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# Ahiska Refugee Families' Configuration of Resettlement and Academic Success in U.S. Schools

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Aydin Bal<sup>1</sup> and Angela E. Arzubiaga<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

In this article, we report on an ethnographic study of figured worlds of resettlement and identities that Muslim refugee youth from the Russian Federation coconstructed in an urban school at the Southwestern U.S. border. In the school, multiple cultural-historical discourses came together within a glocal context: refugee families, a global Islamic movement, and deficit-oriented educational ideologies. Three empirically derived themes emerged: Glocal adaptation, multiple literacies, and sticking together. The overall impact of this study derives from two aspects of the analysis: The cultural-historical analysis of refugee resettlement and the hybrid identities of refugee students.

## Keywords

refugees, figured worlds, identity, resettlement, narratives

Bizim millet o kadar surulmustur, o kadar surulmustur bu yanniya. Kurtlarin icine sal kurtlarin incinde de yasar gider bizim millet [Our nation has been exiled so many times, so much so that if you place us among wolves, our nation will live among them].

Alihan<sup>1</sup> (personal communication, July 8, 2008)

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<sup>1</sup>University of Wisconsin–Madison, Madison, WI, USA

<sup>2</sup>Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ, USA

## Corresponding Author:

Aydin Bal, Department of Rehabilitation Psychology and Special Education, University of Wisconsin–Madison, 1000 Bascom Mall, Room 411, Madison, WI 53706-1326, USA.

Email: abal@wisc.edu

There are 43.3 million displaced people globally who are forced to leave their home countries seeking refuge due to war, political oppression, or fear of persecution (UN High Commissioner for Refugees, 2010). Among them, 15.2 million are officially recognized as refugees. The vast majority of the refugee population is from Muslim countries (Iraq and Afghanistan). Even though 80% of the refugees live in developing countries, the United States is the top resettlement country with approximately 80,000 refugee admissions annually. Since the 1990s, refugees of color have made up the majority of refugees in the United States.

Education of refugee students is an urban education issue. Each year, thousands of refugee students come to urban schools bringing diverse cultural resources, experiences, and goals and join the millions of native minority students and immigrants from nondominant cultural groups. There is a wealth of international literature on the role of schools in constraining and/or enabling refugee youth in resettlement countries (e.g., Candappa & Egharevba, 2003; Matthews, 2008; Pinson, Arnot, & Candappa, 2010; Rutter, 2003; Taylor & Sidhu, 2012). However, educational research literature in the United States is still in need of empirical studies on the education and resettlement of refugee students (Bal & Artiles, 2007; McBrien, 2005).

This study addresses the need for ethnographic attention to resettlement and formal schooling as identity-making processes. Identity formation influences newly arrived refugee youths' academic achievement, mental health, and social adaptation in varied ways (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006). In the literature, refugee students' identities are often conceptualized as rather essentialist, ahistorical, and overly deterministic categories (e.g., *ethnic* and *adversarial identities*). These identity categories function to explain either personal difficulties that refugee students experience (e.g., trauma-related psychological problems) or institutional/structural barriers that they find in the United States (e.g., social rejection; Suárez-Orozco, 2000). We aimed to transcend this dichotomy and investigated the cultural-historical production of new selves in a community of recently arrived Muslim Ahıska Turk refugees at the intersections of individual and institutional/structural factors. We examined how Ahıska students and families innovatively respond to and collectively make meaning of the complex interface of sending and receiving contexts with much the same spirit as is implied in the epigraph. Cultural practices and artifacts (collective narratives) provided entrée to the configurations<sup>2</sup> of the enduring socioeconomic, spatial, and educational struggles of this community. This article further examines refugee students' and families' experiences in the context of conflicts between school ideologies and culturally meaningful practices.

