exactly is required only to be out of point. That is sort of intimidation. So you end up keeping quiet just listening to others (Interview 4 with Isaac, 7-16-2014)

Isaac’s words in the excerpt above are very telling of how he felt as an African international student in his U.S. university classrooms. He said “it is a lot of discomfort when you are in class” and also used the words “intimidation” and “difficult times” to describe the feelings that he had. He felt silenced in that he could not participate in classroom discussion because, as he put it, “you get to be vetted based on the way people are speaking and the way, you know, how you speak.” Isaac recognized that the way he spoke was already stigmatized, and he felt uncomfortable about exposing himself by speaking out and risking being judged based on the way he spoke. With English being a second language for him, he also feared he might not express his ideas as well as he was expected to, or that he might lack the words to express his ideas. As such, he ended up “keeping quiet just listening to others.” As other people participated in the learning process, Isaac was silenced by fear and intimidation.

Isaac went on to say that it wasn't just his fears about participating that made his time in classes uncomfortable. He had an equally hard time understanding his professors and his peers. Often he found that he only heard a few words of what they had said and had to fill in the rest of what he thought they said with his assumptions. Isaac was silenced and intimidated in the American university classroom. He did not understand what was going on, and was fearful that what he assumed was going on might in fact not be what was actually going on. That prevented him from speaking up in class. Asked whether he felt his professors supported him in trying to make him feel more comfortable in their classrooms, Isaac responded in the following way:

First of all, I wasn't sure they knew I had a problem, unless you tell them. So one thing is that my way of doing things is, rarely talk to them about my issues. Just try to see how best I can handle them in my own way. So the truth is I never told them. So many a times they assumed everybody is getting it. And there were quite a number of occasions they would ask if anybody has any question or anything. But many times I wouldn't speak up. It's my normal way. I rarely raised up my hand to say that I didn't hear what you said or I didn't get this and this. I don't. So I cannot blame them. I would just try to say let me figure this out on my own.

(Interview 4 with Isaac, 7-16-2014)

In the excerpt above, Isaac takes on the blame for his own discomfort in the U.S. classroom. He excuses his professors' lack of recognition of his struggles as his own fault since he did not raise his hand and say that he was having a hard time understanding the professors and his colleagues. The professor would ask if anyone had any questions, and Isaac would not volunteer his confusion by asking any questions. Isaac however, does not

indicate that his professors ever made any efforts, beyond asking generally if anyone had any questions, to make him feel included in the classroom discussions. When he remained silent, nobody checked in individually with him to try and understand why he was silent, or how they could help him feel more comfortable about being a part of that classroom community.

Isaac indicated elsewhere in our interviews that he was more comfortable in his mathematics classes because the mathematics classes were highly diverse in comparison to courses in education that he had to take. Isaac's classes in education were predominantly white American, with a majority of his colleagues being white American females. Additionally, his classes in Mathematics did not involve a lot of discussion, unlike his classes in education that were mostly discussion based.

Isaac ultimately failed his qualifying exams a couple of times before being pushed out of that U.S. university. He was then forced to look for a job and move to a different city. He joined another PhD program as a part time student, and at the time of this study, was having to retake classes all over again because the school had a limit on the number of credits that one could transfer from another institution.

Another participant, Kariuki, shared his frustration with the dynamics of the American classroom whereby American students dominate discussions while international students are silenced, mainly because of issues to do with language. He expressed these experiences in the excerpt below:

If you attend a classroom where we have Americans, and I think this is upbringing, they have, like in grad school, the grad classes I have attended most of them are kind of very proactive. English is their first language, so when a

question is posed by the lecturer, they kind of get it very fast. They are proactive, like they would want to answer very fast. So it is common in the classes that I have attended to find that international students, not that they don't know or they don't understand, it's just that some of our American colleagues are quite fast, which is not a bad thing. It is because of the upbringing. This is their country. You are used to freedom of expression. But international students, there is that wait time, which the professors in my view need to take into account. That when you have an international class, Americans would answer very fast. Because these others are trying to first of all formulate. English is not their first language. So we are trying to construct a sentence. Like for me, I struggle with these people to understand (Interview 4 with Kariuki, 9-24-2014).

Kariuki found that American students had the linguistic upper hand, in addition to coming from a culture that rewards proactive behavior, and they could answer questions very fast in discussions. He contrasted this to the position of international student needing more time to construct a response in English in their minds before articulating it to the class. Because it was difficult to keep up with the fast and proactive pace of American students in class participation, Kariuki struggled. However, Kariuki did not think that this was intentionally meant to silence international students, as he pointed out below:

They are quick in answering not because it is intentional to shut out. It is just that, for me I think it is the barrier, the communication barrier. English is not our first language, so whenever there is a question, there is always what I would call a wait time. Okay, there is a wait time for the Americans students to understand the questions. But for international students it is double wait time. Double wait time

first to understand the question and the construction of the answer, formulation of the answer in a language other than your own.” (Interview 4 with Kariuki, 9-24-2014)

Kariuki pointed out the difference in how American students and international student, to whom English is not a first language, communicate in the classroom. While American students needed some wait time from their professors in answering questions, Kariuki felt that international students needed double that wait time, because in addition to processing the question, they needed time to formulate an answer in a second language. Kariuki offered some suggestions for how professors can work with international students in order to avoid silencing them in their classrooms.

We have different dialects. I would just say like people should be conscious that those of us who are international students, English is not our first language and the English that is our first language again is not the American English. It is English from maybe London. But even that accent. So it is not even English from London. This is English made in Kenya. There should be an aspect of patience. And people should not be, when I say, “pardon me” or “say that again,” like every time you get tired of me. When I tell you, “say that again,” it does not mean that I am stupid or I don’t understand or I am slow, or I am an African from a dark continent who are slow in understanding. No,no,no. It just means that I am telling you to slow down, let us come at the same level and we can communicate. When it comes to classroom instructional practices, maybe instructors should be conscious of that and give international students who English is not their first language time. What I would call wait time. And know that Americans would be

fast in answering, not because they think fast. It's because even English is their first language. But for us we would struggle with understanding, and then struggle in constructing our sentences.” (Interview 4 with Kariuki, 9-24-2014)

Kariuki felt that it would be beneficial for international students if professors took into account their language issues during class discussions so that these students can also have opportunities to contribute to the learning process. Rather than getting frustrated with international students and viewing them as being “stupid” or “slow”, efforts should be made to understand that English is a second language for them and when information is presented in English, it might take longer for them to process it than would a native speaker of the language.

Of all ten participants in this study, Faith had perhaps the most vernacular influence in her spoken English. Her first language was Kikuyu, and her spoken English had a lot of Kikuyu influence in the way that she pronounced her words. In the classes that she took in her first semester as a student in a U.S. university, she did not speak up much because some people could not understand what she was saying. In the excerpt that follows, Faith talks about her experiences in U.S. university classrooms.

Let me say for the first semester, it was a time to adjust. It was not easy for me. So many things to do with culture. I think I really experienced what is called culture shock. And the first thing was to do with language. I found out that with my English accent, some people could not really understand me. So it was not easy for me. And most of the time, even in classes, I was like I just want to, not to talk too much, just try to listen. (Interview 4 with Faith, 6-28-2014)



Like with Isaac's experiences, Faith felt silenced due to her accent. Her colleagues in her classes did not seem to understand her, and that was hard on her. Her response to the language difficulties that she experienced in her classes was to avoid talking, and instead "just try to listen." This experience of having such a hard time because of language difficulties was a real shock to Faith, as she explains in the excerpt that follows:

I think for me it was not very easy to start with. I thought that with the English that I knew, everybody would understand me. And I think even it got worse. Especially when I started my classes, whereby we could now interact with many whites. Sometimes I could talk something and they are like, "huh?" I need to repeat again. And me I was like, "how come they are not understanding what I'm saying? I need to stop talking now that these people do not seem to really understand my accent." I felt like I'm shying now away. I mean it was not a good feeling because, gosh, at first it was very stressful for me. I was wondering, will I get to a point whereby I will feel at ease with the way I communicate and even be able to speak in a way that the other person will be able to understand me quickly without really struggling? I thought that with the English that I have, I would be able to speak and people understand me. So to me it was a real shock. It was a real shock to me and I was like I don't even feel comfortable now speaking to some students, especially those who speak like they have a very real American accent, very fast. Sometimes there are some words that I don't really hear. And I try to connect as per the context. Just connecting. (Interview 4 with Faith, 6-28-2014)

Constantly being asked to repeat herself silenced Faith because coming into the country, she had thought that the English she already knew was enough for people to be able to understand her. She did not understand everything Americans said, but she made some effort to connect the dots based on the context and she tried to make meaning of what was being said. But when it became apparent that people did not understand her, or were not making enough effort to try to understand her, she thought it might be better for her to stop talking.

Faith worked hard to try and cope with the issues surrounding language that she faced in the American university classroom. Some professors tried to make the classes more accessible and more comfortable for her and other international students, as she notes in the excerpt below:

So during that time I remember there are times where I could like share my contribution and I realize the other students, especially those who are Americans, they are really not understanding some of the words that I'm using, or my accent. So I had to keep on repeating. But I am also happy that even the instructor that was teaching at that time, I think she so much used to listen to many accents. She could come in and help to explain more what I meant. (Interview 4 with Faith, 6-28-2014)

Although Faith had language difficulties in her classes, she did take at least one class where the instructor of the course was able to understand her accent and would come to her aid and explain what she had said when her classmates did not understand her.

Faith experienced a change in her comfort levels in her classes after her first semester. In her second semester, Faith took a class that turned out to be more diverse

than her previous classes, as well as having fewer students. She credited that course for helping her learn how to deal with the problems she was experiencing with language at that point.

So when I started my spring semester the second semester, there is one course that I took- secondary education. I must say that that course really exposed me very well, especially to more of the language because we were not many students. We were about 6 students in the course, and 3 were African American, and two were whites. And I was the only international student from Kenya. So for me it was a good experience. At first it was challenging because I was wondering, would I really be getting what these people are saying? Their accent and all that? But that was like a training ground for me. I just felt that it is my moment now to learn to listen keenly and get to understand what the other students, their accent is like. And that class, besides learning and sailing very well in the course, I think I really learnt a lot when it comes to listening. And I also learned how to talk. I felt at ease in that class finally. (Interview 4 with Faith, 6-28-2014)

Faith noted that this particular class had six students total, with three being African American, herself being African, and two being white. Faith finally “felt at ease” in that class and she also “learned how to talk,” something she had struggled with in classes she had taken previously. Additionally, afterwards, Faith became more comfortable with asking people to repeat themselves, rather than staying silent and trying to guess what people meant as she would often do earlier on. She explains this in the quote that follows:

I started training myself just like, to be a good listener. Just to learn to listen to others. And if I don't hear very keenly, at first I was not able to ask people to repeat what they had said. But I think with time I am able to ask people politely, "just repeat what you have said" for me to be able to understand them. (Interview 4 with Faith, 6-28-2014)

As is evident in the excerpt above, Faith was able to move past the silence that was imposed on her by her classroom environments, and the silence that she had imposed on herself because of frustration at not being understood. She moved past the silence to a place where she was able to listen more keenly to hear other people when they spoke, and also to speak up when she did not understand someone. This is not to say that Faith felt completely free of the imposed and self-imposed silence that she experienced as a new international student in a U.S. university. In the excerpt that follows, Faith expressed hope for a time when she will be able to feel comfortable about speaking in various contexts without any fears with regards to her language and accent.

As for myself, I would like to see having really improved in my communication with just feeling at ease when I am with anyone. Like I don't feel here I should talk, there I cannot talk too much because I'm fearing whether they are going to understand what I'm saying. I'm looking forward to a point whereby I'm able to express myself at ease with others and they really understand what I am saying. And they too can talk and I am able to understand what they are saying, which I can really see forth coming. Because at least I have really improved in my listening skills. (Interview 5 with Faith, 6-30-2014)

In this quote, Faith communicated that although she had improved her listening skills to be able to understand what other people in her classes were saying, she still did not feel completely at ease about speaking. She still looked forward to a time when she would be able to speak in front of anyone without being fearful that she might not be understood. There were still contexts where she felt like she could not or should not talk, as expressed in this sentence, “like I don’t feel here I should talk, there I cannot talk too much.” There was still work to be done to reach a space where Faith felt like she was really free to talk and express herself.

Unlike Faith’s accent, which is rather heavily influenced by her African language, Kikuyu, Valerie had little to no vernacular influence in her accent. That means that it was not easily perceptible what linguistic community she came from simply by her accent. While there was still a bit of a Kenyan accent in her English, it was obvious from listening to her that she had been in the United States for a while. Her accent had some of the characteristics of an American accent. However, Valerie remembered feeling out of place in her classes when she first arrived. Despite her previously extroverted personality, she found herself becoming introverted and avoiding conversations with her classmates once she got to the U.S. In the excerpt that follows, Valerie explained this:

I guess I was feeling left out. My American faculty might have felt like I didn’t know anything. When folks do not pay attention to what you are saying, or before class people want to come early and chat. When I was in undergrad and high school, I was always the “who is who,” the ones picking out the ones left out. But now the tables turned when I came to this culture. With different ways of doing things, I was now the one very reserved, not talking much. Because I didn’t want

to say anything. I would walk in a few minutes before class started, and I would sit in one corner so that I don't have to say anything. I became very introverted. I thought I was an extrovert but I realized that I am an introvert, with extrovert tendencies when I was Kenya. (Interview 4 with Valerie, 7-28-2014)

Valerie felt that her American instructors thought she “didn't know anything” because she did not feel comfortable in her new environment. For example, she says that before class, her classmates would come into the classroom early and chat. But she would walk in a few minutes before class started and sit in a corner so that she didn't have to say anything to anyone. While she had been an extrovert in Kenya, and she describes herself as having been the “who is who” in high school and undergraduate, when she came to the U.S. as a graduate student, the tables turned, and suddenly she was the introverted student sneaking into class right before it started to avoid talking to people. Indeed, looking back at excerpts from Valerie's interviews in previous sections of this chapter, she felt that once she came to the U.S., suddenly she was a raced individual, and she had to constantly explain who she was and where she was from when people heard her accent. This silenced her, and as previously noted in her earlier experiences, she now had to take on a history and an identity that she had previously not had to deal with.

In their US graduate programs, participants felt pressured to speak a certain way. Most participants felt that they were communicating clearly enough, but their accents were often a cause of discomfort and unease among their colleagues in the classroom, and their students in the classes they taught as teaching assistants. The discomfort and silencing was not always because of the language that they spoke, but rather because of how they were perceived based on their race and their accents. In discussing the politics

of language and the perception of language minority students in the U.S., Nieto (2002) states, “linguistically, there is nothing wrong with the languages they speak; for purposes of communication, one language is as valid as any other. But socially and politically, the languages spoken by most language minority students in the United States are accorded low status” (p. 82). This view expressed by Nieto (2002) was reflected in the experiences of participants in this study. Reactions to their varieties of the English language when they spoke reflected the low status that was accorded to their accents. As such, the participants were fearful about speaking in class, lest they attract the stigma and disdain of their classmates.

### **Responses to Marginalization**

In the preceding section, I have presented findings of the forms of linguistic and identity marginalization, including stereotyping and silencing, that participants experienced in their US classrooms, both in their role as students and as teaching assistants. While the marginalization was obviously distressing to the participants, some participants took whatever opportunities they could to push back against the marginalization of their languages and identities. As defined earlier in this chapter, marginalization, as a theme here, refers to the ways in which participants’ identities as speakers of African languages were suppressed and/or devalued while dominant linguistic and cultural identities were promoted as superior. In this section, I will present findings that show the different ways that participants responded to the marginalization of their African languages and identities in the United States.

Participants’ responses to the marginalization of their languages and identities took various forms. While some participants, like Valerie, actively tried to resist

marginalization, other participants like Eva and Daniel tried to resist the marginalization by finding community with other Kenyans in the U.S., or with African Americans. Eva was successful in creating a community with other African American women, where they supported each other as black women, while another participant, Nicole, took issue with the way African Americans responded to racism and marginalization in the U.S. The experiences of these participants are presented in this section.

As a student, Eva, sometimes encountered instances of racism, or ignorance in her classes. When she was newer to the U.S., she would get angry when faced with racism, but after being in the U.S. for a while, her response changed, as evidenced in the excerpt that follows:

Even in class, I had a professor who said that Africa is a dark continent, while I am an African. And we have done research about Africa and documented about Africa. Even still they would still mention things about Africa in my earshot, things that I have already told them that they are myths, but they would still off track Africa. And before I would get angry. But now I don't get angry anymore. Because I understand that some people will always be like that, and there are things that wouldn't just change. (Interview 3 with Eva, 7-18-2014)

In this excerpt, Eva notes that some of the things that her colleagues in the classroom said about Africa, she had already told them that they were myths, and yet they kept saying then. Therefore, she did not feel compelled to respond to the stereotypes anymore, since they were things she had already made attempts to clarify in the past. Eva had learned to move past anger, to an acceptance that “some people will always be like that, and there are things that wouldn't just change.”



In some instances however, there was some push back when someone made insensitive comments about Africa, as Eva recalled in the excerpt below:

In one of the forums I attended, this gentleman stood up and told us the reason we would not develop is because our ways were quite primitive. And that did not sink in well with a lot of people. And most were not happy with him. Because “primitive” is not a word you use with Africans. (Interview 3 with Eva, 7-18-2014)

The incident that Eva described above took place at one of the forums that she attended with other black women, mostly African American. A man stood up and used the word “primitive” in reference to African ways, and this was problematic for the attendees at the forum because as Eva pointed out “primitive is not a word you use with Africans” because of the history that Africans have had with that word. Words like primitive, and backward, are some of the words historically used to describe Africans by white colonizers.

Eva had to find a way to cope with the marginalizing issues that she faced in the U.S. Eva found community with African Americans because she felt that African Americans experienced the same struggles with race and identity that she experienced as an African woman, and they were willing to interrogate those issues. Eva explained that in the following quote:

I wanted to know of African Americans and how they were encountering the same problems like immigrants. Because as immigrants, we didn’t have a language to discuss what we were going through. I made comparisons of the predicament of the African Americans and that of Africans and I saw that it was

relatively the same. I saw that we had the same problems when it came to identity issues. (Interview 3 with Eva, 7-18-2014)

Eva made parallels between her experiences as a black immigrant and the experiences of African Americans and decided that they experienced some of the same issues as black people in the United States.