We draw on Holland and colleagues' sociocultural theory of *Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds* and their concept of *figured worlds* (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998; Holland & Lave, 2001). Educational ethnographies on refugee students and families in the United States (e.g., Delgado-Gaitan, 1994; Guerrero & Tinkler, 2010; Roxas, 2011; Lee, 2001; Warriner, 2007) also informed us. Overall, these ethnographies demonstrated the resourceful and strategic adaptations that refugees make while exploring the undoing of enduring community struggles. These conceptual and methodological sources helped us to study how refugee students form their identities by innovatively orchestrating what they bring into and what they find in an urban school on the borderlands of multiple cultural worlds including families, communities, and schools as constantly moving across multiple time scales (cultural-history of Ahıska community and biographical accounts) and multiple national contexts (Uzbekistan, Russia, and the United States).

In the subsequent sections, we provide an account of Ahıska Turks' cultural-history of refugeedom. Then, we discuss resettlement and refugees' schooling experiences to contextualize Ahıska youth's identity formation in/through the figured world of resettlement. Following a review of literature and a theoretical introduction, we develop our ethnographic case study.

### *Ahıska Turks and Refugeedom*

Ahıska Turks are a Turkish-speaking Sunni Muslim refugee community originally from Ahıska in the Caucasian region of Georgia near the Turkish border. Until 1829, Ahıska was a part of the Ottoman Empire. Later, Ahıska became part of the Russian Empire and then the Soviet Union. In World War II, like Jewish and Polish groups, Ahıska people were targeted by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Ahıska Turks were accused of failing to relinquish their "bourgeois" ethnic identity (Turkish) and thus failing to converge with the postethnic communist consciousness of the Soviets (Hirsch, 2002). They were displaced and transported to distant regions of Central Asia in cattle tracts. Several thousand Ahıska died from starvation and the cold during the 2-month deportation. Adult participants of our study were born after this displacement and grew up in urban areas of Uzbekistan where they lived relatively peacefully. The dissolution of the Soviet Union resulted in the second displacement experience. In 1989, they became the subjects of a pogrom in Uzbekistan (Aydingun, Harding, Hoover, Kuznetsov, & Swerdlow, 2006). Native Uzbeks killed hundreds of Ahıska. Those who survived lost houses, jobs, and friends, and all of the other social and economic capital they had managed to accumulate. The newly formed Russian

Federation accepted them as refugees and resettled them in rural regions with harsh physical conditions and limited economic opportunities (Aydingun et al., 2006). Negative social and institutional attitudes toward the Ahıska persisted as Russia experienced a failing economy and a nation building project in the 1990s (see Wertsch, 2001, for a detailed account). In addition to taxing resettlement processes including adapting to new modes of economic production such as farming with limited resources, they continued to experience discrimination and violence in Russia. Consequently, the United States has accepted approximately 14,000 Ahıska Turks as refugees since 2000. In their third resettlement experience in 60 years, they have settled across multiple U.S. cities.

### *Refugee Settlement in the United States*

Refugeedom is often understood within a human rights discourse that portrays refugees as helpless victims and depoliticized objects of humanitarian efforts. The U.S. government, religious organizations and Hollywood celebrities contribute to this image construction (Guerrero & Tinkler, 2010). Yet refugee status is a political position, strategically offered to certain displaced people over others. Local and global political considerations such as an anti-communist orientation during the Cold War have influenced refugee admission policies in the United States (Tempo, 2007). Institutionalized racism has been another driving force in refugee admission. For instance, after the revolution, affluent Cubans of European ancestry were granted refugee status easily. Conversely, displaced people of African or Native descent from Haiti and Nicaragua who fled due to similar circumstances in their countries struggled as asylum seekers in a legal limbo for decades (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006).

### *Refugee Students in U.S. Schools*

Students with refugee status attend inner-city schools in ports of entry and in both traditional and newly established settlement communities. Unfortunately, biases against those students often permeate how their needs are constructed and addressed in schools (McBrien, 2005). These negative perspectives have developed in part from the dissemination of academic research in public spheres (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006). The vast majority of refugee studies have focused on the identification of war-related problems such as posttraumatic stress disorder and adaptation difficulties (American Psychological Association, 2010). This overreliance on individualistic and deficit-oriented perspectives misses the role of pre- and postresettlement contexts in which cultural-historical resourcefulness, academic strengths, and resiliency have

engendered revitalization among refugees. To address refugees' diverse needs, strengths, and interests, it is important to understand refugees' experiences from a culturally historically situated perspective in which the role of enduring institutional and personal struggles are taken into account (Holland & Lave, 2001).

The education literature is largely silent on refugee students and represents them and "their voices" as ahistorical and autonomous subjects without using multiple data sources and descriptions of their cultural-historical contexts (McBrien, 2005; Suárez-Orozco, 2000). This makes it difficult for practitioners to build cultural congruency and design culturally relevant pedagogies for refugee students experiencing academic and behavioral difficulties in urban schools where the intersection of race, class, and ability creates unjust and disabling ecologies and negative educational outcomes for students of color (Blanchett, Klingner, & Harry, 2009). Based on an ethnographic study of a White science teacher who successfully built cultural competency working with nondominant students, Milner (2011) suggested that urban educators recognize the importance of students' varied identities and develop cultural competence about their students' personal and collective histories, struggles, and cultural resources. Following Milner's recommendation, we take a step here to provide a study of identities, struggles, and adaptation strategies that a group of Muslim refugees bring into an urban and highly diverse school.

### *Theoretical Perspective*

Identity is a key concept in the educational and social science literature. However the past decades have seen a shift from theories, which locate identity within the individual psyche or cultural group (ethos) and define the nature of identity as stable, cohesive, and developmentally attained (Suárez-Orozco, 2004; Wertsch, 2001). Holland and colleagues' cultural-historical theory of identity (1998, 2001), which we used in the present study, reconciles the tension between the individualist and culturalist views. Grounded in the cultural-historical psychology of Lev Vygotsky and the work of Bakhtin and Bourdieu, Holland and colleagues conceptualized identity as an unfinished social construct always in the process of remaking. They located identity in "the (mediated) place of historical subjectivities in the creation and undoing of enduring struggles" (Holland & Lave, 2001, p. 7). At the heart of this theory is the assumption that people engage in identity remaking processes through their participation in culturally and historically contingent activity systems, called figured worlds (e.g., the figured worlds of smartness,

disability, or environmental activism). Figured worlds are “socially and culturally realm[s] of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 52). As such, figured worlds are mediated by cultural artifacts (e.g., a shared narrative on success). Collective narratives are key cultural artifacts that play a pivotal role in the enactment and construction of figured worlds (Holland & Cole, 1995). They are distributed memories of the past that are oriented toward both the present and the future as simultaneously representing how things were and how they should be (Wertsch, 2001). In this study, we focused on the figured world of resettlement and its key artifacts, collective narratives that convey norms, modes of behaviors, and beliefs. More specifically, we addressed the following research question: *How does the figured world of resettlement organize Ahiska students’ social adaptation and academic engagement in an urban charter school?*

## Method and Ethnographic Background

This study is part of a yearlong ethnographic project conducted in 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 school years. We used Stake’s (2005) *ethnographic case study* approach to provide insight into Ahiska families’ figured world of resettlement that students brought into an urban charter school. Instead of reporting unique experiences of each student as individual cases, we choose here to focus on commonalities and differences across Ahiska youth and families in an interactional context in a manner well suited to Holland and colleagues’ theory. Following epistemological suggestions by Wortham (2006) and Hall (2004), we aim at situating students’ identities in the intersections of multiple cultural milieus (family, community, and school).