While Eva was able to find herself and her identity by interacting with and having conversations with African Americans, Nicole took a different approach. Nicole felt that it was more helpful for Americans, both black and white, to work towards moving on from racism instead of shining a spotlight on it. She also thought that the issues of race in the United States are exaggerated. Ogbu (1992) discusses the differences in how voluntary and involuntary minorities view the U.S. by distinguishing between how the two groups became incorporated into the American society. He defines voluntary minorities as people who moved voluntarily to the U.S. “because they believe that this would result in more economic well-being, better overall opportunities, and/or greater political freedom. Even though they experience subordination here, the positive expectations they bring with them influence their perception of the U.S. society and schools controlled by Whites” (p. 290-291). Involuntary minorities on the other hand became part of the U.S. by involuntary means, such as slavery, and as such are less likely to have positive views of the U.S. (Gibson & Ogbu, 1991; Ogbu, 1992). Given the voluntary nature of all participants’ moves to the U.S., most participants did not think racism in the U.S. was something they needed to focus on, and some, like Nicole, thought involuntary minorities, like African Americans, were making it into a bigger issue than it needed to be. The excerpt that follows is a quote from an interview with Nicole:

I also feel that we should not blow the whole idea out of proportion. Like we should not start looking for racism where it is not. Sometimes I feel like they are taking very petty things to make them look like they are racist, or they are based on race. Well the majority of what people feel is racism is actually there. But then I also feel like the slavery and the slave trade and being slaves happened almost 300 years back. So what they could do is to teach generations to try and co-exist with each other because they are in America. They are going nowhere. They have to live here. But then we cannot continue feeding on the children what happened all those years back. It is good to keep the history, but because the history has some negatives impacts towards these children, it is good for the parents, both for the white and black, to try and show them that they can live together, and that that was history. (Interview 4 with Nicole, 9-4-2014)

As explained in previous sections, Nicole did experience instances of marginalization, for example when she described people brushing her off once they heard her accent, or when colleagues made stereotypical assumptions about her as an African woman. But Nicole, as illustrated in the excerpt above, still took issue with some of the ways that African Americans responded to issues of racism in America. I wanted to explore this further with Nicole, and so with further conversation, Nicole revealed that she felt African Americans had a negative attitude towards Africans, and that she also felt excluded from the experiences of African Americans. While she recognized that racism was real in the United States, she felt that sometimes it was exaggerated. She did not feel included in the issues that African Americans faced in the United States, and as a response to this perceived marginalization, she felt disconnected from them.

I have realized that the African Americans too also have another attitude towards the Africans themselves. Such that now maybe they feel like it is the Africans who sold them to be slaves. And now they have another negative attitudes towards the whites because they made them slaves. We can all forget about this thing because even my great grandparents were not participants of slave trade. Yet it is still affecting hundreds of generations that came later. So I think it is a big issue that cannot be swept under the carpet. At the same time we should not blow it out of proportion. Sometimes when you go to the shopping malls, you realized that even the way the African Americans answer you back when you ask for something, is not like a friendly way you would expect them to. Sometimes white attendants can respond to you in a more respectful way than African Americans. Or when you are asking for direction if you need to get somewhere and they seem to have no time even for one second to explain to you what you are really asking for. I feel like that's kind of an attitude. And even in class, they would want to talk like they are in a class of their own that has not been experienced by anyone else. "You Africans what are you talking about and you just found us here?" Yeah, that kind of attitude. Of course you expect that when you see them because you have the same color of skin, and you all maybe trace roots in Africa, you should be more closer than the whites. But then you realized that they are even further or they pull themselves further in their own cocoon or class. If you are like forming groups, they want to form their own group that is only made of African Americans, and you find your way to other groups.

(Interview 4 with Nicole, 9-4-2014)

Nicole expected that because they shared the same skin color, African Americans would be more accepting and inclusive of her as an African. However, she found that that was not the case. The African Americans in her classes excluded her on the basis that she was a newcomer to the experience of being black in America, and as such she was not expected to know about that experience. Nicole therefore responded to this marginalization by people she expected to be on the same side with her by distancing herself from them, and becoming further alienated from the possibility of interrogating issues of race and racism with them in some of the ways that participants like Eva did.

Unlike Nicole, Eva had conversations with her group of African American sisters that she felt were including, rather than excluding, of her as an African woman. To distinguish between the experiences of Eva and Nicole, though, Eva had been in the U.S. over ten years by the time of our interviews, while Nicole had been in the U.S. only one year. Additionally, Eva viewed the U.S. as potentially her permanent home, since she did not have plans to move back to Kenya, while Nicole was still keeping her options open. In the group of African and African American women that Eva became a part of, they interrogated issues of how Africans and African Americans view each other and the reasons behind the negative views that each group might have of the other.

Some of the conversations we had were such as how we see each other and how we know each other and it was evident that most of what we knew about each other was from what the media showed us. Most African Americans when they see us, they believe that we are snobbish. And from Kenya where I come from, we see them as the 49<sup>th</sup> tribe. And we come with a stereotype that they are lazy people and the media has already depicted them so negatively. And therefore we

put them at the bottom of where we come from. We were very conflicted because most African Americans remind us about where we wanted to be and where we didn't want to be. And even at home most of us grew up in the pop culture and we admired the pop musicians and actors of the U.S. But when we come here, we struggle and we are caught in between the relation between the Americans and the African Americans. And we come from a setting where white people, like back in Kenya, are held at a higher stature and are seen as the best in certain expertise. And most of us did not grow up during colonialism, so there is a way we don't view American people as how the African American people see them. And when we see that, we think it's wrong because we don't know the history between them. And most of our parents don't talk about it, so we don't know what happened.

(Interview 3 with Eva, 7-18-2014)

Eva cited issues of survival and protecting one's immigration status as some of the reasons Africans might not be in a position to offer solidarity to African Americans in the struggle against racism. As Gibson & Ogbu (1991) point out, voluntary minorities come to the U.S. with positive expectations, and they see the U.S. as having better prospects for them and their families, in comparison to their home countries, and as such, they are more likely to do everything they can to survive, and even thrive, in the U.S. Eva observed that for Africans in the U.S., getting involved in resisting racism might be viewed as potentially jeopardizing their immigration status, and as such, their ability to pursue a better life in America.

And besides, we have issues of surviving here. When you come to school here and you start aligning yourself with African Americans, you might have

problems, as they are resisting. And you are African, and they ultimately view themselves as Americans. In many situations, we know what is going on and we know what racism is, but we cannot protest because we don't have the voice. Plus some of us have very sensitive papers and we might be deported back to Kenya at any time. So we cannot resist very strongly. And some of us are economic refugees in our countries. For instance myself, I might not do better because I lack the connections. And for now, I can do better here in America than in Kenya. Therefore it requires a certain discipline to interact, because I might see someone's unfairness but because I am not a citizen, I cannot protest because I have no fall back plan. But comparing to the African American, I can trace back to my roots and say this is my family, this is where I came from. African Americans don't have that advantage, and that is a factor that makes them angry. We also had conversations on how we call them. Some of the Africans called them animals. I wondered why you would call people who look like you wild animals? (Interview 3 with Eva, 7-18-2014)

While Eva was able to have these important conversations with African Americans and explore her own identity in the process, she found that she was not able to have the same conversations with her Kenyan community in the U.S. The Kenyans in her community in the U.S. preferred to not confront the issue of race but rather believe that anyone can be successful as long as they worked hard. Additionally, being only temporarily in the U.S., they did not feel like they needed to invest themselves in the country and the country's issues, as Eva explains below:

Eva: I'd say that most of them are very Christian and there are issues like racism that I wouldn't be up to talk to them about because I don't think they could hold such conversations.

Nyaboke: And why is that?

Eva: They are not ready. And yet they are actually raising their kids here. And they are the kind of people that use the Bible to say that success is based on your hard work. So that's why I don't have such conversations with them. We are not as united as we used to be. Like last week, we got an email that we should collect at least 20 dollars in case of a funeral. But it didn't go down well because most of the students know that they will later relocate or some would want to return home. So they would not invest because the place is like "a by the way" place.

(Interview 3 with Eva, 7-18-2014)

Eva perceived that the Africans in her community here in the U.S. were not ready for conversations about race because of the Africans' lack of investment in the country, and also because the Africans had Christian convictions that Eva felt made it difficult to have certain conversations with them. And so Eva's personal response to the marginalization of her identities in the U.S. was to align herself with African American, whom she felt were more invested in some of the same issues of racism that she wanted to interrogate.

Another participant, Valerie, felt uncomfortable when she first arrived in the U.S. as a graduate student. But her experiences motivated her to pursue work on the issues that international students face when they come to study in the U.S. In addition to pursuing a PhD in education, Valerie also held a position working with international students at her



university. In the excerpt that follows, she outlines the ways that, through her position, she advocated for international students coming into U.S. universities:

I think a lot of what has contributed to my being successful as an international staff member in this school is that I now have a voice. I now know how to navigate the nuances of political issues within higher ed. I am no longer the quiet graduate student. I am an advocate for myself and for my students. So many people call me when they want to consult about something. So I think that is what you can say is the differences between how I felt as a graduate student and my first job. To the point now I am considered an expert.... So our students do have a voice. We advocate for them when they are facing discrimination on campus. So they know. We tell them that from the very beginning; don't suffer in silence. Let somebody know if anyone is impeding on your freedom. (Interview 4 with Valerie, 7-28-2014)

Valerie pointed out that she now had a voice. She said this in reference to the fact that when she was new to the U.S., she was instantly silenced by her new environment, and she suddenly became introverted although she had been more extroverted before. But with time, she gained a voice and was “no longer the quiet graduate student.” Valerie saw herself as an advocate for herself and her students. She drew on her own experiences as an international student with a multilingual background to advocate for the needs of international students that were facing the same kinds of issues that she had faced when she first arrived in the U.S.

In describing some of the issues that the international students that she worked with faced, Valerie pointed out that:

For other students, it is normally cyber bullying, or someone leaving you a note saying, go home. Or the worst is when it is the faculty member that is bullying the student. You will find a faculty member who told a Nigerian student, “Hey you will never amount to anything apart from being an athlete or being a musician.”

So this was a tenured professor, but still within that tenure, you are held accountable. So we use the legal office to get him taken care of. (Interview 4 with Valerie, 7-28-2014)

The discrimination issues that students faced came from not just other students but from faculty members sometimes. Stereotypes and prejudices played a role in how international students were viewed by their peers and by the instructors, and sometimes those prejudices came out in the form of attacks on individual international students. Noel (2000) points out that it is important for educators to interrogate their own prejudices, even when they don't think that they have any. In the U.S., it is common for educators to deny having any prejudices against any groups of students (Noel, 2000), but cases of prejudice, racism and discrimination against students that are outside of the dominant race and culture are also widespread. Valerie's office at her university in the U.S. ensured that those people that subjected international students to discriminatory treatment were held accountable, regardless of their positions.

The participants in this study responded to the marginalization of their languages and identities in the United States in different ways. Valerie, for example, initially silenced by the marginalizing experiences that she had, later on found her voice and faced the issues of marginalization head-on through her position as support staff for international students coming into her university. While Nicole rejected the magnitude of

the issue of racism in America and distanced herself from African Americans, Eva formed a close sisterhood with a group of African American women, and through this group, interrogated the common issues surrounding racism and marginalization that they faced as black women in the United States. The experiences of the participants in this study as relates to their responses to marginalization therefore varied in some ways, but they also all revealed a struggle to reconcile their identities to an environment where those identities were not valued.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter focused on the theme of marginalization of African languages and identities in the Kenyan and U.S. contexts. This theme was common to the experiences of all ten participants. In the Kenyan context, the theme of marginalization was presented under four subthemes: punishing students' use of African languages, silencing African languages and identities, hierarchy of languages and identities, and resisting the marginalization of African languages and identities. Under these subthemes, findings from the participants' experiences were presented from the domains named in the research question: What are the post-colonial language and identity experiences of transnational Kenyan teachers in graduate education programs in the United States in the following domains: a) their primary and secondary schooling in Kenya b) their teacher preparation in Kenya c) their teaching experiences in Kenya; and d) their graduate education in the United States? However, although experiences from the domains in the research question were included, more focus was put into the themes and subthemes that emerged than on the timeline of what happened when. This is discussed in more detail in the methodology section of this dissertation.

In the Kenyan context, the participants, or their peers, were humiliated, shamed, beaten, and forced to perform manual labor in their schools for speaking African languages in school. The clear message to the students was that their languages were not valued in school, and that in order to be successful, they had to learn English as quickly as possible and forget all about their African languages. Teachers were largely responsible for these humiliations and punishments that participants suffered as students, and when the participants became teachers themselves, some of them reported using some of the same methods in an attempt to get students to stop speaking African languages in school. In doing this, the teachers had good intentions, as they wanted their students to learn the English language, which is critical for their educational success in Kenyan schools. However, in thinking back to these experiences, participants felt things need to change in the methods used to encourage students to learn and speak the English language. Nieto (2002) notes that teaching is a “lifelong journey of personal transformation” (p. 280), and learning to understand and value students’ multilingualism and multiculturalism is part of that journey. It is possible to learn English and all the academic literacies that are required in school without stumping out students’ native languages and identities in the process (Delpit, 2002).

The subthemes that emerged under the theme of marginalization in the U.S. context were: becoming raced, linguistic and racial stereotyping in the U.S., silencing of African languages and Identities, and responses to marginalization. Teacher participants experienced marginalization in the U.S. context, both as students and as teaching Assistants. They reported often feeling like they could not speak in their classes in the U.S. because for one thing, they often did not understand some of the things that the

professors and their peers were talking about. Also, when they attempted to give their contributions, not being understood, or constantly being asked to repeat themselves made them shy away from making any further attempts to contribute to classroom discussions. Furthermore, some participants felt like they were not provided with sufficient opportunities to participate, as American students were more likely to jump in and answer questions very fast before they had an opportunity to process the question and formulate a response. This was perceived to be a cultural thing, as Americans seem to have a culture of being more proactive in comparison to some other cultures that might frown upon that kind of behavior. It is important for American university educators to strive to know and understand the learners in their classroom, especially international learners who come from different cultures with different languages, in order to be able to create a classroom environment that is both welcoming and inclusive for all (Ma, 2014; Zheng, 2014).

The theme of the marginalization of African languages and identities that emerged in interviews with participants in this study is important because a lot of the same marginalizing and silencing practices that these participants experienced as students in Kenya, as teachers in Kenya, and as international students in the U.S., continue to occur in both contexts. Though in different ways, African languages and identities are marginalized in Kenya just as much as they are marginalized in the U.S. Rather than finding spaces for both African languages and English to live side by side, attempts are made to choke African languages out in order to make room for the English language and westernized identities. This is why it is important to hear the voices of these participants as they describe their experiences with language and identity in both the Kenyan and the United States contexts.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### “IT’S LIKE I AM TAKING SOME REST FROM A LOT OF ENGLISH”: (RE)CLAIMING AFRICAN LANGUAGES AND IDENTITIES IN KENYA AND THE UNITED STATES

This chapter will present findings on the theme of (re)claiming African languages and identities, which emerged from the data in this study. I put parenthesis in the word (re)claiming to indicate that while some participants claimed their African languages and identities all through their schooling years, and later in life, other participants did not place a lot of value in, or even tried to distance themselves from their African languages and identities at some point in their lives, but later on reclaimed them. In discussing the ways that participants (re)claimed their African languages and identities, I will draw from post-colonial theories. I will explore the ways the participants experienced their multilingualism with a specific focus on the ways that they connected and reconnected with their various languages and identities. Hybridity as a concept in post-colonial theories will be discussed in this chapter, given that the participants were all multilingual and had to navigate their identities in the midst of languages, which (as established in chapter four) often clashed with each other. The participants’ identities as teachers and scholars in both Kenya and the United States were highly shaped by their ability to speak the English language, but at the same time, in both contexts, they brought in their backgrounds as speakers of African languages in ways that informed both their professional and social lives. They were therefore a mix of different identities, all informing each other and working together to shape the ways that they interacted with their students, their colleagues, and other people in their communities.

In (re)claiming their African languages and identities, participants engaged in code-switching depending on the context they were in, or forged hybrid identities where they enacted their two or more linguistic and cultural identities in various personal and professional spaces. The term hybridity in post-colonial studies is widely attributed to Homi Bhabha (2000), and broadly refers to the coming together and co-existence of multiple languages and cultures in a single individual (Moore-Gilbert, 1997). Many post-colonial nations in Africa adopted the language of their former colonizers and as such, the people in these countries live with two or more, sometimes opposing, languages and cultures; a situation that may lead to the habitants of these nations claiming hybrid identities that encompass both the former colonizer's language and identities, as well as their own native languages and identities. Anzaldúa (1987) has also theorized on hybridity as a borderland identity, an in-between self that is neither one nor the other, but rather a coming together of multiple identities. Being certified teachers in Kenya and graduate students in U.S. universities, all participants in this study were highly literate in English (although their varieties of English were not always valued) and were proud of their academic accomplishments that got them to this point in their careers. They also expressed pride in their African linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and asserted that they viewed their multilingualism as an asset in both their personal and professional identities. For example, and as will be discussed later on in the chapter, some participants used their knowledge of African languages and cultures to inform their teaching, thus creating spaces where both identities worked together to inform their teaching practices.

This chapter is divided into two sections. Both sections are concerned with the same overarching theme of (re)claiming African languages and identities. The first

section focuses on the participants' Kenyan context experiences, and presents two subthemes: Nuances of language and identity affiliations, and honoring students' home languages. The second section of this chapter focuses on the same overarching theme, but with a specific focus on participants' experiences within the United States context. In the United States context, the following subthemes are discussed: Nuances of language and identity affiliation, and African languages and identities as capital.

In presenting findings under the theme of (re)claiming African languages and identities, I consider the participants' experiences as both students and teachers in Kenya, as well as their experiences with transnationalism as international students pursuing graduate education in U.S. universities while maintaining personal and professional ties to Kenya. The terms globalization and transnationalism, which I will define shortly, were central to the experiences of the participants, especially in the United States context.

As a result of globalization, defined simply as the increasingly common interactions across borders that have led to the opening up of borders, global languages, and cultures (Jordão, 2009) have emerged as a reality for more people as they adopt aspects of various cultures and identities in their definitions of themselves. Jordão (2009) refers to a global language as “a language without a homeland, or with as many homelands as there are users of it... a language that belongs to no one and at the same time to everyone.” (p. 95). For participants in this study, a consequence of globalization was that they had to put a lot of emphasis on English as a global language, both as learners in their earlier years, and as teachers later in life.

Another consequence of globalization that was relevant to the participants' experiences is transnationalism. Jiménez, Smith & Teague (2009) define transnationalism



as “the movement of people, media, language, and goods between distinct nation states, particularly that which flows in both directions and is sustained over time” (p. 16). As explained in chapter one, I use the term transnationalism to refer to the personal and professional ties that the participants maintained with their country of origin, Kenya, while they lived and studied in the U.S. Despite globalization, and the emergence of English as a global language (Jordão, 2009), participants (re)claimed their African languages and identities, and sought to create identities that embraced both English and their African languages as necessary and important parts of themselves.

### **Kenyan Context**

In this section I will present findings from the two subthemes that were identified under the theme of (re)claiming African language and identities within the Kenyan context. First I will present the subtheme of nuances of language and identity affiliations. Under this subtheme, I will present data that reflects the nuances of participants’ experiences with languages and identity, and the ways that they chose to enact their multilingualism. For example, some participants chose to claim and reclaim their African languages, and privilege those languages in their lives. Some participants chose to claim and reclaim their African languages, but privilege English and dominant identities. Yet other participants chose to take the middle ground, privileging one language or the other in different contexts, and for different reasons. Participants talked about the ways that they claimed and stayed connected to their African languages, even as they received their schooling in a context where the English-only policy was enforced, often through the use of corporal punishment and manual labor. Other participants’ experiences will reflect the ways that they reclaimed their African languages later in life after those languages were

relegated to inferior positions earlier on. Secondly, under the subtheme of honoring students' home languages, I will present participants' experiences of the ways that they endeavored, as teachers, to honor their students' home languages as a way to (re)claim African languages and identities as valid languages that have value in students' literacy learning. The Kenyan context section will then end with a discussion of the two subthemes.

### **Nuances of Language and Identity Affiliations**

In different ways, and to differing degrees, participants (re)claimed their African languages and identities, even as they embraced the English language. As earlier explained, I put the parenthesis in (re)claiming to mean that while some participants claimed their African languages and identities all through their schooling, and later in life, other participants initially did not place a lot of value in these languages, but later reclaimed them. The nuances of participants' language and identity affiliations were evident in the analysis of data, as will be presented in this section.

Kariuki was highly enthusiastic about his African language, Kikuyu, throughout our interviews. He spoke very fluent English, but he would sometimes switch to Swahili (which I understand), and even Kikuyu (which I do not understand), to express certain points. Whenever he said something in Kikuyu, he would translate it for me since I do not understand the language, being Kisii myself. Kariuki grew up in the city and was fluent in both English and Swahili from quite early on in his life. He was driven to learn his mother tongue, Kikuyu, by a desire to connect with the language, and with his rural home environment. In the excerpt that follows, he explained his connection to Kikuyu:

I am proud of my language as a Kikuyu. So during the school holidays, I never spent any extra day in Nairobi. I always wanted to go to the rural area to learn more Kikuyu and to interact. Because I found the rural area so spacious, a lot of freedom to move around, to eat mangoes. So even when I was through with primary school and got an admission in Nairobi, I refused and went to a day school in the rural area. But interestingly, up to today they say I speak broken Kikuyu. (Interview 1 with Kariuki, 6-14-2014).

Kariuki was deeply connected to the Kikuyu language and to his rural home. So much so that although he got admission to a high school in Nairobi, he decided to go to a rural high school instead. This is contrary to the ideas some participants expressed in chapter four that coming from Nairobi was seen as superior to being from the village. In that case, people in the rural areas would want to go to school in Nairobi, or try to imitate people from Nairobi, and not the other way around. But Kariuki's love for his language and culture drew him to want to study in his rural area. Despite putting in a lot of effort though, Kariuki noted that his Kikuyu was still considered "broken." According to Anzaldúa (1987), it is typical for individuals with hybrid border identities to be in between languages and cultures, never fitting in completely in either one. As evidenced by his "broken" Kikuyu, Kariuki did not fully fit in as a speaker of the Kikuyu language. Similarly, as was apparent in his descriptions of his experiences with English in chapter four, he did not fully fit in as a speaker of the English language either. Kariuki maintained, throughout our interviews, a strong connection to Kikuyu, and he privileged Kikuyu as a language he was proud of.

Kariuki's enthusiasm for speaking the Kikuyu language was not always met with the same enthusiastic attitude. Some people found it irritating when he spoke to them, or to other people, in Kikuyu, as Kariuki points out in this excerpt:

Unlike my colleagues, who strain so much to learn English and Kiswahili, for me it was the other way around. I wanted to learn more Kikuyu and to engage in conversations in Kikuyu, which brought me into problems. Like people would ask, why are you speaking in Kikuyu? Because if I find a fellow Kikuyu, I don't like conversing in Kiswahili or English. And some people kind of get irritated. Some of my friends used to get irritated. "Why are you guys speaking in... I mean!" (Interview 1 with Kariuki, 6-14-2014).

The dilemma of loving a language that is highly stigmatized was real for Kariuki. Having gone to a primary school in Nairobi, the speaking of African languages was not very prevalent in the school, and while his friends were striving to learn and speak in English and Swahili, Kariuki was rocking the boat by speaking Kikuyu and in the process, annoying some people.

You would find some who would shy away from Kikuyu. They are Kikuyus but they shy away. Even in primary school. When I come back from the rural areas, I am eager to kind of experiment with them. They shy away. Looking back now, either they were not fluent, so they would shy away from it. So that's one way of looking at it. Some maybe they just don't want to be associated to it. (Interview 1 with Kariuki, 6-14-2014)

As Kariuki pointed out in the excerpt above, Kikuyu was a language that some people did not want to be associated with, but despite this lack of enthusiasm from his peers, Kariuki

maintained a strong pride in his African language throughout his schooling and into his adulthood. Whenever he was around other speakers of the Kikuyu language who were willing to speak the language, he spoke Kikuyu. However, he had to negotiate the contexts in which he spoke this language since, as some participants, including Kariuki, revealed in chapter four, some Kenyans frown upon the speaking of African languages, linking it to tribalism and lower social class. Kariuki moved in between these languages, often facing some resistance, but nonetheless choosing to privilege Kikuyu in contexts where he felt it was appropriate to do so.

Kariuki also faced a clash of identities whenever he went to his rural home. The other children in his village saw Kariuki as someone that could be key to helping them learn the English and Kiswahili languages. The rural children were already fluent in their vernacular language, and were thus interested in a reciprocal engagement where they learned English and Kiswahili from Kariuki, and Kariuki learned Kikuyu from them. But being from Nairobi, Kariuki was not very fluent in the kind of “pure” Kiswahili that they were trying to get from him. He was more comfortable with an in between language, sheng’, which is a less formal type of Kiswahili that is mixed with English and other languages.

When we converse with them in Kiswahili, they would make an attempt to converse in pure Kiswahili. Which for me, when I start speaking in pure Kiswahili, was putting a strain on me. Because it’s not a formal setup. Because I associate pure Kiswahili in a formal conversation. But sheng’, which is a corruption of Kiswahili and English and some bit of mother tongue here and there, is more of informal. I would be more comfortable to engage them in an

informal conversation with sheng'. I want to converse in Kikuyu and they want to converse in Kiswahili. But the kind of Kiswahili they would want is not the one that I would want to engage in. They want to engage in formal, what they are taught in school, which I am comfortable with. But I am only comfortable conversing in that kind of Kiswahili in a formal setup, but not with my friends relaxing. That was now the problem. (Interview 1 with Kariuki, 6-14-2014)

Kariuki was facing expectations from his rural friends to be a support in their learning of a "pure" form of Swahili, while to him, that did not fit in with the context or with the relationships he had with these friends. In that context, he was more comfortable claiming either Kikuyu, or sheng' as a hybrid language, which was more suited to the way that he wanted to portray himself in those relationships.

Kariuki's commitment to Kikuyu comes through strongly in the experiences presented in this section. I will point out here though that Kariuki was equally enthusiastic about English, as was evident in the ways that he and other teachers enforced the language policy in their school (see chapter four for more on this). Personally, he had a deep love for Kikuyu and a deep desire to learn the language, but professionally, as a teacher, he was forced to enforce the English-only policy and stress to his students that they were "professionals" and needed to represent themselves as such by speaking in English. Living in the in-between space of embracing both languages, he practiced both identities as a speaker of Kikuyu and a speaker of English, but neither language fully defined him.

Another participant, Sally, also had a complex relationship with English and with the two African languages, Kikuyu and Kimeru, that she considered her vernacular

languages. In chapter four, I shared findings that Sally recounted participating, as a young student in a school culture where African languages and accents were stigmatized, in laughing at and making fun of those students that had African vernacular-influenced accents in their spoken English. At that point in her life, she thought it was funny and would participate in humiliating those students. But even as she did that, Sally spoke both Kikuyu and Kimeru at home with her family, and she had a special connection with both languages, as can be seen in the quote that follows:

They (Kikuyu and Kimeru) have a special place in my life. Because I feel that I express myself better when I use those languages with my family and friends. I feel like I am getting understood more, and I can reach more people who matter to me. (Interview 1 with Sally, 7-5-2014)

The contradictions in Sally's experiences were not uncommon in the interviews of other participants in this study. Making fun of African languages and accents among school children, and sometimes teachers, was often considered to be all in good fun. Although the effects of this shaming of African languages and accents were clearly evident, for example, when those that got laughed at became silent and withdrawn (see chapter four for more on this), the people that did the shaming often did not consider their actions anything but a natural part of English language learning. Making fun of vernacular-influenced accents was supposed to be funny, but it did not seem to mean that the participants did not love their own languages.

Some participants, like Mercy and Isaac, expressed regret at either not having learned their vernacular language themselves, or not having taught their children to speak those languages. As explained in chapter four, Mercy felt that in some ways, she

sacrificed her mother tongue while learning English and Swahili. She went to a school (she got both her primary and secondary education at the same school) where the majority of students were either Indian or white, and speaking African languages in the school was almost unheard of. After completing secondary school, she went to a different school for her A-levels (an advanced level high school everyone had to attend before going to college in the old system of education in Kenya). The language situation in that school was very different from her former school, as Mercy explains in the excerpt that follows:

I ended up in a situation where people would use English in class, but outside the classroom, it was Luo. And what you had to do, you had to speak Luo properly. If you were speaking it as if you don't quite, like you are not a Luo, you're from another tribe and you're learning it, there was almost like a stigma attached to it. You know like, "Oooh a city girl! How can you not speak your mother tongue properly?" I experienced almost some stigma there. Even when we used to go upcountry, that's how we used to feel. So we would shy away from speaking Luo where there were people. Because the moment we spoke they would say, "These ones are speaking Luo as if they are people from another tribe who are learning Luo." (Interview 1 with Mercy, 6-15-2014)

Not unlike Kariuki, whose Kikuyu was considered "broken", Mercy did not fully fit in as a speaker of the Luo language. At that point in her life, other Luo speakers thought she did not speak Luo "properly" and as such, she did not fully have membership in that culture. Mercy explained that in an effort to rectify that, she had to do something.



I polished! I had to style up! I really really polished my Luo. In fact it was like I made up for all that time I had lost. I really polished up my Luo. Because I didn't want the stigma. And you know people would just tell you in your face, "Why are you talking Luo as if you are someone from another tribe?" So I really polished up my Luo. (Interview 1 with Mercy, 6-15-2014)

During her A-levels schooling, Mercy worked to reclaim her African language. Going to a school where the language was not valued had facilitated her putting Luo in a secondary position after English and Swahili, but suddenly being surrounded by other speakers of the language, who stigmatized her for not speaking it "properly" enough, reawakened her desire to reclaim that part of her identity.

In this context, being called a "city girl" was a negative, as it implied that she had lost touch with her African language and culture. This is in sharp contrast to Sally's secondary school (where students were slightly younger, given that Mercy's school was an A-levels school, which is the next level up after secondary school and before university in the old education system in Kenya). In Sally's secondary school, as seen in chapter four, being called a "born town", which is synonymous with a "city girl", was considered a positive that others admired and sought to emulate, because it meant that the person spoke English better than those from the rural areas. However, Mercy's experience at her A-levels school was that one did not want to be labeled a "city girl", because this label carried the stigma of being disconnected from one's African language and identity.

Similarly, in the case of Daniel, speaking in English was a negative in his village. Throughout our interviews, Daniel privileged the English language and dominant

identities, as seen in chapter four and elsewhere in this chapter. Daniel received some pushback for speaking English in his village. He recounted that in his village, one was scorned and considered prideful if they spoke English.

Daniel: When I came home, now to our rural home from Nairobi, I don't think even English was spoken. *Maringo inaitwa aje?* (Translates to: what's *maringo* called?)

Nyaboke: Pride

Daniel: Pride. You are just being proud for nothing, you know?

Nyaboke: When you speak English?

Daniel: Yeah. So it's like you want to show people you can, you know? So that is something you, of course, had to be conscious about. There is a way a community just wants to coalesce together. They do not want anyone to out-shoot. So if you speak better than anyone, they will just bring you down. (Interview 1 with Daniel, 6-2-2014)

Daniel was caught in between wanting to be good in English and being able to be accepted in his community. In the last part of the excerpt above, he revealed that he viewed his community as trying to bring him down because he spoke "better" than them. This indicates that Daniel privileged speaking in English and viewed it as being better. Daniel went on to reveal that for a while, he avoided speaking English, because he did not want to be seen as proud, or trying to "out-shoot" other people. To keep the peace, he suppressed his English until he found an environment that supported his speaking of English, as he explains below:

I think I was conscious of that kind of peer pressure. So I would not really exceed expectations of my environment, and I stayed within there. And I think that was the case until I went to (*name of high school removed for confidentiality*), and I had that environment in the staffroom where teachers showed some confidence in me. (Interview 1 with Daniel, 6-2-2014)

Both African languages and English were suppressed, to varying degrees, depending on the context. For Daniel, he came from the village environment, where speaking English was read negatively, to his high school environment, where he received praise and recognition for his English. He therefore had to learn to navigate the two identities, and code-switch as necessary, depending on the context.

Unlike Daniel, who privileged English whenever he could, Isaac struggled with the English language throughout his schooling. It was therefore natural for him to claim and privilege his African language, Duruma. As earlier established, Duruma was very closely related to Swahili, and so to Isaac, Swahili was like a second mother tongue. However, as much as Isaac loved to speak Duruma, he found that it became difficult for him to pass the language on to his children, as he explained in the excerpt that follows:

I always feel proud speaking that language, my mother tongue, even more than Swahili. Despite the fact that someone can easily challenge me. In my house we don't speak it. It's unfortunate. Even though I like my language, but because of probably cross marriage, it becomes very difficult for me and my family. So we end up speaking Swahili, me and my wife and the kids. So the kids basically speak Swahili. But still I like my language. I speak it most of the time I get an

opportunity to, which makes me tied to my culture. (Interview 1 with Isaac, 7-2-2014)

Isaac had strong personal connection to Duruma, though he also mentioned that “someone can easily challenge me” in the language. As an insider to Kenyan expressions, I know this to mean that he was not completely fluent in the language, and so someone could challenge him on it. He could however speak a decent amount of it, and so for him, the unfortunate part was that his kids spoke Swahili and not Duruma. He also had adult cousins that were scrambling to learn and reclaim their mother tongue as adults because, due to an urban upbringing, they did not learn those languages when they were younger.

When we go home and find our kids out there, they are playing and are speaking Swahili instead. Back in the rural areas. We feel we are wasting the generation.

We feel like our language is dying out. And the problem is, I don't think we have had any serious initiative to change the trend. We just end up talking about it and it ends there. But one thing I would emphasize, it doesn't even start with our generation. Even those who are our age group and were brought up in town, that has been the trend. But the good thing is when they grow older, they really strive to learn the language. They end up trying to speak the language because they want to identify themselves with the language they come from. Like most of my cousins who when we were growing up, they couldn't even speak the language. Most of them have grown up in Mombasa. But now as they have grown older, they are really speaking more of the mother tongue. They really want to feel like they are part of the community. I feel like they lost part of their childhood to learn their language properly. So sort of, they are trying to compensate. Sometimes you

want to speak with them in Swahili, but they are speaking mother tongue. Even some of the words still they make mistakes in them. Because they are not as fluent as we are. (Interview 3 with Isaac, 7-11-2014)

Like with Mercy, the push to reclaim African languages was also a prominent part of Isaac's interviews. He felt that somehow, "we are wasting the generation" by allowing African languages to die out without making much of an effort to pass them to the next generation. Isaac however saw some hope in the fact that some of his cousins were making an effort to reclaim their African languages even at an older age. Having been raised in urban areas, the mother tongues had taken a backseat to English and Swahili, but as adults, they were making room in their identities for, and seeking to reclaim these languages by learning them in their adult years.

### **Honoring Students' Home Languages**

In the Kenyan context, the second subtheme under (re)claiming African languages and identities was the subtheme of honoring students' home languages. In this section, I will present participants' experiences of the ways that they navigated the realities of teaching in English while also recognizing that their students were multilingual learners, some with difficulties in English. Participants recounted their experiences of helping students navigate their multilingualism in different ways. Some participants (re)claimed African languages, which were suppressed by the English-only policy in the schools, by allowing students to express themselves in the language that they felt best served their ideas, and other participants made exceptions only in certain situations and contexts. In doing this, participants honored students' home languages as valid languages that students could use to enrich and support their literacy learning.