### Participants

Six Ahiska students, 12 Ahiska parents, and 6 educators participated in the study ( $n = 24$ ). Students were between the ages of 9 and 13. After approvals from the IRB and the school district, Ahiska families who (a) had children between the ages of 8 and 15 and (b) had lived in the United States for less than 3 years were identified by the principal, Mr. Tuna. The first six families (Orag, Meshet, Alihan, Niyazov, Yektay, and Alihan<sup>a</sup>) whom we contacted agreed to participate in the study. Parent participants were between the ages of 28 and 55. Their range of educational attainment is from 1 year of secondary school to postsecondary education (technical college and undergraduate degrees). They had lower paying jobs including maintenance, custodial and

**Table 1.** Participating Ahiska Families and Students.

Family	Students	Parent education mother father	Parents' current occupation mother father	Number of children	Number of household members
Orag	Fatih Male Third grade	Bachelor in management	Homemaker Driver and custodian in River School	8	10
Meshet	Mikhail Male Sixth grade	Bachelor in finance	Homemaker	3	5
Alihan	Umut Male Sixth grade	11th grade (secondary-level vocational training)	Hairdresser	2	4
Niyazov	Adaham Male Sixth grade	11th grade (secondary-level vocational training)	Factory worker	2	4
Yektay	Gabriel Male Sixth grade	11th grade (secondary-level vocational training)	Nurse assistant	2	6
Alihan <sup>a</sup>	Elmira Female Third grade	11th grade (secondary-level vocational training)	Homemaker	2	4

<sup>a</sup>Alihan families' fathers were brothers.

factory work, hairdressing, and baking (Table 1). Five of the students were male (Mikhail, Umut, Gabriel, Adaham, and Fatih) and one of them was female (Elmira). Fatih and Elmira were born in 1999 and attended the second grade. Mikhail, Umut, Gabriel, and Adaham were born in 1995 and attended the sixth grade in spring 2008. School administrators (Principal Mr. Tuna and Vice-Principal Mr. Asya), English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher (Mrs. Asya), Language Arts teachers (Mrs. Martin and Mrs. Randall), and special education teacher (Mrs. Beesly) who worked directly with the student participants were asked to be part of the study. In the spring, we mainly worked with Mrs. Asya teaching Ahıska students who were pulled out from mainstream Language Arts classes. Mrs. Asya was in her early 30s with 10 years of teaching experience in Turkey as an English teacher. She was in her first year in the United States. Her husband, Mr. Asya, was the vice-principal and became the principal during the fall.

### *Settings: A Transnational Islamic Charter School and Ahıska Homes*

The study took place in a tuition-free charter school, River Science, and the housing area including the communities and homes of the Ahıska students. The homes were located in the downtown area of a Southwestern metropolis. The neighborhood was characterized by concentrated poverty and limited availability of social services. Ahıska families lived in an apartment complex with other low-income immigrant and native racial minority families. In the state, immigrant students' education has been and continues to be an emotionally charged and politically driven issue. The state has long-lasting assimilationist policies supporting court sanctioned and voter-driven educational policies banning bilingual education and promoting a uniform method of instruction. The state also has the highest number of charter schools in the nation. On one hand, River School shared general characteristics of urban charter schools in the state (e.g., high numbers of low income minority students). On the other hand, it was a district school founded by a group of volunteers inspired by a transnational Islamist movement, *Cemaat*.

*Cemaat* emerged in Turkey and is currently seen as one of the most influential Islamist movements around the world (Turgut, 2010). *Cemaat* preaches an interfaith dialogue and a "moderate" Turkish version of Islam yearning for Turkey's idealized imperial past and leadership in the Islamic world (Park, 2008). The movement runs a strong network of approximately 1,000 schools and universities and numerous charities, social organizations, businesses, and media outlets throughout Asia, Europe, and Africa. Today, *Cemaat* runs one of the largest charter school networks in the United States with 135 schools

operating in 26 states enrolling more than 45,000 students (Strauss, 2012). The majority of students attending Cemaat schools are non-Turkish and non-Muslim. The schools are known for their rigor and emphasis on academic achievement in natural sciences and mathematics education, which makes them attractive to non-Muslim parents looking for an alternative to failing public schools in the United States. Cemaat schools do not require student participation in any religious practices such as studying the Quran.