Participants reported trying to be accommodating of students' home languages, even though they were operating under a policy that rejected the use of African languages in school. In some cases, even Swahili was discouraged even though Swahili is taught in school as a subject. In some schools, students did not speak their mother tongues, but instead spoke Swahili or sheng'. Kariuki, for example, taught at a city school where students did not speak their vernacular languages as much due to the mix of students from different linguistic backgrounds. However, those students still struggled with English, and for them, their home language was sheng', an in between language that is a mix of Swahili, English, and any number of African languages.

It was a language preferred by most boys. It's a day-to-day use language. Those kinds of youth like freedom, detachment, independence. All those bound together. Like it's a language of association. So the sense of belonging to a certain clique, where we are shutting out the adults from our conversation. It is a language they used more often because it brought about cohesiveness amongst the youths, amongst the students. (Interview 3 with Kariuki, 9-21-2014)

As Kariuki pointed out in the excerpt above, the students were using this language as a way to express their youth and independence. It was the language of their generation, a language that often made its way into the classroom. Kariuki had to find ways to work with this language in his classroom, as he explained in the excerpt that follows:

At that time maybe I was young. That time I started teaching and I could identify with them. I don't think I was as strict. I don't think I was so strict in terms of I have to speak to them in a certain way. It depended on the context. In classroom, when I am teaching, I would try to adhere to the formal language, and that is

English. English is the language of instruction. Because that is what the curriculum dictates. But in regards to receiving responses from students, I would not be so strict. I would meet every student at their point of competency in terms of expression. So I wouldn't say, "Whatever you have answered, can you repeat now in proper English?" That one, I wouldn't do that. But outside during games or sports maybe, I would once in a while try to show them maybe I know a little bit of Sheng' as a point. You know as teachers, you struggle to balance so many things. At one point you are an authority. At the same point, you do not want to put some kind of wall. Let them know that you enjoy some of the music that they listen to. You can go with what they say is the flow. (Interview 3 with Kariuki, 9-21-2014)

Kariuki was in a position where, as he pointed out "At one point you are an authority. At the same point, you do not want to put some kind of wall". He had to find an in between space where he could honor that school's language policy by teaching in English, while also trying honor the students' preferred language (sheng') by not attaching any stigmas to the language. Kariuki made attempts to speak some sheng' to his students in order to develop relationships with them and avoid putting up walls that would make it difficult for him to reach them.

However, as much as Kariuki tried to honor this language that the students brought into his classroom, there were obstacles that he had to face, as he explains in the excerpt that follows:

In terms of instruction, classroom instruction, I adhered to the language of instruction. I would also deviate if I needed to explain a certain concept. In terms

of grading, I would try to encourage them. I would try to explain concepts in class in whatever language. But let's be fair, the grading of your final examination would depend on how well you can be able to express yourself in English. So in as much as I encouraged them to use any form of expression, any language of expression, even Sheng', I told them there is no name like chemistry "sodium". There is no way of, even if your Sheng' is so dynamic to changes, we don't have a name for sodium. (Interview 3 with Kariuki, 9-21-2014)

While honoring students' home language, in this case Sheng', Kariuki also had to emphasize the importance of acquiring academic language specific to the content area that he was teaching as there were no substitutes to those terminologies that they could use when it came to testing. Kariuki therefore moved in between emphasis on English and making room for Sheng' in order to ensure that his students were getting the instruction and learning experiences that they needed in his classroom.

Another participant, Faith, would also sometimes use Kiswahili to explain or emphasize a point to her students. She however tried to stick with English most of the time. And although once in a while she could resort to Kiswahili where she thought necessary, she made a point to never used Kikuyu in her instruction, even though the majority of her students were Kikuyu. Being multilingual in English, Kiswahili, and Kikuyu, however, enabled her to draw on her linguistic capital in Kiswahili to help students when explaining concepts in English did not seem to be working for some students.

I mainly used English, though at times I could chip in Swahili, especially when I needed to emphasize and explain for the student to understand. Because in that



school, it was an average school and students were average. So I felt that maybe if I also try to explain in a language which is easier for them, they might understand. So at times, maybe one or two situations, I could chip in some Swahili word. I mostly had to teach in English and try to explain using Swahili so that they could really understand what I want them to get. So I think that is whereby now the advantage of being a multilingual person came in very clearly for me. Because I felt that these students were struggling with English. So I could try to explain to them whatever I really wanted them to understand even using my Swahili. But there is no single point I can remember that I used vernacular, my mother tongue, no. So for me as a teacher, I just decided I will focus mainly on the national language.” (Interview 3 with Faith, 6-24-2014)

Faith felt that as a teacher, it was her responsibility to use the national languages, English and Swahili, in her teaching. Although English was the language of instruction, she felt that she could use Swahili when needed in order to help her students understand what she was teaching. However, for Faith, African languages were not permissible in the classroom. From Faith’s account, above, of her experiences, there was still a hierarchy of languages that privileged English, and to a lesser extent, Kiswahili. Faith felt a responsibility to privilege these languages, at least in the classroom, and the compromise she felt she could make was to allow Kiswahili in some instances, rather than insisting on the English-only policy. Outside of the classroom was a different matter, as Faith explained in the excerpt below:

Sometimes we could even get to a point of telling the student, “Just speak with a language you can understand,” especially if it is mainly outside or a student really

wants to explain to you more about whatever he or she is going through.

Especially those are some situations whereby you could find that the student is really struggling to speak out and to bring out what he or she wants. So at that time we could just encourage them, “Just speak with your language,” so that at least you understand as a teacher. (Interview 3 with Faith, 6-24-2014)

Like Kariuki, Faith was in between the role of a teacher charged with upholding the language policy in their school, and the role of a teacher trying to ensure that they can reach and making learning accessible to all their students. She therefore had to make decisions about what contexts were appropriate for what kinds of action with regards to the languages that she used, or allowed students to use.

Having a multilingual background that afforded her an understanding of what it felt like for a student to not be confident about their fluency in a second language, Faith worked to create a classroom environment that was welcoming for students to speak up in English without fear of humiliation because of their level of fluency or their accents.

One of the things that I used to do was just to create that environment as a teacher, such that when a certain student is speaking, and even he or she makes a mistake, the other students should not laugh at him or her. So we were really keen on that. Because we realized that at some point it was very intimidating for some students. Because they realized that, “Every time I speak, it’s like I don’t really speak well. And some students laugh at me”. So that keeps them off speaking. So we were really trying to encourage these students. We try to talk to the students generally and tell them, “You have to persevere with each other because we are all learning and we want to be better.” (Interview 3 with Faith, 6-24-2014)

Laughing at students who spoke with vernacular-influenced accents was a major problem in schools, as it silenced those students that were laughed at (see chapter four for more on this). Although Faith discouraged African languages in her classroom, she worked to create a classroom environment that was respectful of students' accents, as she wanted those students to be able to participate in the learning process without fear of being ridiculed.

Like Faith and Kariuki, Sally found herself in a position whereby she had students who sometimes needed her to explain content in a language other than English. She would sometimes oblige and use Kiswahili, but not without considering the implications of doing so. She explained this in the excerpt that follows:

During the lesson, if I found students did not understand a concept in English, then I would just say it in Kiswahili. Though rarely, but I would. Ok my argument was, I can't just leave it at that. Let me try a little. Then the students would say, "ooooh!". They would then understand. But then I just found under the circumstances, I wasn't sure whether encouraging the dual language would be to the students' advantage. Because they would be expected to write these concepts in exam in English. So if I encourage them to think in Kiswahili, Kikuyu, or Kimeru, which I wouldn't, I would really lose my job. I really didn't know what implication that would have, encouraging them to get so much into Kiswahili if the subject is not Kiswahili that they are learning. (Interview 3 with Sally, 7-13-2014)

In addition to being concerned about using Kiswahili and other African languages to explain concepts to students when their examinations were in English, Sally was also

faced with the possibility of losing her job if she were perceived as not following the school's language policy. Sally had to tread carefully as a teacher in that situation, even though she found the situation disappointing, as she explained in the excerpt that follows:

It could be so disappointing to find that the students could not express what they knew. Simple concepts, simple ideas, they could not put them on paper in an intelligible manner. But if asked to say it in their mother tongue, they would very effectively do so. And then year in year out, we presented these kids for examinations and then the results just show it's like this kid didn't go to school. They didn't learn anything. So I still keep asking myself whether that was really the right thing to do to the students and parents. Telling them your child after four years did not learn anything. Whereas if you told them to say what they learnt in a different language, they really would. (Interview 3 with Sally, 7-13-2014)

Sally was torn by the knowledge that the students were perceived as having learned nothing, when in reality, they had learned something, except they could not express what they had learned in English. And the examinations were unforgiving since there was no room to express their knowledge in anything but English.

Because most participants expressed frustration at the English-only policy in many Kenyan schools, and also at the Kenyan education system, which places a lot of emphasis on standardized tests written in English, and thus restricts their ability to teach in ways that honor students' home languages, I asked them what they would have wanted to see happen in the schools. In response to this, Jackline talked about her desire for a situation where formal education in Kenya is conducted using African languages. Chimbutane (2011)'s study on bilingual education in Mozambique is an example of

successful implementation of bilingual education in an African, post-colonial context. Chimbutane (2011) points out that “[b]ilingual education has also been contributing to the transformation of rural schools, from being islands detached from the communities they serve to sites where metropolitan and local knowledge intersect and cross-fertilize.” (p. 162). According to Jackline, using African languages in teaching would make content easier for students to understand, as she stated in the excerpt that follows:

This one thing I have really been thinking, like why should all learning be done in English? Can people learn in their mother tongue? I look at it like, if people were taught mathematics in their mother tongue, how easy could it have been than when they are being taught in English? I don’t know if that is possible, but learning in a second language usually comes with a lot of challenges. (Interview 5 with Jackline, 9-29-2014)

Jackline highlighted the difficulties in learning in a second language as a reason she might be interested in seeing learning occurring in students’ native languages. Although she was unsure of the possibility of this happening, she saw it as a way to combat the challenges, some of which are discussed in chapter four, that students faced while learning in a language that was not their first language. Jackline added to this by saying that using Kamba names in contexts where the students were Kamba would make learning more relatable for the students. She envisioned that a situation where learning was taking place in the students’ first language and the examples used were culturally relevant to the students would make things easier, as she explains below:

Things will just flow. Because they will just be so easy to understand. Because you are learning in your mother tongue. It becomes very easy to relate with the

knowledge. You don't see it like something for other people. And then I am imagining like somebody is teaching and then they are giving examples of Kamba names. "Yeah, Mueni did this." So if you are Mueni, and then maybe you came up with an idea, then you are able to relate well with that. (Interview 5 with Jackline, 9-29-2014)

Jackline's point that students can benefit from teachers using culturally relevant examples, such as local names, in their instructions in order for learners to connect more with the material that they are learning is supported by the literature. There is extensive literature that supports the need for culturally relevant instruction, which includes teachers using students' native languages and cultures as important aspects of their literacy learning experiences (Goldenberg & Coleman, 2010; Xu, 2010). While it is impossible for all teachers to learn all students' vernacular languages, especially in urban contexts in Kenya where students come from a multitude of linguistic backgrounds, teachers can learn about those languages and cultures (Xu, 2010), and use them to inform their instruction as Jackline suggested.

In explaining why students might not connect very much to instruction when it is not culturally relevant to them, Jackline said, "you know it's like there is a feeling like that thing belongs to those people, those English people" (Interview 5 with Jackline, 9-29-2014). Jackline felt that there was the possibility of students perceiving the education that they were receiving as belonging to "those English people" when they did not see themselves, and their experiences reflected in what they were learning. Jackline advocated for teaching practices that honored students' African languages and identities

by making classroom experiences reflective of the learners' linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

In responding to the same question about what she would have liked to see happen in the schools, and as a suggestion for helping students with their language needs without resorting to suppressing African languages, Faith suggested that it is important for all teachers, including Mathematics teachers like herself, to help students with language rather than leaving it to the language teachers, as she felt some teachers did. The participants in this study did not always feel, as content teachers, that it was their responsibility to help students with their language and literacy needs. Some participants had linguistic struggles of their own when it came to English, and they were not enthusiastic about dealing with the language and literacy needs of their students. Faith, however, reiterates the importance of literacy in the teaching of mathematics.

Language is very important even in teaching mathematics. We always say as mathematics teachers that mathematics has got its own language. And as teachers, they have to understand the mathematical language for them to be able to deliver the content in the right manner. So language is very important even when it comes to mathematics. Because we find that besides dealing with formulas and computation skills, we also have some word problems that require a student to read and understand. And if a student doesn't connect the language that is used, it becomes very hard for the student to interpret the question correctly. (Interview 5 with Faith, 6-30-2014)

In addition to recognizing the importance of language and literacy in Mathematics, Faith pointed out that there is need to change the classroom discourse in Kenyan schools that

makes learning mostly teacher centered, thus giving students few opportunities to practice speaking in English.

Teachers need to put emphasis in the classroom in developing the right classroom discourse. And especially the communication, ensuring that there is good communication between student and student, teacher and student. Especially in group work discussions, which is a rare thing in mathematics. Because in mathematics, mostly the classrooms are teacher-centered. And we find that mostly teachers end up doing lecture method. But if they can be able to introduce something like discussion, a classroom discourse whereby students will be involved more in speaking with one another, sharing the ideas, trying to use their language, I think it can really help. What I would really major on as a teacher educator who has gone through all that, is not necessarily to come up with policy measures sometimes to even get students to wear sack cloths or even corporal punishment. I would like them to speak in English, but I think the best would be coming up with other ways, which could be more helpful to students. Like I'm talking of initiating discussion groups, which are functional, where students can contribute their ideas. More like an emphasis in debate clubs and such things, where a student can just go there and talk. And I think even coming up with forums. I will be for this because I myself feel that I really like my first language. And the same case applies to students. And I mean, if they come from the same tribe, they will always find themselves talking in their first language, which is not a sin to talk in the first language. So for me I think instead of just punishing them, why are they not encouraged to take part in debates whereby we can have some



... speak in their mother tongue others translate? It's like fun, but at the same time they are learning. They are proud of who they are, and they learn the importance of learning all the languages. (Interview 5 with Faith, 6-30-2014)

Rather than using punitive measures, like having students wear sack cloths, or using corporal punishment, to force students into speaking English, Faith pointed out that she would like to see teachers shift strategies and use other methods such as creating more opportunities for students to use the English language without criminalizing their African vernacular languages. By using languages that they are already familiar with as a foundation, they can learn language or content area concepts required at their grade level. Faith's suggestion that teachers provide opportunities for students to practice speaking English in a safe environment goes hand in hand with calls by Nora & Wollman (2009), and Ernst-Slavit, Carrison, & Spiesman-Laughlin (2009) for teachers to provide a lot of opportunities for learners to use spoken English in the classroom, and for teachers to create a classroom environment that allows students to feel that it is safe for them to participate. This can be done by demonstrating to the students that they, including their languages and cultures, and their contributions are not only accepted, but valued as well.

The research supports the participants' accounts of their experiences of being constrained by school policies and standardized testing in their efforts to honor their students' African languages. Giroux (2008) and Muthwii (2004) note that one of the major constraints to teachers' ability to provide instruction that honors students' home languages and cultures is the emphasis on standardized testing. As teachers in Kenya, the participants reported being faced with this dilemma in their teaching. Kariuki, for example, used sheng' where necessary to help his urban students learn science concepts.

But he also found that as much as sheng' was a useful tool for the students' learning, their examinations were in English and he had to keep that in mind since examinations were a major priority. Sally, on her part, feared losing her job if she used students' home language in instruction, as this could be perceived to be taking away from the students' ability to perform well in examinations.

Insistence on a strict English-only policies in classrooms can strip linguistically and culturally diverse students of their voice and render them powerless in their own education. Razfar and Rumenapp (2012) note that students are often aware of the language ideologies and the power and status implications of language practices in their classrooms. They argue that in order for there to be room for challenging these discourses, teachers need to open up conversations about language, power, and the implications of the explicit and implicit language ideologies that exist in their classrooms. The English-only policy in Kenyan schools denies students their own identities and voices. Renowned African authors like Ngugi wa Thiong'o use their African languages and identities to creatively enrich their writing, but such practices are frowned upon, or even punished, when carried out by multilingual learners in school contexts. However, as illustrated in this section, some participants, like Kariuki, Sally, and Faith, made some effort to honor students' home languages despite the obstacles that were in the way of their ability to do this.

### **United States Context**

In this section, I will present the participants' experiences of (re)claiming their African languages and identities within the U.S. context. In the U.S. context, under the theme of (re)claiming African languages and identities, two subthemes emerged:

Nuances of language and identity affiliations, and African languages and identities as capital. Like in the Kenyan context section, the parenthesis in (re)claiming is used to indicate that some participants had always claimed and had close connections to their African languages and identities, while some participants were reclaiming those languages and identities later on in their lives.

In (re)claiming their African languages and identities in the U.S., and as the first subtheme suggests, there were nuances in the participants language and identity affiliations. Some participants code-switched depending on the context they were in, some participants sought affiliations with other Africans that spoke some of the same African languages that they did, and yet others sought affiliations with African Americans on the basis of their shared identities and experiences as black individuals in the United States. Some participants also chose to distance themselves from other Africans and/or African Americans for various reasons. Some participants enacted hybrid identities since they were navigating a new culture that privileged English and western identities, while at the same time they were holding on to their own languages and identities, and finding spaces for both of those realities to co-exist in them. Under the second subtheme, African languages and identities as capital, I will present findings that reveal that some participants viewed and used their African languages and identities as capital.

### **Nuances of Language and Identity Affiliations**

Participants expressed strong connections with their African languages and identities, even in the U.S. context, where those languages and identities were often stigmatized and considered a liability in their capacities as students and teaching

assistants (see chapter four for more on this). The participants felt some relief and comfort in opportunities that they got to converse with other Kenyans in either Swahili or a shared African language. In the excerpt that follows, Nicole explained what this felt like for her:

When I meet people from Kenya, I will speak to them or with them in Swahili. And then I will mix with English. I would say that there is that unity that you feel, that homeliness that you feel when you speak in that language (Swahili) that you identify with, both of you identify with. So you feel the oneness when you speak to somebody in a local language. And then you feel like you are revisiting home. It's like you have met somebody from home and it's the only way to connect so well without having to struggle looking for vocabularies. And then because I am speaking English throughout, this is like a breather. It is like when you are going through an interview and an easy question is thrown. You feel like, "oh I have relaxed!" So it's like I am relaxing. It's like I am taking some rest from a lot of English.

Nicole expressed a strong connection with Swahili, as a language that gave her a feeling of being at home, and with other Kenyans she encountered in the U.S. In speaking Swahili, Nicole felt a sense of belonging with those Kenyans. She implied in this excerpt that speaking in English all the time was exhausting, and as such, any opportunities to speak in a language she associated with home were like a breath of fresh air and a way for her to relax, away from the pressures of speaking in English.

Nicole also indicated that she spoke a mix of Swahili and English with other Kenyans. As Kariuki explained in the previous section (Kenyan context) in this chapter,

it is often hard for Kenyans to speak “pure” Swahili or “pure” English in informal contexts, and often, they take the middle ground of mixing the two languages, and sometimes even mixing in some words from their vernacular languages. This is indicative of the hybridity of Nicole’s, and other participants like Kariuki’s, identities. They spoke multiple languages, but did not necessarily have complete fluency in any one of them. Rather, they spoke a mix of all the languages, creating a hybrid language (Anzaldúa, 1987) of their own that represented the various identities that they claimed.

Like Nicole, Faith also sought breathers from speaking English all the time by grabbing at any opportunities that she got to speak her vernacular language, Kikuyu, in the U.S. Whenever she called home, she enjoyed the opportunity to converse with loved ones in Kikuyu. Additionally, she often switched to Kikuyu when speaking to other Kenyans in the U.S. with a similar linguistic background. She explained her relationship to Kikuyu in the U.S. in the following excerpt:

I think being the first language it just comes naturally. You know, you engage in your first language comfortably. I also look at the whites, and especially from America here, I look at them when they are speaking English and I’m like, these people don’t struggle. Because it’s their first language. They don’t struggle. Most of them even don’t have a second language. That is the only language they learnt since they were young. And so to them, it just flows, when I am struggling speaking it myself. I have to think, then I speak. I think what I want to say. I think in my mother tongue, I then translate in my mind, and I speak. But them, it just flows. And I am like the same case when it comes to my mother tongue. I don’t

have to think. So it just comes. It will just flow out. (Interview 4 with Faith, 6-28-2014)

Faith compared her relationship with Kikuyu with the relationship white Americans have with English. She did not include other Americans, like African Americans, in this description, implying that ownership of the English language belongs to white Americans. In the same way that she felt white Americans did not struggle with speaking English, she did not struggle with speaking Kikuyu. In both cases, the first language came naturally and flowed out without the struggles of speaking a second language, where one has to go through a longer process when constructing words in order to speak. Faith therefore felt it was more comfortable for her when she spoke to other Kenyans from her community in Kikuyu. In the case of other Kenyans from other communities, Faith felt that Swahili was just as comfortable, as she explains in the quote below:

When I'm with my other Kenyans, and maybe they are not from my tribe, we switch to Swahili. I think it also naturally flows. You know, like we are not really struggling trying to think, to create some words in our mind, and then talk. You know, like in English. So Swahili is a bit easier to converse. So most of the time we find ourselves chatting and talking in Kiswahili. (Interview 4 with Faith, 6-28-2014)

Swahili and Kikuyu were both unifying languages and languages of comfort for Faith. She referred to other Kenyans in the U.S. as "my Kenyans", indicating a closeness and a sense of belonging that manifested in shared languages.

While Faith was able to find Kenyans from her community in her U.S. university, and thus had opportunities to speak Kikuyu with them, not all participants enjoyed the

same reality. For Daniel, for example, he was from the Embu community, and there were no other Embus at his university. As such, he did not have people he could speak to in Embu. There were however, a lot of Kikuyus and Luos around him who grouped together and spoke their languages a lot. In the excerpt that follows, Daniel explained how those groupings made him feel:

There are people who naturally group that way. And it's not everyone. It's specifically Kikuyus and Luos. They find strength in their tribe, in my opinion. And they herd together. So being an Embu, I have to either tag or nothing. So I don't like those groups. I get intimidated by them. I have two friends, one Luo, one Kikuyu. The Kikuyu was closest to me, but he was able to gather another group of people that completely excluded me. And I start feeling like any discussion that I participated in, I am actually out of place. You know like people are talking very serious things, and you come in. It's like you have actually broken into a discussion. I would feel an exclusion. But it's not something that I would break my neck to try and crack. Actually I feel bad about these kinds of things. Honestly I feel so bad about them. And the other guy also had a group of some people from his community, and there would be a very strong connection.

(Interview 4 with Daniel, 6-17-2014).

While for some participants, claiming their African languages and identities in the U.S. was a positive thing that brought them a sense of comfort and belonging, for Daniel, it made him feel excluded. Daniel was trying to claim African identities by making friends with Kenyans from various ethnic communities. But being from a smaller community, and not having friends from his own community, he experienced some exclusion and felt

like an outsider when his Kenyan friends banded together with other Kenyans from their own communities.

Perhaps as a result of feeling excluded from sub-groups among his Kenyan friends that were based on ethnic backgrounds, Daniel made deliberate efforts to expand his circles beyond the Kenyan community around him. The following excerpt explains Daniel's feelings about Kenyans at his U.S. university grouping themselves together:

Daniel: I tried very much to also not get local.

Nyaboke: Tell me more about that. By being close with the Kenyan community, you feel like you would be local?

Daniel: Yeah. And even I think in the Kenyan community, there is the LOCAL with capital letters, and there is the local with small letters. Local with small letters is like here we are, just a local Kenyan community. And then within that community, you herd around people, not because you are doing the same program, but because you came from the same ethnicity. It's something I feel bad about. But also hanging out here as Kenyans for me doesn't feel right. Honestly to me it doesn't feel right. There is comfort zone and there is knowing that you can speak to another person. (Interview 4 with Daniel, 6-17-2014).

Daniel was both claiming and rejecting the connections that he had with the Kenyans in his US Kenyan community, as well as the languages that they spoke. While he made close friendships with Kenyans, he also felt like an outsider in those groups because he came from a minority ethnic group and did not have the same connections that his friends had with Kenyans from their own ethnic communities. Daniel sought to widen his circles, while admonishing what he perceived as groupings based on ethnicity. He also framed



his dislike for those groupings as a desire to avoid being “local”, and an attempt to get out of his comfort zone to interact with other people.

On the other hand, Faith came from a dominant community, Kikuyu, and had a lot of Kenyan friends in her US community that had the same ethnic background as her. She told me in our interviews that she had had experiences with Kenyans in her circles in the U.S. claiming there were groupings based on tribes within those circles. In one of our interviews, an incident we had both witnessed during a social event with Faith and her Kenyan friends came up. In the course of this study, Faith and I struck a friendship she invited me to a Kenyans’ social event at her friend’s house. It was a party with food, drinks, and dancing, and in the course of the evening, one of the ladies started accusing people of tribalism. She took offense when someone mentioned that they had had dinner at another Kenyan’s house. The lady threw a fit, accusing the Kenyans that had had dinner together of holding secret meetings for Kikuyus and failing to invite other Kenyans from other tribes. Several people tried to calm her down, assuring her that there were no secret meetings for Kikuyus and that the dinner was just an innocent dinner among friends. The lady wasn’t hearing any of it. She made a grand scene that forced the host to end the party and send everybody home. This incident came up in one of my interviews with Faith. The excerpt that follows is what Faith shared about it:

I think the person who had come up with the whole issue of people from this community not inviting others, I think she has her own issues with herself.

Because basically we were not holding a meeting just for Kikuyus and we never invited others. I think it is very true that we are tribal. Because every person is proud of where he or she comes from. So it is good to appreciate that we are from

different tribes. But we just have to learn to live in peace with one another. So I think the lady had her own problems, which I may not really be able to tell why actually she thought that she was not invited to that meeting, which was for Kikuyus. Because I don't think there was nothing even like a meeting people had gone to. They were invited to take some dinner with nothing, no agenda. But I think maybe she had her own issues. (Interview 4 with Faith, 6-28-2014)

Faith acknowledged that she is proud of where she is from, and her tribe is part of that. However, she felt that being proud of one's tribe did not mean that people from different communities could not live together and be peaceful with each other. Unlike Daniel, Faith did not see Kenyans sticking together as tribalism, or as a way to be localized. To Faith, being Kenyan in the U.S. was an important aspect of her identity here, and as she explained in the excerpt that follows, she felt that Kenyans in the U.S. needed to be united by their common identity as Kenyans in a foreign country.

Why fight over tribe? We are all Kenyans. When they go out of Kenya, they realize how important to be a Kenyan is, and just to keep aside your tribal basis, and just to be a Kenyan. So those are some of the issues that are really aching. And I hope that our country will get better anyway, that people will live like Kenyans and not just like Luos, Kikuyus, Kisiis, whatever those tribal basis. Fine, it is good, but I am looking forward to seeing our country being one, united in one accord. Whereby they are not looking at each other with a tribal eye, but at least look at the other person as my brother, my sister. Look at the other like my fellow Kenyan. Oh my! I am looking forward for that! (Interview 5 with Faith, 6-30-2014)

Evidently, it was not always easy to claim Kenyan languages and identities in the U.S. without some tensions. However, as Faith pointed out in chapter four, all other communities, including white Americans, African Americans, and even international students from other countries, tended to stick together. It was not easy to find a sense of belonging with other groups, and as such, outside of her Kenyan community, there was a feeling of being isolated. Mercy made similar observations in her experiences at the U.S. university she went to. In the excerpt that follows, Mercy talked about her tendency to seek out friendships with other Kenyans:

I have this habit of checking out Kenyans, and getting excited when I hear about a Kenyan. I mean it's something that I almost have to fight to resist. Because I realized if I continue that way, I will never form any meaningful friendships during my time here. So like for me, it's like making friends with an American is something that I have to really make a conscious effort. Especially because it takes effort. It's not like making friends with a Kenyan. You know with a Kenyan, it's just like we click. And I tend to just like gravitate to them when I see them. (Interview 4 with Mercy, 6-28-2014)

For Mercy, socializing with Americans took work and some effort, unlike seeking out other Kenyans, which was easier due to shared identities as international Kenyan students in the U.S. She however shared Daniel's concern about not being able to expand their circle of friends if they focused too much attention on making friends with or hanging around other Kenyans. While Mercy acknowledged this as a concern, she still made a lot of her social interactions with other Kenyans in the U.S. community where she lived and studied.

As seen in chapter four, Mercy faced some racist treatment in the classes where she worked as a teaching assistant, and although she had to operate in that environment as a student and a teaching assistant, socially, she found respite in the relationships that she built with other Kenyans in the U.S. For participants like Mercy, Nicole, and Faith, claiming their languages and identities as Kenyans in the U.S. was a way to find a sense of belonging, and to find some respite from the challenges of being black and multilingual in a U.S. university.

Another participant, Eva, found her respite and community with a group of African American women in the U.S. As seen in chapter four, Eva spent a lot of time throughout her schooling in Kenya trying to distance herself from African vernacular languages, and from Swahili. In order to fit into the elite national school that she went to, she had to speak only in English, and English with an American or British accent at that. So for Eva, when she arrived in the U.S., it was time to redefine herself, as she recounts in the excerpt that follows:

During this time, I was struggling with my identity as an African woman in the U.S. I had not understood myself, and I was turning 30 by then. And I had to make some decisions on myself, on what diction would I have? Would I speak African, African American, or would I sound American? How would I carry myself around? (Interview 3 with Eva, 7-18-2014)

When Eva first arrived in the U.S., she was often frustrated and angered by the racism that she experienced and observed. But through constant conversations with her group of African American women friends (more about this can be found in chapter four), she got to a place of acceptance and turned the focus on how she could best embrace her own

identity as an African woman while trying to navigate the realities of being black in America. When it came to language, Eva took time to pick and choose what identities she wanted to claim, as she explains in the excerpt that follows:

When I came to the states, I went to this private school, and they really were pushing us to talk with the American accent. So I listened a lot to N.P.R, and I listened a lot to Oprah. I really have been influenced by the way she tells tales, you know? I would observe people and see what I wanted to do and what I didn't want to do. (Interview 3 with Eva, 7-18-2014)

Eva was deliberate about the way that she redefined herself, adapting the aspects of American culture that she felt fit in with who she wanted to be, while also reclaiming her African identities.

When I first met Eva, I noticed that she spoke with a fairly Americanized accent, sometimes pronouncing even Swahili words with a hint of an American accent. Eva had learned throughout her time in school and college in Kenya that she had to read her environment and quickly adapt to it. In Kenya, and particularly in the contexts she had been in, that had meant speaking only in English and being a snob to people who spoke Swahili and other African languages. Coming into the U.S., suddenly she was no longer at the top of the hierarchy when it came to language and identity. She found that she was now a raced individual, and her language, as well as her skin color, were stigmatized in this context. Eva's response to this new reality was to reclaim those identities that she had worked so hard to distance herself from in the past, as she explains here:

In that setting, I eventually decided I am an African and that there were very many positive things about being an African. And that I had this knowledge. And

I got comfortable with being African. After deciding to live in the U.S., I knew that I will have to keep my wholeness as I try to fit into the white community. But not forgetting that I am still African and strike a balance. Plus I realized that I can never be white. (Interview 3 with Eva, 7-18-2014)

Eva mentioned severally in our interviews that she had always wanted to marry a white man so that she could have biracial children. Because the biracial children she had known growing up had had an easier time than her. For example, in boarding school, those children were favored over children that looked like her. For one thing, they were allowed to keep their hair long while she and other dark-skinned children like her were made to cut their hair. Because of these experiences, Eva had fantasized a lot about marrying out of her dark skin, and having children that would be more likely to have a better life than she did. But coming to the U.S. forced her to interrogate those beliefs and think more deeply about who she was in this new context. One of the things she sought to reclaim and reconnect with was her African language, as she explains in the excerpt below:

Since I got comfortable with myself being an African, I got to love my language. And I got to learn it, since my language is a source of knowledge and it's the container of my culture. I also believe that there is nothing healthy about raising a generation without ethnicity. Because your language holds a culture that is a vessel. And our kids are supposed to drown in it. And not learning it kills a certain type of knowledge that is in it. (Interview 4 with Eva, 7-21-2014)

Living in the U.S. gave Eva a new perspective as she experienced racism and realized that the westernized persona she had worked to create over the years was still viewed as

African and lacking when she got to the U.S. Eva therefore had to do some soul-searching, form alliances with other black women in the U.S. that enabled them to work through the common issues that they faced, and work towards an acceptance of herself as an African. She started to recognize the importance of her African language and identity, even as she pursued graduate education in the United States.

### **African Languages and Identities as Capital**

The second subtheme under (re)claiming African languages and identities, in the U.S. context, was the subtheme of African languages and identities as capital.

Participants used their identities as Africans as an asset in their classrooms as graduate students and as teaching assistants. After working through her identity issues in the U.S., Eva decided that her identity as an African was an asset that she could use in her work and studies, as she points out in the quote below:

I also realized that I could do more work after knowing my identity. And I was able to speak as an African. And I got to write a lot too. I got to fear knowledge and do research, and I'm able to share what my people know and what my people go through. (Interview 3 with Eva, 7-18-2014)

Eva saw her identity as an African as something that could inform her work, and she felt that having reconnected with this identity, she could speak as an African. As a teaching assistant in a US classroom, Eva took every opportunity she got to demystify Africa for her students. Ironically, considering Eva did not speak Swahili in Kenya (not because she could not, but simply because she was in a school where girls had to speak English in order to belong), she ended up seeking, and getting, a teaching assistantship as a Swahili teacher at her university in the U.S. In the excerpt that follows, she explained some of the

ways that she used her identity as an African with knowledge of the African culture, and her knowledge of where her students were coming from with their misconceptions about Africa:

I teach my students about food, and we name them. We say *maini* (liver), *matumbo* (intestines). Some of them are like, “Eew, who eats that?” And then I tend to have a talk with them that human beings in the world could for different purposes. And some certain things were formed out of slavery, where they had to eat this type of food to survive. So it’s something that is not to be looked down upon. And clothes, some of those people that walk naked in Africa. And I told them, when I came here in the summer in America, when I looked at people in the U.S., I thought they were naked. But it’s the heat. So I teach culture, and I have to explain some things. So they need to become ambassadors. Demystify Africa of the way it is looked at. So that understanding that not everyone in Africa is like they are shown on TV. (Interview 4 with Eva, 7-21-2014)

Eva not only taught her students the Swahili language, but she also taught about African cultures, and African history. She worked to demystify Africa, and Africans, for her students, so that they could interrogate some of the ways that the media had misrepresented Africa to them. Eva had students from different ethnic backgrounds, including white Americans and African Americans interested in either travelling to an African country at some point, or simply learning Swahili to connect to a part of their history, as was the case for some African American students. With a rich diversity of students, Eva used her own linguistic and cultural identity as capital in making sure that



she went beyond teaching the language, to challenging deficit stereotypes about Africans as well.

Beyond the classroom, Eva also used their African languages and identities as capital in a transnational sense. For example, although Eva herself had not been keen on learning her African language, Luhya, she was able to draw on the knowledge and insights she had received from being a black woman in the U.S. to give her sister, who lives in Kenya, advice on the importance of their African language. She explains this in the excerpt that follows:

My sister works in a small town, and she is interested in taking a political position. And I told her, “You have to learn how to speak. You are not going to be a politician from a community and you can’t speak Luhya. That doesn’t work. You have to learn, because the people who you are addressing, most of them are Luhya, and they want to hear you sounding like them. So the one way for you not to get lost is to show that you can speak that language.” (Interview 4 with Eva, 7-21-2014)

Eva embraced her identity as an African, more so after she came to the U.S. and realized that in this context, she was a raced individual, and as such, she had to find ways to accept and celebrate herself in the face of marginalization. She encouraged her sister to learn Luhya, the very language Eva had previously worked hard to disassociate herself with. Eva reclaimed her African languages and identities and used them as assets in both her teaching and her personal life.