Within this complex global Islamic movement, schools play a key role. Turgut (2010) summed up the schools' global mission: "to create new Turkish-affiliated Muslim elite, well versed in technology, successful in a global free-market economy, yet extremely devout" (p. 1). The schools are run on two philosophical/theological principles: Hizmet (service) and Temsil (modeling). Turkish teachers who are all practicing Muslims move between Cemaat schools around the world. A teacher who works in the United States can be relocated, for example, to Germany or Afghanistan to teach there. Cemaat schools are not religious schools (e.g., Islamic madrasa or Jesuit schools) that have overtly religious curricula. Islam is not taught as part of the school curriculum but through Temsil, leading through being the best example of a devout Muslim. Western-style curricula of Cemaat schools follow local standards and have an exclusive focus on natural sciences, mathematics, college prep, and social/moral discipline.

River School was located in the downtown area with 270 students in Grades K-11. It was in a faded pink colored one-story building that resembled an old manufacturing facility. The school was between a busy highway and a large avenue that ran through the business center of the city. It was amid racially segregated housing complexes and a large university campus. The school had two playgrounds facing the posterior walls of low-income single-family houses. Thirty-seven Ahiska students had attended the school since 2007. The student body included 50% Latino, 20% Turkish from Turkey and Ahiska, 20% White, 5% African American, and the remaining 5% were from other immigrant/refugee communities. Whereas the majority of the teachers were local teachers, the administrators, science, and ESL teachers were from Turkey, holding temporary or emergency teaching credentials in the state. The state extended emergency licenses that bypass state licensing requirements because of teacher shortages in high-need subject areas, such as math, for high-need urban schools.

### **Researcher's Role**

As educational researchers and teacher educators, we have extensively worked with refugee and immigrant families in and outside of the school

settings. The first author shares the same ethnic and linguistic background (Turkish) with the families. The second author served on the present study's dissertation committee. Before and during the study, the first author participated with the Ahiska community in events such as religious and national festivities (Ramadan). He had developed long-term personal relationships with the families and Turkish educators since 2001. His personal connections afforded us relatively easy access to the school and families across several social events. The first author also volunteered in the ESL program of the school for a month in 2008. As we both have worked with refugee/immigrant communities and conducted ethnographic studies, we are cognizant about constantly shifting insider/outsider positions, power differentiation between researchers and participants, and other ethical issues. We constantly worked to balance a possible power differentiation in the data collection, analysis, and dissemination by using multiple data sources and being involved in community activities before and after the study. While we employed a sociocultural theory of identity (Holland et al., 1998; Holland & Lave, 2001), which guided the study, we strived to form an emic cultural-historical account of Ahiska refugees' identity formation as situated in the Ahiska community and River School. This approach was intended to avoid the representation of refugee families and students' within overly deterministic representation as *depoliticized victims* or as exotic others with an exclusive focus on "different" cultural and religious practices or autonomous characteristics.

### *Data Sources and Analysis*

We conducted semistructured entry and exit interviews and nonstructured follow-up interviews. The in-depth entry and exit interviews took 30 to 90 minutes. Follow-up interviews were short informal interviews conducted for member checking and clarification purposes on a weekly basis. Parent interviews were conducted in Turkish. Teacher and student interviews were in English and Turkish depending on participants' preferences. Spradley's (1979) ethnographic interviewing method was employed to develop rapport and to elicit understandings of participants' actions and meaning making and the key activities via various *grand-* and *mini-tour* questions. For example, a grand-tour question was *Could you describe as much as you can what you do in a typical day of this ESL class from the beginning until the end of class?* We were participant observers in the school and during home activities during the year for 1 to 2 times per week. General education language arts classes, ESL classrooms, and others school activities and spaces (playgrounds, monthly assembly meetings, and baseball games) were observed. Several documents were collected such as homework, behavioral evaluation

tools, and student artwork. Individual and group histories were contextualized in the social and curricular organization of the school, based on the analysis of 94 hours of transcribed participant observations and interviews.