Another participant, Valerie, also used her Kenyan identity to educate her undergraduate students about Africa, and to connect with them by introducing aspects of

her Kenyan identity to the classroom. She taught various classes, and because some students were curious about her background, she would sometimes weave her cultural knowledge, including her knowledge of Swahili, into the lessons. For example, she used cultural items like the *lesso* (a large cloth that some Kenyan women tie around their waists for various occasions), to pick her students' interest and get them interested in things, beyond their immediate environment, that they would normally not have been interested in.

I used different ways of teaching. I would involve them with learning some Swahili words. One of the famous things the kids would love is if I went with the *lesso* and showed them those messages. So I read them out loud and ask, "Why would you put proverbs or messages on a fabric?" So find different ways to engage them in things that they may not have been interested in. That motivated students. (Interview 4 with Valerie, 7-28-2014)

In her work as a teaching assistant in a U.S. university, Valerie got her students to think about other parts of the world, other groups of people, and to recognize that other people speak other languages, and they do various creative things like putting wise teachings on fabric that people wore on a day-to-day basis.

Seloni (2012) points out that international scholars in U.S. universities can use their multilingualism and diverse cultural backgrounds to introduce diverse, global experiences into the American university classroom. This is important because othered identities are often silenced, or ignored in American classrooms, while mainstream cultures and identities dominate. Like Seloni (2012) participants like Eva and Valerie

embraced their multilingualism and diverse cultural backgrounds as assets, and used them to bring new perspectives to the classes that they taught as teaching assistants.

### **Conclusion**

Chapter five focused on the theme of (re)claiming African languages and identities. Participants' experiences, while varied, all demonstrated different kinds of choices and struggles in relation to (re)claiming their African languages and identities. The first part of the chapter discussed this theme as it emerged from participants' experiences in the Kenyan context. The first subtheme in the Kenyan context was the nuances of language and identity affiliations. There were nuances in the ways that participants chose to affiliate themselves when it came to language and identity in Kenya. Some participants told of their experiences claiming their African languages and identities, even in situations where they were punished or ridiculed for it. Some participants, while still claiming their African languages, chose to privilege English, and yet other participants tried to find spaces for both their African languages and English in their identities, code-switching as needed depending on the context.

Anzaldúa (1987) notes that one cannot separate a person's language from their identity, because language is very much a part of the person that speaks it. It is difficult to simply switch a language off from a person when that language is an integral part of their culture, and their definition of who they are. While for various reasons (including school culture, and peer pressure) some participants did not grow up placing a lot of value in their African languages, some, like Eva, recognized the importance of those aspects of their identities later in life and made attempts to reclaim those languages and identities.

In the second subtheme under the Kenyan context, honoring students' home languages, this study found that as teachers, the participants found ways to honor students' home languages in their classrooms. For example, they would use Swahili, or other African languages, to explain difficult concepts when needed. As teachers, they were in the in-between space of being responsible for enforcing English-only school language policies, while at the same time recognizing and understanding that not all students could benefit from an instruction that was conducted entirely in English. Oftentimes they had to make the decision to make exceptions, especially in situations where students were having a difficult time understanding a concept when explained in English.

Other languages, like Sheng', which is itself a hybrid language that combines English, Swahili, and African languages, also came into play in urban areas. Kariuki used this language to connect with his students by using it when speaking to them in order to break the generational barrier between them, and show them that he understood them as youth, and as speakers of this dynamic, youthful language.

While the participants made these judgment calls and used languages other than English with their students for various reasons, there was also the fear that doing so might have negative consequences for them, such as losing their jobs. However, as Nieto (2002) points out, "it is only when educators and schools accept and respect who their students are and what they know that they can begin to build positive connections with them" (p. 280). In many instances, the participants, in their roles as teachers, chose to honor students' native languages in order to make connections with them that would facilitate the students' learning.

In the United States context, the first subtheme under (re)claiming African languages and identities that was explored was the nuances of language and identity affiliations. All participants found themselves in between various, sometimes conflicting, identities. Participants made different choices in the languages and identities that they privileged, and the communities that they chose to affiliate themselves with. For all participants, their African identities were important to them. But at the same time, they were also speakers of the English language, they performed their scholarship in English, and they had to adapt in different ways to being a part of a U.S. university, and to being a part of US society. In navigating their identities as students and teachers in the U.S., the participants were forced to explore issues of race and racism. Race and racism were issues most participants had not had to deal with in Kenya. But in the U.S., they were confronted with it on a consistent basis as black, international students. Suddenly, they were categorized and identified based on their skin color and their languages. These identities played a large part in how they experienced their classrooms in the U.S.

The second subtheme in the U.S. context in this chapter was African languages and identities as capital. Under this subtheme, findings indicated that some participants drew from their African languages and identities in their professional and personal lives. These languages and identities informed their teaching, and they used them to explore worlds and cultures with their students that the students might not have had opportunities to explore before.

These findings add on to existing literature on language in education in the Kenyan context by revealing the meanings that ten transnational teachers made of their experiences with language and identity, and the ways that they (re)claimed those

languages and identities that were beaten out of them as students. While there is still a lot of work to be done in pushing back against the suppression of African languages in Kenyan schools, these findings show that these teachers are taking the steps to (re)claim those languages both in the Kenyan and the United States contexts.

## CHAPTER SIX

### CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This dissertation has found that the transnational teachers interviewed experienced marginalization of their African languages and identities in both the Kenyan and the United States contexts, but they reclaimed those languages and identities as important assets in their teaching in the English language. In this chapter, I will discuss the implications of the major findings from this study for literacy research and practice in Kenyan education, and the implications for educational research and practice in U.S. universities. The chapter is organized in three sections. The first section revisits the study and provides a summary of the major findings from the study. The second section discusses the implications of these findings and makes suggestions based on these findings for literacy researchers, teachers, and other practitioners in Kenya as well as suggestions for educational research and practice in U.S. universities. The third section offers directions for future research.

#### **Revisiting the Study**

This dissertation study explored the post-colonial language and identity experiences of transnational Kenyan teachers in U.S. universities. In chapter one, I provided a detailed rationale for this work by citing literature that shows that there is a language problem in post-colonial Africa schools. The literature showed that schools are some of the major sites of linguistic oppression, and teachers are to a large extent implicated in the repression of African languages in their classrooms (Kitoko-Nsiku,

2007; Maeda, 2009; Muthwii, 2004; Wa Thiong'o, 1986). In light of this information, I decided to focus this study on the experiences of teachers with language and identity. I wanted to find out how they experienced being multilingual in Kenyan schools, both in their time as student, and in their time as teachers. To add another layer to the study, I decided to focus on participants who were not just Kenyan teachers, but Kenyan teachers in the U.S. The reason for this was that in addition to their experiences in Kenya (where African languages are suppressed, but the suppression is seldom explicitly linked to race), I wanted to hear their experiences with language and identity in a context where their race was more prominent, and their skin color and language were more explicitly interconnected. Post-colonial theories and language imperialism theories, which framed this study, argue that the suppression of non-dominant languages and identities is a way for Westerners to maintain the status quo, which places those languages and identities at the bottom of the power hierarchy while Western languages and identities are celebrated as superior.

Going into the study with this knowledge, I structured the study such that I was asking questions to find out what the participants' experiences were with regards to their languages and identities as African who spoke both non-dominant African languages and English, which is a dominant language in many contexts in the world.

Qualitative interview methodology was used to collect data, and thematic analysis was used to answer the research question: What are the post-colonial language and identity experiences of transnational Kenyan teachers in graduate education programs in the United States in the following domains: a) their primary and secondary schooling in Kenya b) their teacher preparation in Kenya c) their teaching experiences in Kenya; and



d) their graduate education in the United States? I interviewed ten Kenyan teachers who at the time of this study were pursuing graduate education in the United States. Each participant was interviewed five times, with one interview under each of the domains listed in the research question, and one more interview about their plans and aspirations for the future. In total, fifty interviews were conducted for this study. Data analysis was done using thematic analysis, with the research question, and the theoretical frameworks (post-colonial theories and language imperialism theories) guiding the analysis process.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The findings from this study are discussed in chapters four and five. In the pages that follow, I will provide summaries and discussions of the findings from this study. The summaries are organized by themes and subthemes, similar to the organization of the findings in chapters four and five. Before summarizing the findings from this study, I will provide a brief overview of what the reviewed literature in chapter two revealed that helped inform the design of this study. In chapter two, I reviewed studies that showed that although many post-colonial African countries, including Kenya, have policies that allow for mother tongue education in the early grades, this policy is often not implemented for a number of reasons, including that the government does not back up this policy with the appropriate resources that would make it possible to implement (Nyaga and Anthonissen, 2012), the teachers felt it was best to initiate a focus on English as early as possible (Jones, 2014), and that parents and communities did not always support the idea of their children being taught in African languages (Campbell & Walsh, 2010; Jones & Barkhuizen (2011); Kitoko-Nsiku, 2007; and Tembe and Norton, 2008). These studies revealed that the English was preferred and emphasized from early on in

students' schooling, while in many cases, African languages were stigmatized as being wrong and unacceptable for school. Although English was introduced early and emphasized in schools, a study by Onchera (2013) found that students at the secondary school level still had difficulty in oral communication in English, which made it difficult for the students to participate fully in the learning process. This dynamic led to situations where teachers did most of the talking in class, and students became passive receivers of knowledge (Onchera, 2013). A study by Spernes (2012) indicated that students displayed more sophisticated literacy skills when they were allowed to express their ideas in Nandi (their mother tongue), a language that was otherwise not allowed in school.

Reviewed literature from the United States context revealed that language was a major area of stigmatization and marginalization for non-native speakers of English in education in the U.S. (Pailliotet, 1997), as well as for linguistic minority teachers in U.S. universities (Haddix, 2010), and for international students from African nations (Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Caldwell, & Utsey, 2005; Gatua, 2014; Wamwara-Mbugua & Cornwell, 2010). In all of these studies, the stigmatization of language was closely linked to race and nationality. In the studies on African international students and teaching assistants in U.S. universities (Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Caldwell, & Utsey, 2005; Gatua, 2014; Wamwara-Mbugua & Cornwell, 2010), it was revealed that race often only became an issue for the African students once they came to the United States. These groups of students and teaching assistants were not often raced in their countries of origin, and in the U.S., it was a shock for many of them that they were grouped and judgments were made about them (including judgments about their

intelligence) based on their skin color and their language (Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Caldwell, & Utsey, 2005; Gatua, 2014; Wamwara-Mbugua & Cornwell, 2010).

The studies discussed above tell us what we already know about the topic of study in this dissertation. In the section that follows, I will present a summary of the findings from the current study.

Chapter four focused on the theme of marginalization. Participants revealed that they experienced marginalization in both the Kenyan and United States contexts. In the Kenyan context, four subthemes emerged in the data under the theme of marginalization, as summarized below:

#### *Punishing students' use of African languages*

The participants were punished for speaking African languages in school. The punishments included corporal punishment where they were caned by their teachers, manual labor (like being asked to dig in the school farm, cut grass, or clean classrooms and bathrooms), and public humiliation (like being called names, being made to wear sack cloths, or being given the *monto*). Speaking African languages in or outside of the classroom was considered wrong, and although in most cases, teachers spoke these languages in school themselves, they punished students for doing the same.

#### *Silencing African languages and identities*

As a result of the stigma that was attached to African languages and African accents, the participants reported being silenced in various ways. For example, Sally said that in the primary school that she went to, African languages and accents were so stigmatized that some students would not open their mouths to speak at all in school because speaking would either lead to punishment for even accidentally saying a non-

English word, or ridicule from other students, and sometimes from teachers, for not speaking “correctly”.

#### *Hierarchy of languages and identities*

The participants’ experiences also revealed a hierarchy of languages that placed English at the top of the hierarchy and African languages at the bottom. For example, Eva went to national schools where she and her peers spoke in English and looked down upon anyone that spoke Swahili or any other African language. Eva recounted that there was an expectation that they spoke English with either a British or an American accent, even though most of them had never been to either of these countries.

#### *Resisting the marginalization of African languages and identities*

This study also revealed that participants resisted the marginalization of their African languages and identities. Jackline, for example, noted that in her school, some students would sometimes hide during games time so that they could speak their native languages without fear of being caught. Isaac also noted that they would offer bribes to their peers when they were caught speaking their African language so that their peers wouldn’t report them. These were forms of resistance because although they knew that speaking in African languages was considered wrong, they found ways to speak these languages because, as some participants insisted, it was not possible to separate them from their native languages. As teachers, the participants also resisted the marginalization of their African languages and identities. Participants, including Isaac, Kariuki, Faith, and Mercy, reported speaking their African languages with colleagues in the staffroom even though they were aware of their schools’ English-only policies.

In the United States context, participants also experienced marginalization of their African languages and identities as summarized in the following sub-themes:

#### *Becoming raced*

Participants came from Kenya, where for most of them, race was not something that featured prominently, or even at all, in the way that they defined themselves, to the United States, where race was one of the most prominent markers of their identity. Valerie, for example, noted that it was unsettling for her when she arrived in the U.S. and realized that she had to take ownership a history and an identity that she had not had to reckon with before. She realized that now she was considered black, and in some ways, she had to educate herself on and take ownership of the histories and experiences of other black people in the U.S.

#### *Linguistic and racial stereotyping in the U.S.*

Participants were marginalized and stereotyped based on their racial and linguistic identities. For example, participants like Faith and Sally recounted that their white classmates often assumed they had nothing to contribute in class and would sometimes be dismissive of their ideas. Faith and Mercy also recalled experiences with their students as teaching assistants where students showed open preference for white teaching assistants, bypassing them to seek assistance from the white teaching assistants instead. Faith also noted that because of her accent, and race, sometimes her students would be dismissive of her when she was trying to help them in class.

#### *Silencing of African languages and Identities*

Silence was often a result of the prejudice that the participants experienced both as students and as teaching assistants in US classrooms. Isaac, for example, was very

uncomfortable in his classes when he first arrived as a PhD student. He could not understand most of what the professors were saying, and he often had to fill in the gaps of his understanding with assumptions and guesses. He did not feel comfortable speaking up about his own discomfort, and nobody asked him, so he suffered in silence until he was thrown out of the program for failing his comprehensive examinations.

### *Responses to marginalization*

All participants had experiences of being marginalized in the United States in one way or the other, and they also all had different ways to responding and coping with the marginalization. While some participants like Valerie actively resisted marginalization, others like Faith recognized it as a problem but focused their attention on trying to achieve their academic goals rather than confront the issues of race and racism in the U.S. Participants like Valerie and Eva saw themselves as potentially living in the U.S. long-term, and they were invested in issues of racial justice in the U.S. At the time of the study, participants like Daniel, Faith, and Kariuki were not committed to staying in the U.S. on a long-term basis, and they expressed that although they saw racism in their classrooms as students and as teaching assistants, they tried not to be overly concerned about it.

The theme of marginalization as emerged in the participants' language and identity experiences revealed a lot of parallels with some of the ideas in post-colonial theories, Anzaldúa (1987)'s work on linguistic terrorism, as well as Phillipson (1992)'s work on linguistic imperialism. According to Anzaldúa (1987) linguistic terrorism refers to the dehumanization and suppression of a group of people by way of suppressing and devaluing their languages, with the effect that the suppressed groups internalize the

negative perceptions of their languages and use it against themselves and against each other. Soto & Kharem (2006) have also used the term linguistic terrorism to argue that it is a form of terrorism to take away a people's self worth by stripping them of their languages. In Kenya, as a former British colony, English is aggressively promoted as the language of upward mobility, while African languages are demonized as wrong and unfit for school (Wa Thiong'o, 1986). Like Anzaldúa (1987) points out, "[i]n childhood we are told that our language is wrong. Repeated attacks on our native tongue diminish our sense of self. The attacks continue throughout our lives." (p.80). These words by Anzaldúa (1987) reflect some of the experiences of participants in this study as they described experiences of being beaten, forced to perform manual labor, humiliated, because they dared to speak their African languages in school. The attacks on their languages did not stop at the primary and secondary school levels. Even as adult graduate students in the U.S., they continued to face attacks based on their identities as multilingual speakers of the English language.

The overarching theme of marginalization of African languages is closely aligned to Phillipson (1992)'s theory of English Linguistic Imperialism and Said (1979)'s idea of orientalism in post-colonial theory. English Linguistic Imperialism theory is defined as when "the dominance of English is asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages." (Phillipson, 1992, p. 47) while orientalism is the misrepresentation of the other where a dominant group misrepresents another group as inferior and lacking, while representing themselves as superior (Said, 1979). Both theories caution against the colonialist culture of self exaltation by dominant groups where the dominant group

creates ideal images of themselves while suppressing and devaluing other groups. The dominant group then rationalizes this relationship between the two groups and works to maintain their position of power by keeping the other groups at the bottom (Phillipson, 1992).

Chapter five explores the theme of (re)claiming African languages and identities. The first part of chapter five discusses this theme within the Kenyan context as summarized in the two sub-themes that follow:

#### *Nuances of language and identity affiliations*

There were nuances in the ways that the participants (re)claimed and connected with their African languages and identities, and in the ways that participants chose to affiliate themselves with those languages and identities. For example, while participants like Faith and Kariuki claimed and privileged their African languages throughout their experiences as students and teachers to their current experiences in the U.S., some participants like Daniel and Eva had complex relationships with their African languages that at some points in their lives saw them seek to distance themselves from those languages and identities while privileging English and dominant identities. Other participants also had complex relationships with their languages and identities, and most either code-switched as they felt was appropriate to their context or embraced hybrid identities, mixing their various languages and identities in ways that placed value of each of those languages and identities.