We used Frederic Erickson's (1986) *interpretative research* methodology in our analysis that followed a recursive and iterative process focusing on school, family, and neighborhood activities, and joint participation. The purpose of the analysis was to (a) generate preliminary assertions that constituted the figured world of resettlement and (b) establish the evidentiary warrant for these assertions through rigorously testing them against the whole data corpus for confirming and disconfirming evidence. By reading/listening to the data mass repeatedly and holistically, we developed preliminary hypotheses (e.g., understandings of the figured world). The hypotheses were tested searching first for confirming and disconfirming evidence. Our focus was on unifying features, which led to *key linkages*. The linked themes were put together and reorganized into final assertions, which were tested repeatedly. We followed three criteria for maintaining trustworthiness or credibility of the study: (a) Evidentiary adequacy and immersion; (b) Data triangulation; and (c) Member checking (Erickson, 1986; Stake, 2005). Below we explain and discuss our findings to address our research question on how the figured world of resettlement organizes Ahıska students' social adaptation and academic engagement via cultural narratives in an urban charter school.

## Findings and Discussions

As experienced border crossers, Ahıska Turks have navigated across multiple physical and cultural borders and formed a multilayered and ever-evolving figured world of resettlement. Our findings were clustered around three empirically derived themes regarding the figured world of resettlement. The themes are bound to collective narratives Ahıska refugees used as key artifacts: (a) *Glocal adaptation*, (b) *Multiple literacies*, and (c) *Sticking together*.

### *Glocal Adaptation*

This is the most general assertion, which functions to mediate social adaptation and educational activities. With remarkably fast and dense urbanization of global capitalism, increased access to modes of transportation and instant communication technologies, refugees engage in economic, political, and identity-making activities globally (Arzubiaga, Nogueroń, & Sullivan, 2009; Hall, 2004). Ahıska Turks' experience should be understood by a simultaneous focus on local and global contexts-what Alim and Pennycook (2007) called *Glocal context*. We found that in Ahıska narratives glocal adaptation

was a significant context for identity formation. Resettlement perceptions and activities of the Ahiska aimed toward a glocal social adaptation that included successfully adapting to local contexts, while transcending national borders. A glocal identity, in this sense, is not an either/or identity but rather new identity configurations, which not only include new dimensions but at the same time mediate success. The Ahiska effort toward a glocal adaptation is at times a counternarrative to the narrative on immigrants' fear of becoming Americanized.

Portes and Rumbaut (2006) stated immigrant parents might fear their children "lose" their own culture and become "Americanized." This fear might create intergenerational as well as intragenerational tensions (Lee, 2001). In River School, Turkish educators, who were also newcomers or recent arrivals, constantly voiced this fear for Ahiska students and their own children. On the other hand, Ahiska families framed their children's increased acculturation to the host society from more situated views than an *either/or dialectic*. Ahiska families argued for a glocal adaptation model and encouraged their children to develop friendships with local ethnic groups, as long as they participated in Ahiska cultural practices. Mr. Yektay, a truck driver who grew up in Uzbekistan and Russia as a refugee youth, represented this standpoint, based on his past experiences and future projections. He stated (Interview, 7/27),

If we have our unity, he [Gabriel] can become friends with Americans or Mexicans. When he comes to home if he speaks his own language and sees his father or his grandfather do their prayers, he will not forget his religion. We were friends with Tatars, Uzbeks, Russians. But we kept our religion and language. The same thing should happen here.

As noted, Ahiska parents believed their children would not lose their cultural identity if Ahiska people keep their culture and children participate in Ahiska cultural activities. They were not resentful about their children's friendships with other youth from dominant (White) or nondominant racial groups (African American and Latino). Nonetheless, this lack of fear of assimilation did not apply to all situations and was not meant to be a method of integrating into the United States permanently:

It would be good if they [his children] move to Turkey after they finish their schools . . . and once they get their Green Cards . . . We should live under a Muslim flag. (Interview, 07/13)

Mr. Meshet expressed a general tendency in the community to imagine Turkey as the "final" destination in their glocal engagement with refugee

resettlement. Turkey had an important place in the Ahıska refugee community's social geography akin to a compass that provides direction in the figured world of resettlement. Ahıska considered themselves members of *the imagined Turkish nation* (Anderson, 2006), which mostly signifies Turks living in Turkey but also extends to approximately 500 million Turkic people around the world. While none of Ahıska participants had lived in Turkey, they considered it the imagined homeland. Ahıska participants regularly mentioned a desire to live under "a Muslim flag." They did not wish to live in any other Muslim country but in Turkey, an idealized ethnoreligious space. Past studies have often taken a deterministic view and attributed Muslim refugees' behaviors to a homogenous and global Muslim identity (Gibson, 1997). Our findings on glocal adaptation concur with Hall's (2004) findings on Sikh immigrant youth's identity formation in the multiple imagined spaces: "as members of a global South Asian diaspora, their sense of what it means to be 'Asian' 'Indian' or 'Sikh' is shaped not only by culture learning at home or at school but by ideas and images, film narratives, and artistic forms circulating across networks linking Leeds, Vancouver, New York, and Amritsar (the sacred center for Sikhs in Punjab)" (p. 118). The following assertions include two specific glocal adaptation practices, *multiple literacy practices* and *sticking together*, for the Ahıska refugee community. These assertions shed light on what it means to be an Ahıska youth in the glocally constructed figured world of resettlement.

### *Multiple Literacy Practices*

Language plays an essential role in forming identities (Holland et al., 1998; Wortham, 2006). The Ahıska community has kept Turkish as the dominant spoken language at home. Turkish has been one of the most significant forms of symbolic capital associated with claiming the Ahıska identity. Meanwhile, multilingualism was a central practice and considered glocal social capital. Mrs. Alihan, a hairdresser stated,

From time to time, I make him read and give him the books in Russian so he [Umut] wouldn't forget it . . . He should not forget Russian. Why would he forget it? It is about world, it is about business. Knowing many languages is very good. English? We are living in English anyway. It would come much better. (Interview, 07/13)

Mrs. Alihan clearly desired Umut maintain his Russian and that he become proficient in English. She also believed that Umut's English would be improved naturally. In Ahıska homes, learning a new language is a familiar

and structured process that required active social engagement with native speakers in multiple literacy events. English acquisition was not seen as an *anxiety-ridden* process but a set of familiar activities that would help increase global capital. The families used various strategies to maintain the languages they already spoke while supporting English learning, the language of global capitalism. Ahıska families also acknowledged the historical struggles their children experienced within resettlement experiences, as expressed next:

My son complains “in Russia you said to learn Russian and get a good education. We came here, now you say to learn English. I had enough” (laughing). Of course, our kids are now struggling here. (Mr. Orag Interview, 7/8)

Each generation of the Ahıska has had to rapidly adapt to new social conditions via the mastery of multiple literacies as stated by Mr. Orag. Not surprisingly, we observed family members engaged in multiple literacies using various sociolinguistic practices. In daily conversations, Ahıska families used Turkish, Russian, and Uzbek. Ahıska families watched Turkish and Russian movies, soap operas, and news programs via cable TV and the Internet. Some Ahıska children were named after Turkish movie stars and pop singers. At work and school, Ahıska Turks spoke English, Russian, and sometimes Spanish with coworkers and schoolmates. Ahıska children used English to communicate with siblings in personal and academic activities (e.g., games and homework). They read books, played video games, and engaged in Internet literacies (producing family videos or learning to paint via YouTube tutorials) in Turkish, Russian, and English.