#### *Honoring students' home languages*

The participants all reported that the schools they worked for as teachers had strict English-only policies, but some of them made exceptions when needed to help students



understand the content in their classrooms. Kariuki, for example, had students that spoke a hybrid language that included English, Swahili, and other African languages. He would allow students to speak this language in class if they needed to, and he would even speak the language himself as a way to connect with the students and show them that he understood them and their experiences. Faith also made exceptions sometimes and let students speak in Kikuyu because she understood the difficulty that they students were experiencing with English. The danger of losing her job was present for Sally in allowing African languages in her class, but when necessary, she did allow students to express their ideas in their home languages.

In the United States context, the theme of (re)claiming African languages and identities was discussed under two subthemes as summarized below:

*Nuances of language and identity affiliations*

Like in the Kenyan context, there were nuances in participants' accounts of how they experienced their multilingualism in the United States, and their accounts of the choices that they made in terms of what identities they affiliated themselves with. Participants like Nicole, Faith, and Mercy, got a sense of belonging from aligning themselves with other Kenyans in the U.S. Nicole described spending time with and speaking Swahili with other Kenyans as a relief and a breather from the struggles and pressures of speaking English all the time with Americans. Faith also said that for her, Kikuyu and Swahili just flowed, and made her feel at home, when she spoke with other Kenyans. Daniel, on the other hand, was resentful of the groupings among Kenyans in the U.S. He felt that Kenyans in his US community grouped themselves based on their ethnicity, and this made him feel excluded since he did not have people from his ethnic

community to group himself with. Eva, because of her investment in issues of race and racism in the U.S., aligned herself with African Americans and found community with them based on their shared experiences as black individuals in the United States.

*African languages and identities as capital*

The participants noted that they saw their multilingualism as assets in their personal and professional lives. Some participants also felt that their multilingual backgrounds enabled them to bring other, otherwise marginalized, perspectives to their classrooms as both graduate students and teaching assistants in the U.S. For example, Eva taught Kiswahili at her university as part of her teaching assistantship duties. She used this platform to demystify Africa for her students, because she saw that her students had some misconceptions about what it meant to be African. Valerie also brought in her cultural knowledge to her classes as a teaching assistant and worked to expose her students to perspectives that they might not otherwise have had access to. In her transnational relationships with her family, Eva used her newfound insights about her African languages and identity to offer advice to her siblings about the importance of these languages and identities.

The findings under the theme of (re)claiming African languages and identities supported and added to some findings from other studies reviewed in chapter two. For example, in her study with primary school students in a school in Kenya, Spernes (2012) found that although the students reported being caned for speaking their mother tongues in school, they displayed greater mastery of content and more sophisticated articulation of their ideas when instruction was provided to them in their mother tongue. Similarly, this study has found that the participants reported that when they were punished for

speaking African languages in school, that had the counter effect of silencing them rather than making them speak in English as intended. Therefore, their literacy learning was impeded. On the other hand, the participants reported as teachers (e.g. Faith and Kariuki) they used African languages as needed in order to support their students' learning in their classroom.

In the U.S., participants (e.g. Eva and Valerie) used their African languages and identities as assets in their teaching. This is consistent with the literature that was reviewed in chapter two (e.g. Haddix, 2010; Seloni, 2012), which revealed the various ways that linguistic and cultural minority teachers in the U.S. used their multilingualism as assets in their teaching.

One of the things that I found in the data that was surprising for me was that some participants had some really big changes in the ways that they thought about their languages and identities over stretches of time and contexts. For example, Eva distanced herself from her African language, Luhya, and even Swahili throughout her schooling and the whole time she was in Kenya. But when she moved to the United States and was confronted with issues of race and racism, she made a complete turn and strongly embraced her identity as an African, including her African languages. To a smaller extent, the same was true with Mercy, who went to elite schools throughout her childhood where African languages were rarely spoken. She did not speak her mother tongue much until she went to her A-levels school where her peers did not look kindly on people that could not speak their mother tongue. She then put in a lot of effort to try and learn her African language.

In the section that follows, I will discuss the limitations of this study, as well as the implications of these findings for further research, the implications for literacy research and practice in Kenyan education, as well as the implications for educational research and practice in U.S. universities. I will also offer some suggestions for both the Kenyan and United States contexts.

## **Limitations and Implications**

### **Limitations and Implications for Further Research**

Having discussed the findings from this qualitative interview study, it is imperative that I also discuss the limitations. One limitation of this study was that as a researcher, I came into this study with some subjectivities, which might have influenced the data that I collected, analyzed, and reported. As I have discussed extensively in this dissertation, I share a similar background as the teachers in this study, being a transnational Kenyan teacher myself. I have also had a lot of experiences similar to some of the teachers' experiences. However, I tried throughout this study to minimize my influence on the data and the analysis process by constantly reminding myself of my own positionality in relationship to this study in order to check myself any time I foresaw any danger of my biases interfering with the process. I also made a point to not talk about my own experiences on the topic of study with the participants. Although during interviews, some participants sometimes used terms such as "you know?" or "you understand" to indicate our shared understanding of what they were talking about, I did not have much trouble keeping my own experiences to myself. Most participants were happy to talk about their experiences without requiring me to talk about my own.

Because of my subjectivity in this study, it is also possible that a different researcher with a different background may have gotten different data from the participants. My shared background with the participants gave me access to some data that an outsider interviewer might not have gotten. This can be a strength of this study, but it can also be a limitation because it means that my background shaped the kind of data that I got. In analyzing data, I may also have highlighted as important things that a different researcher with a different background might have perceived differently.

Another limitation to this dissertation study is that the theoretical frameworks that were used played a significant part in how data was analyzed. The same data, analyzed under a different theoretical framework, might have yielded different findings. To counter this limitation, I tried to include both instances where the data matched the theories as well as when the data went against the theories. For example, one of the teachers, Daniel, maintained a distance from his African languages and identities almost throughout the study and did not seek connections to these aspects of his background like most of the other participants did.

Additionally, this dissertation study employs post-colonial theory from the perspectives of a limited number of post-colonialists, most of whom are male. Another analysis of similar studies' findings, using other theorists such as Angela Davis, Audre Lorde, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, among others, that deal with decoloniality with a feminist and/or intersectional lens, for example, might offer additional ways to think about language and identity in post-colonial contexts, as well as additional ways to complicate the notion of post-coloniality and decoloniality. Such a lens may provide spaces for

intersectional work that may interrogate the notions of sameness and difference among colonized subjects based on class, gender, ethnicity, rural vs. urban, and so on.

Although this is a qualitative interview study that performed a total of fifty interviews with ten participants, it might be argued that the number of participants may also be a limitation. I interviewed ten teachers, and as such, the experiences and views that they expressed can allow for important conversations on language and identity in Kenyan schools and U.S. universities, but cannot in themselves broadly cover the experiences of similar demographics in either context. Additionally, the participants were mostly female teachers, with only three male teachers. Although gender was not a consideration in participant recruitment and selection, it is possible that gender might have influenced the kinds of responses that I got from the participants.

Moving forward, I would like to propose that more research be conducted to further illuminate the experiences of Kenyan teachers. The experiences of teachers, as has been illustrated in this study, can offer important insights that can help us understand the meanings that these teachers make of their experiences as practitioners in education and as important stakeholders in students' literacy learning.

While this dissertation study focused on teachers from Kenya, there is need for similar research studies to be conducted in other post-colonial African contexts. It will be of interest to see research on other formerly colonized African nations like Tanzania that took a different route with language and chose to privilege Kiswahili over English in their education system. Further, similar research could be conducted with teachers currently teaching in Kenyan primary and secondary schools. In conducting research with currently

practicing teachers, observations of their language and literacy practices in the classroom should be made to compliment their personal accounts of their experiences.

In addition to teachers' experiences, more research could be conducted on the language and literacy practices of multilingual students in Kenyan schools to demonstrate ways in which students use their African languages to support their literacy learning. Students' experiences with, and their ideologies surrounding their own multilingualism would also provide a rich perspective to the conversation on multilingualism in Kenyan schools. Research on parents' perspectives on this conversation would also add to the conversation, as parents are important stakeholders in their children's language and literacy experiences, both at school and at home. Furthermore, similar research should be conducted in both rural and urban areas in Kenya in order to get perspectives from a variety of contexts in Kenyan schools.

In the United States, more research could be conducted to further highlight the experiences of African international students in US universities. This is especially important because there is a growing number of international students (Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Caldwell, & Utsey, 2005), and international instructors (Seloni, 2012) in universities in the United States, and it is of utmost importance that universities in the United States work collaboratively with this population of students and instructors to enrich the educational experiences of all participants in these learning communities.

### **Implications for Literacy Research and Practice in Kenyan Education**

As summarized in the previous section, the findings from this research study showed that the participants were forced to only speak in English at school, and they were punished for any non-compliance with this policy by use of corporal punishment,

manual labor, and/or public humiliation. As discussed in the literature review in chapter two, the marginalization of African languages is a persistent problem in post-colonial Africa's schools and societies (see for example Kitoko-Nsiku, 2007; Orwenjo, 2012), and is sometimes co-signed by parents (Campbell & Walsh, 2010; Jones & Barkhuizen, 2011; Tembe & Norton, 2008), who believe that allowing African languages in instruction will take away from their children's ability to have an edge in the global economy. However, studies such as those conducted by Muthwii (2004) and Spernes (2012) indicated that African languages are important capital that teachers can use in their classrooms to support students' literacy learning. This dissertation adds to these studies by pointing to the findings after interviewing ten Kenyan teachers, which indicated that although there were harsh punishments to their use of African languages in schools, the participants persisted in speaking those languages. They continued to speak African languages in schools even as teachers. There was no stopping them from speaking their native languages because they could not separate themselves from the languages of their families and communities, and as Wa Thiong'o (1986) noted, one's language and their identity are intertwined, and it is impossible to separate the two. This dissertation study therefore suggests that schools in post-colonial African nations like Kenya should embrace African languages as important parts of their students' identities, and rather than try to suppress these languages, incorporate them into classroom instruction. Students' home languages are important capital that the teachers can tap into in not only in the teaching of English, but also in teaching academic literacies that will help the students to be successful in their content area classrooms as well. This dissertation study suggests that English language proficiency, and proficiency in the literacies needed to be



successful in Kenyan schools, can be achieved while honoring Kenyan students' native languages.

Findings from this study also indicated that the participants and their peers were silenced by the stigma that was placed on African languages and identities in their schools and classrooms. Because they were not allowed to speak African languages, and also because speaking these languages (or in accents associated with these languages) often led to being ridiculed and humiliated, some of them chose to be silent instead. This dissertation study suggests that African languages and identities (including accents) should be destigmatized. This can be done by moving towards not just tolerating, but also actually celebrating African languages in the schools. Schools should encourage their teachers to teach students to embrace their languages, and to allow their students to demonstrate that one can be literate in important academic content even when they struggle with the English language.

The findings also indicated that oftentimes in the participants' classrooms, learning was heavily teacher-centered, and students had few opportunities to speak in class. Faith, for example, indicated that in her experience, the teachers dominated classroom talk, and as students, they did not speak much in class. This situation is problematic because the schools expect students to learn and be able to speak in English but provide few opportunities for them to practice speaking the language. This study points to the need for teachers to create a lot of opportunities in their classrooms for students to practice their language in a stigma-free environment, where students are encouraged to practice their English without fear of prejudice should they speak it with an African accent. In practicing their English, students could also be allowed to code-

switch with Swahili and other African languages as needed as they work towards fluency in English.

The findings of this dissertation also indicated that when the participants became teachers themselves, they were put into the same school dynamics that required them to suppress their students' home languages. Without specific training on working with multilingual learners' literacy needs, the participants were often unsure how to handle issues of language in their classrooms. Agnes, for example, said that while she sometimes allowed students to speak in their mother tongues in class, she was fearful of the consequences (which included the possibility of losing her job) of doing this and would, as much as possible, avoid allowing these languages in the classroom. Given these findings, this study suggests that there is need to adequately prepare all Kenyan teachers to provide instruction that honors the diverse backgrounds of the learners in their classrooms and to use the linguistic and cultural capital that these learners bring into the classroom to facilitate and enrich the students' learning. In this dissertation study, participants expressed that they did not take any courses in their teacher preparation programs that specifically focused on preparing them for working with multilingual learners. As I pointed out in the rationale section for this dissertation, there is a lot of research and conversation surrounding the preparation of all teachers for working with linguistically and culturally diverse learners in the U.S., but very little attention is paid to this in Kenya, possibly because a majority of people in Kenya are multilingual, and so students' multilingualism is overlooked as something that warrants careful attention. As teachers, participants worked in schools that promoted the same deficit ideologies concerning students' home languages as their own schools had done. They were required

to enforce the same kinds of language policies that marginalized and silenced students' languages and identities.

The findings in this study showed that the participants were punished as students for speaking African languages, and this often silenced them. Later on as teachers, the same participants were required to enforce English-only policies in their schools, and the participants reported the negative effects of this that they saw on their students. In light of this finding, this dissertation study suggests that in order to break the cycle of teachers being complicit in the punishing and suppression of African languages, teacher preparation programs in Kenya and other post-colonial African nations with similar issues might benefit from offering training for all teachers on working with linguistically and culturally diverse learners. Such training might offer teachers research-based perspectives on not only the importance of students' home languages and cultures in their literacy learning in all subjects, but also offer specific strategies for using these languages to promote students' literacy learning.

It would also be beneficial for teacher preparation programs to encourage student teachers to examine their own biases regarding African languages and identities. Wa Thiong'o (1986) argues that colonization of the mind has persisted long after physical colonization of African nations ended. It is important that teacher preparation programs offer courses whereby prospective teachers will be challenged to examine their own ideologies, recognize the biases that they carry regarding African languages and identities, and take steps to remedy any deficit thinking about these languages and identities.

Additionally, teachers could be trained to have high expectations of all learners, regardless of their linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Findings from this study indicated that some of the participants, such as Sally, had teachers that called students fools because they struggled with speaking in English. Another participant, Kariuki, reported that as a teacher himself, he worked in a school culture where students were treated differently when it came to punishment for speaking African languages, because some students were viewed as having higher potential, and therefore the teachers expected “better” from them than other students. The teachers’ expectations in this case were based on deficit thinking about students. Those students who were perceived as having potential for academic success were not expected to speak African languages. This study suggests that teachers be given training to prepare them for work with linguistically and culturally diverse students in ways that are supportive of their linguistic and cultural capital, and that offer high expectations for all learners.

### **Implications for Educational Research and Practice in U.S. Universities**

Findings from this dissertation study indicated that the participants were marginalized both as students and as teaching assistants in their United States universities. They had to take on identities as black individuals in the United States, and had to educate themselves on what that meant for them in terms of how they were perceived by their students, colleagues, and other people that they encountered. While the participants’ African languages and identities had been marginalized in the Kenyan context as well, it was not until they came to the United States that the connection between their experiences of how their languages were perceived and race became explicit for them. In light of this finding, this dissertation study makes the suggestion that

Kenyan teachers in U.S. universities may benefit from using the experiences with language, race, and identity that they had in the U.S. to inform their research and practice as future teacher educators in their country of origin. Having had experiences that opened up their perceptions of issues of language and power, and the connections between language, race, and identity, they could advocate for the inclusion of courses that deal with these issues in teacher preparation program curriculums in Kenya. This may be helpful in opening up conversations in teacher preparation program classroom where pre-service teachers get opportunities to explore the deeper issues and the theories surrounding language and identity. When teachers' awareness of these theories are awakened, then they will have the tools to guide their practice as they support the literacy learning of multilingual Kenyan learners.

This study also encourages multilingual international students in U.S. universities to recognize their multilingualism as an asset in both their personal lives, and their professional lives as graduate students and teaching assistants. International teachers in U.S. universities have rich linguistic and cultural identities that they could use as important capital in inspiring global conversations in their classrooms. Education in U.S. universities often does not include a lot of global literature (Seloni, 2012), and global perspectives (Ma, 2014; Zheng, 2014), and international scholars can use their backgrounds to introduced more global perspectives into their classrooms. They can work with their students to find “third spaces” (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-Lopez, & Tejeda, 1999; Gutiérrez, Bien, Selland, & Pierce, 2011) that incorporate the local US knowledge and their unique knowledge and perspectives to create a richer “third space” experience for their students. Some participants, like Valerie and Eva, used their hybrid identities as

speakers of both English and African languages to provide instruction that blended both African languages and cultures with English and American culture. They offered alternative perspectives of Africa and Africans to their students while offering a more global perspective to classroom discussions. Ma (2014) and Zheng (2014) assert that while international teachers in U.S. universities should adjust to the U.S. educational circumstances, which may be different from their home countries, they should also use their linguistic and cultural background as an additional resource.

All participants felt that their time in the United States had taught them a lot and forced them to think about some issues, such as race, that they had not had to spend a lot of time thinking about before. International teachers in U.S. universities, as demonstrated in this study, have language and identity experiences that might provide rich data that they can use to help them reflect on their teaching practices in Kenya. They could use the knowledge and perspectives received from their time in the U.S. to inform their practice once they return to their home countries. All participants experienced the marginalization of their African languages in Kenya, and some of them even reported feeling that this marginalization of African languages was warranted. But being in the United States put them in a position where they experienced this same marginalization on a more personal level from other people. Eva, for example, strived to distance herself from African languages and identities while in Kenya, but coming to the U.S., she was at the receiving end of marginalization as a black African. It did not matter that she thought she spoke English well, and that she went to a national school in Kenya. In the U.S., she was forced to confront issues of race and racism, and come to terms with her own identities. While all participants' experiences were different, and every international student's experiences

are different, all international and transnational students in the U.S. can learn from their experiences in the U.S. and use the knowledge and experience they acquire to inform their practice when, and if, they choose to go back to their home countries.

Participants in this study cited language as one of the major issues that they faced in the United States. Coming from Kenya, where English is the language of instruction in schools, all participants had a good command of the English language by the time they came to the U.S. But their varieties of English, and their accents, were often marginalized in their US classrooms. As students, they sometimes did not understand when professors spoke too fast. And when they made contributions in class, they were often asked to repeat themselves, which further silenced them. It is important for instructors in U.S. universities to be sensitive to the fact that international students are adjusting as bilingual and bicultural learners, even as they learn the content under instruction in their classrooms. In their role as teaching assistants, some participants reported being ignored by students, who chose to work with American teaching assistants instead, because of their language and accents. International scholars bring a wealth of knowledge into American classrooms (He, 2014; Ma, 2014; Zheng, 2014), and it is important for universities to encourage all students to interact with international students and teaching assistants in order to learn more about them and what knowledge they bring to the classroom before making judgments on their intelligence and abilities based on race, nationality, language, and accents.

Instructors with international students in their classrooms are also encouraged to have an open mind to learning about other cultures and be willing to find a middle ground where the different backgrounds in the classroom can work together to create a more

inclusive educational experience for all. Some participants, like Isaac and Faith, reported that they spent time in some classes quietly listening to other people speak because they did not feel that they could speak in those spaces. It is important that U.S. universities welcome everyone in their classrooms into the learning experience. By welcoming perspectives from different backgrounds and creating classroom environments where differences in cultural and linguistic backgrounds are not only acknowledged, but valued as well, they may help to make the learning and teaching experiences of multilingual international students like those that participated in this study more positive and rewarding.

To achieve this, instructors in U.S. classrooms could engage in discussions and collaborative efforts with teachers and students from various cultural backgrounds. In order to better appreciate the needs of international students and teaching assistants, there is need for instructors to have opportunities to interact and work with international students from diverse backgrounds. One of the participants in this study, Valerie, recounted the struggles she underwent as a new international student in her classroom. Some of her struggles included feelings of discomfort as she was not conversant with the cultural jargon that was thrown around in her classrooms, and also being judged on her silence in class, when to her, the silence was because she was not accustomed to the American classroom. With more opportunities to interact with, and have dialogues with international students, American instructors in U.S. universities may have a better understanding of what the needs of these students are and work to make their classrooms more welcoming to diverse students.



Some participants, like Valerie, Nicole, and Eva, also observed that some instructors, and some colleagues, in their US classrooms made demeaning comments about Africa and Africans that were often a result of stereotypes about the continent and its peoples. It is important for instructors to be positive and respectful when making comments about other cultures. While instructors might have opinions about other cultures, they should keep in mind that being culturally relevant is supposed to make teaching more effective, not to provide a platform to critique other cultures in a negative manner (Zheng, 2014). In a healthy learning environment, all members should guard against any biases that they might hold, and work to develop understanding, and balanced perspectives about other languages, identities, and cultures. The experiences of the participants in this dissertation study, as recounted in their interviews, showed that they valued their vast repertoires of languages and identities, and even in contexts where aspects of their African languages and identities were systematically suppressed, they drew from those languages and identities to inform their personal, academic, and professional lives. It is therefore imperative that the linguistic and cultural capital that multilingual international students bring to the U.S. classroom is not only accepted, but also celebrated as rich capital that adds to the learning experiences of everyone in the learning community.

Finally, a major suggestion this dissertation makes is on the need for U.S. universities to foster solidarity among and between international students and other groups of students. As demonstrated in this dissertation study, there are often groupings among students that exclude other students with different identities. This sometimes leads to a distrust that may cause even wider rifts among these groups. For example, Nicole

pointed out that she felt excluded when African Americans talked about their experiences with racism while taking on the attitude that she, as a recent immigrant from Africa, did not understand those experiences. Faith also noted that every group at the university she went to tended to stick together. For example, the white Americans grouped themselves together, and the same was also true for African Americans and international students from different countries. Fostering a sense of solidarity among all these groups may be beneficial in breaking down some of the barriers to communication among students from different backgrounds. One way to do this may be by encouraging open conversations in the classrooms about sameness and difference, and what these mean as we engage collectively in the pursuit of our work in literacy education, as well as in education in general.

### **Conclusion**

This dissertation study was completed with ten Kenyan teachers who were pursuing graduate education at various universities in the United States at the time of the study. The aim was to explore the language and identity experiences of these teachers within the domains of their primary and secondary schooling in Kenya, their teacher preparation in Kenya, their teaching experiences in Kenya, and their graduate education in the United States. A total of fifty interviews were conducted, transcribed, and the data analyzed using thematic analysis. The dissertation is organized in six chapters. Chapter one provides a rationale for the study, gives a historical background of language in Kenyan education, and explains the research focus of the study. The first chapter also defines the major terms used throughout this dissertation, and gives an overview of the entire dissertation. Chapter two provides a review of the literature from both the Kenyan

and the United States contexts, and a discussion of the theories used to frame this study. Chapter three discusses the methodology used in conducting this study, including an introduction of qualitative interview as an inquiry method, a description of the participant recruitment and selection methods, and an overview of the data analysis process. Chapter three also provides a discussion of my background while positioning me within this research. The chapter ends with an introduction to the ten participants that took part in this study.

The two findings chapters, four and five, present the findings from the analysis of data collected in this study. There are two major findings in this dissertation study. The first major finding is that the participants' African languages and identities were marginalized in both the Kenyan context and the United States contexts. In Kenya, participants reported being silenced by the ways that these languages and identities were suppressed in their schools. There was a hierarchy of languages, with English at the top of the hierarchy, and African languages at the bottom. However, in various ways, participants resisted this marginalization. For example, some participants worked to find spaces where they could speak those languages without the risk of punishment, whether it was by hiding or bribing. In the U.S., participants reported being silenced by the ways that their languages and accents, which were linked to their race as black Africans, were treated as deficit. The second finding is that in various ways, participants (re)claimed their African languages in both the Kenyan and the U.S. contexts. In Kenya, they privileged those languages in various contexts, and found ways to honor students' home languages in their teaching despite policies that suppressed those languages. In the United States, they formed communities with other Africans and African Americans and worked

to (re)claim their African languages and identities as assets, both in their personal and professional lives.

The implications of these findings have been discussed in this chapter, and recommendations have been made for future directions in literacy research and practice in Kenyan education, as well as for educational research and practice in U.S. universities with international students. While the ten participants in this study have been invaluable in providing insight into their experiences with language and identity in Kenya and the United States, I would like to emphasize that Kenyan teachers are all individually unique in the ways that they experience their multilingualism and their identities. This dissertation study therefore does not wish to impose its participants' personal experiences to all post-colonial African nations or peoples. While this study focused on both the Kenyan and the United States contexts in the experiences of the teachers, I want to emphasize that my intention is not to say that Kenyan teachers need to come to the United States in order to get enough distance to be able to interrogate their experiences with language and identity. Teachers in Kenya can and should reflect on their experiences with, and their beliefs about language. Coming to the United States is not a prerequisite to being able to do this. The transnational connections made sense for this particular study, as explained in chapter one, but it is by no means a requirement for other studies on this important topic.

Through this study, I have highlighted the post-colonial language and identity experiences ten transnational Kenyan teachers in various universities in the United States. It is my hope that findings from this dissertation study will be of interest to the intended audience of this work (mainly teachers, administrators, parents, and other educational

stakeholders in Kenya, and universities in the U.S.), as well as other audiences interested in the continuing conversations on the issues surrounding literacy, language, race, and power in schools and universities both in post-colonial Africa, and the United States.

## APPENDIX A



**Syracuse University**

**Interview Protocol**

Nyaboکه Nduati, PhD Candidate

*School of Education, Department of Reading and Language Arts*

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Title of Study: THE POST-COLONIAL LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY  
EXPERIENCES OF TRANSNATIONAL KENYAN TEACHERS IN U.S.  
UNIVERSITIES

Semi-structured interview protocol for Participants.

### **Protocol 1: Family Background and K-12 Kenyan Schooling Experiences**

Tell me about your family history. (e.g. what your parents do? Where you were born?

Your siblings? Your extended family?)

Tell me about your cultural and language background.

Tell me about the language practices in your family.

Tell me about the attitudes toward your native language, Kiswahili, and English in your family.

Tell me about the cultural practices in your family.

Tell me about your feelings towards your cultural background.

Tell me about your early education. (e.g. where did you go to school? What kind of student were you?)

Tell me about the language policy in your K-12 schools. (e.g. classroom language policy? outside classroom but within school building?)

How was the language policy enforced in your K-12 schooling.

Tell me about the attitudes toward African languages, Kiswahili, and English in your K-12 education schools.

What types of reading and writing did you see and do throughout your K-12 education.

Tell me about how you learned to read and write.

Tell me about your reading and writing experiences in the various languages that you speak (English, Kiswahili, your native African language).

Tell me about your classmates throughout your K-12 education. (e.g. what were their language and cultural backgrounds? What languages did they speak? What languages did you speak in your interactions with them? What was accepted? What was not accepted?)

Tell me about the cultural and language backgrounds of teachers in your K-12 education.

Tell me about your most memorable teachers from your K-12 education.

Tell me about ways your experiences with language in your K-12 schooling influence you as a person.

Tell me about your thoughts on race as you were growing up in Kenya.



## **Syracuse University**

### **Interview Protocol**

Nyaboke Nduati, PhD Candidate

*School of Education, Department of Reading and Language Arts*

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UNIVERSITIES

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#### **Protocol 2: Kenyan Teacher Preparation Experiences**

Tell me about your decision to become a teacher.

Tell me about the kinds of courses that you took in your teacher preparation program.

Tell me about any courses you took that you feel tackled issues of language in the classroom.

Tell me about other ways your teacher preparation program prepared you for teaching in multilingual classrooms.



Tell me about your experiences with your teaching practice. (e.g. Which school did you teach at? What level did you teach? How prepared did you feel for the task of teaching that classroom?)

Tell me about your comfort levels with each of your spoken languages by the time you joined your teacher preparation program.

Tell me about your attitudes toward your African language, Kiswahili, and English when you started off your program.

Tell me about your experiences with language as a pre-service teacher.

Tell me about the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of your students and colleagues.

Tell me about the language policy at the school and how was it enforced.

Tell me about how you personally enforced the language policy in your classroom.

Tell me about your strengths and weaknesses as a teacher in a multilingual classroom at that point in your teacher preparation.

Tell me about ways you worked to build on your strengths and address your weaknesses as a multilingual teacher in a multilingual classroom at that point in your teacher preparation.

Tell me about your thoughts on race while you were a teacher in Kenya.

Tell me about any other experiences you had with language during your teacher preparation.



## Syracuse University

### Interview Protocol

Nyaboke Nduati, PhD Candidate

*School of Education, Department of Reading and Language Arts*

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Title of Study: THE POST-COLONIAL LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY  
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UNIVERSITIES

Semi-structured interview protocol for Participants.

#### **Protocol 3: Kenyan Teaching Experiences**

Tell me about your decision to pursue teaching after your teacher preparation? (Because in Kenya many people are forced to study education by government choice, and once they graduate they pursue careers other than teaching).

Tell me about your teaching background. (e.g. When did you start teaching? Which schools did you teach at?)

Tell me about your comfort levels with each of your spoken languages by the time you started teaching as a certified teacher.

Tell me about your attitudes toward your African language, Kiswahili, and English when you started teaching as a certified teacher.

Tell me about your experiences with language as a certified teacher.

Tell me about your experiences with your teaching when you started teaching as a certified teacher. (e.g. Which school did you teach at? What level did you teach? How prepared did you feel for the task of teaching that classroom?)

Tell me about the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of your students and colleagues.

Tell me about the language policy at the school and how was it enforced.

Tell me about how you personally enforced the language policy in your classroom.

Tell me about your strengths and weaknesses as a teacher in a multilingual classroom at that point in your teaching career.

Tell me about ways you worked to build on your strengths and address your weaknesses as a multilingual teacher in a multilingual classroom at that point in your teaching career.

Tell me about any other experiences you had with language during your years teaching as a certified teacher.



## **Syracuse University**

### **Interview Protocol**

Nyaboکه Nduati, PhD Candidate

*School of Education, Department of Reading and Language Arts*

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Title of Study: THE POST-COLONIAL LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY  
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UNIVERSITIES

Semi-structured interview protocol for Participants.

#### **Protocol 4: U.S. Graduate Education Experiences**

Tell me about your decision to pursue graduate education in the U.S.

Tell me about your initial impressions of the U.S. (the country, the culture, the people)

Tell me about the earliest relationships (professional or personal) that you established when you first arrived in the U.S.

Tell me about your comfort level with the English language when you first arrived in the U.S.

Tell me about your experiences in the U.S. classroom during your first year of graduate studies in the U.S.

Tell me about the cultural and language backgrounds of your colleagues and professors in your classes.

Tell me about your language experiences with your colleagues and professors in the U.S. classroom so far.

Tell me about your language experiences socially with friends and colleagues since you have been in the U.S.

Tell me about the factors that inform your choice of language to speak in different contexts (e.g. academic, social, family etc.).

Tell me about ways your cultural and language background have influenced you as an international student here in the U.S.

Tell me about courses you took here in the U.S. that impacted your views on language.

Tell me about your experiences with race here in the U.S.

Tell me about the Kenyan/African community in your area here in the U.S., and the language practices of that Kenyan community.

Tell me about your language practices with your family and friends back home since you have been here in the U.S.

Tell me about your current attitudes toward your African language, Kiswahili, English.

Tell me about ways your cultural and language background influences you as a student and as a teaching assistant now.

Tell me about ways your past educational (e.g. language and literacy) experiences influence your present beliefs and practices as a student and as a teaching assistant.

Tell me about your strengths as a multilingual student and teaching assistant in the U.S. graduate classroom? Weaknesses?

Tell me about ways your being multilingual influences you outside of your role as a student and/or teaching assistant (e.g. socially).

Tell me about the impact your language experiences here in the U.S. have had on you as a teacher and future teacher educator.



## **Syracuse University**

### **Interview Protocol**

Nyaboke Nduati, PhD Candidate

*School of Education, Department of Reading and Language Arts*

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UNIVERSITIES

Semi-structured interview protocol for Participants.

#### **Protocol 5: Future Plans and Aspirations**

Tell me about your career plans for after completing your program.

Tell me about your decision to (move back to Kenya/ stay in the U.S.) after completing your program.

Tell me about ways your experiences with language up until this point might influence your future as a person & ways they might influence you as a teacher educator in the future..

Tell me about specific things you have learned about language and multilingualism that you might use in your capacity as a teacher educator in the future.

Tell me about what your ideal teacher preparation program for multilingual teachers of multilingual learners might look like (in Kenya? In the U.S.?)

Tell me about your language aspirations for your children (if you have or plan to have any) in terms of the languages you would like them to speak in various contexts and why.

Tell me about your language aspirations for Kenya in terms of where you would like to see the country headed linguistically.

Tell me about what your language aspirations for Kenyan schools are in terms of what you think the language policy should be and how you think it should be enforced in the future.

Tell me about any other language and cultural aspirations that you have for your future as a future multilingual teacher educator.



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## VITA

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#### **Master of Fine Art (MFA) - Creative Writing**

Syracuse University – Syracuse, NY  
August 2010

#### **Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) - French, Literature**

Kenyatta University – Nairobi, Kenya  
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### **UNIVERSITY TEACHING EXPERIENCE**

#### **School of Education; Reading and Language Arts Department; Syracuse University (2010-2016)**

Instructor: RED 326/625: Literacy Across The Curriculum

Field Practicum Supervisor: RED 326/625: Literacy Across The Curriculum

Teaching Fellow: EDU 760: Pedagogical Strategies for Teaching Undergraduates

Supervisor- EDU 508: Student Teaching in English Education

Teaching Assistant: SED 415/615: Teacher Development: Assessment and Data-Driven Instruction

Teaching Mentor: The Graduate School, Syracuse University

Graduate Assistant: RED 671-Literacy Clinic

Teaching Assistant: CLS 105: College Learning Strategies

Literacy Camp Director: RED 326/625: Literacy Across the Curriculum

Teaching Assistant: RED 614: Composing Processes

**College of Arts and Sciences; English Department; Syracuse University (2007-2010)**

Instructor: WRT 120: Writing Enrichment

Instructor: WRT 105: Academic Writing Studio

**PUBLICATIONS**

Nduati , Nyaboke; LaToya L. Sawyer & Marcelle Haddix. (2012 February 14) Review of Freire, Teaching, and Learning: Culture Circles Across Contexts by Mariana Souto-Manning. *Education Review*, 15. Retrieved [Date] from <http://www.edrev.info/reviews/rev1152.pdf>

Nduati, Nyaboke. "Bargaining for Gabriel." *Joyland Magazine* 4 Apr. 2015. Web.

Nduati, Nyaboke. "Safe to Cry." *Akashic Books* 24 Feb. 2015. Web.

**PAPER PRESENTATIONS TO NATIONAL & INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND CONFERENCES**

Nduati, N. (2016). "The whole day they never opened their mouths": Teaching English in Post-colonial African Contexts. To be presented at the Tenth International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry, Champaign-Urbana, Illinois.

Nduati, N. (2016). Kenyan Teachers' Perspectives on Language and Literacy in Kenyan Schools. To be presented at the Tenth International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry, Champaign-Urbana, Illinois.

Nduati, N. (2016). Becoming Raced: Kenyan International Students' Experiences with Language and Race in the United States. To be presented at the Tenth International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry, Champaign-Urbana, Illinois.

Nduati, N. (2016). The Post-Colonial Language and Identity Narratives Of Transnational Kenyan Teachers in US Universities. To be presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Washington, DC.

- Nduati, N., Williams, K., & Hodge, R. (2016). "Becoming Who We Were Meant To Be: Black Teachers' Experiences of Teaching and Becoming Teachers." To be presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Washington, DC.
- Nduati, N. (2015). The Post-Colonial Language and Identity Narratives Of Transnational Kenyan Teachers in US Universities. Presented at the annual meeting of the Literacy Research Association, Carlsbad, California.
- Nduati, N. (2015). The Post-Colonial Language and Identity Narratives Of Transnational Kenyan Teachers in US Universities. Presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, Illinois.
- Nduati, N. (2014). The Language and Identity Construction Narratives of Multilingual Kenyan-born Teachers in US Higher Education. Presented at the Tenth International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry, Champaign-Urbana, Illinois.
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### **PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS**

American Educational Research Association (AERA)

Literacy Research Association (LRA)

National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)

Central New York Reading Association (CNYRA)