Some of the most influential forms of literacies, which Ahıska youth participated in, were related to the global hip-hop culture and its localized practices: *Free-style rap* and *graffiti*. Student participants listened and performed the freestyle, an improvisational form of rapping. Specifically, Umut, a star athlete, was mastering this form by participating in freestyle battles against other rappers in his neighborhood. To be able to win a freestyle battle, a rapper would be able to “diss,” put an opponent down, with superior lyrics and rhymes. In school, Umut attempted to utilize his mastery over hip-hop literacies, which have been kept at the margins of formal academic discourses in the United States. For example, in a lesson, following Language Arts teacher’s syllabi, the ESL teacher, Mrs. Asya, was covering personification. Umut insisted on doing freestyle to demonstrate his understanding of personification that is giving human qualities, feelings, or action to inanimate objects. Eventually, Mrs. Asya gave up and allowed Umut to share his freestyle in class:

1. walking desk took over the town
2. man this rock made hell of a sound
3. I wish I were a horse I will make this wind laugh
4. worse the rock just ran out of the town
5. fool things r going wild.
6. OK my personification ends peace out
7. homie u know Im the best. (Document Analysis, 5/14)

As seen in lines 1 to 4, Umut skillfully demonstrates his knowledge of personification by attributing human traits to inanimate objects while keeping the integrity of freestyle.

*Graffiti* is another hip-hop literacy Ahiska students practiced. Adaham, an inspired painter and the eldest of the Niyazov family, was recognized as a master graffiti artist. He was constantly asked to make individualized graffiti for his schoolmates. Alim and Pennycook (2007) studied the role of hip-hop literacies as significant glocal activities through which marginalized youth form their identities as mediated by global and local hip-hop cultures. They suggest minority students' multiple literacies, which are often ignored or feared, should be strategically included in academic and nonacademic discourses. Alim and Pennycook also warn about unintended consequences, which might occur when such discourses are incorporated into school programs in a superficial way without understanding and challenging enduring institutionalized marginalization processes. They recommend educators facilitate but not dictate or strictly regulate the use of popular culture considering the complexities of those cultural practices and the risk of further marginalization.

Ahiska students in our study practiced religious literacies outside of the school along with children whose parents were from Turkey. The students studied reading and writing in *classical Arabic*, language of the Quran, taught by Turkish volunteers. Reciting the Quran is a highly valued activity in Ahiska community and Sunni Muslim world in general. The majority of Muslims conduct their religious practices in classic Arabic. People who recite the Quran can act as imams, officiating priests, in religious ceremonies. The ability to recite the Quran is especially relevant for Muslim refugees in resettlement countries where access to imams to lead ceremonies is limited. In sum, Ahiska youth joined literacy worlds in both "new" and "old" languages. They engaged in a myriad of literacy practices involving movies, religious texts, video games, or television series within glocal contexts where multilingualism and multiple literacies were integral and privileged forms of symbolic capital in the Ahiska community.

In contrast, those multiple literacy practices were problematized in River School. Located in a state where some of the most extreme applications of an assimilationist ideology were initiated, River School was not exempt from a deficit-oriented *home-language as a problem* paradigm that has dominated the educational discourses in the United States (Paris, 2012). Both U.S.-born and Turkish educators in River School appropriated this paradigm as they officially positioned nondominant students within two categories: *ELLs* or *learning disabled*:

If they come here speaking Turkish or Russian or whatever language\_ they are in between. They have 5 years in the home learning the language by observation and modeling. That makes it difficult because they have no school knowledge. (Mrs. Martin; Interview, 10/16)

This quote aptly demonstrates the state's assimilationist ideology that has deep roots in the United States. Since the 1980s, educational policies have created a powerful hegemonic discourse that conceptualizes cultural and linguistic practices, which minority students bring to school as deficits. As a form of social control, these policies along with psychological and educational theories (e.g., eugenics and culture of poverty) and practices (achievement and aptitude testing) focus on presumed deficiencies that nondominant students bring into schools. Schools and educators, in this paradigm, play the role of "fixers" of the deficiencies inherent in immigrants/refugees and other nondominant groups. In an ethnographic study with Sudanese refugees, Warriner (2007) found the assimilationist monolingualist ideology and "quick fix" ESL programs were not useful, as they did not provide the opportunities for social mobility and self-sufficiency.

In River School there was tension not only about the education of nondominant students but also about what counted as correct English. This included learning and practicing *correct English* over other vernaculars. In the United States, differences in vernacular (e.g., Ebonics) have been moralized with unequal distribution of status and associated with minority students' outcomes. The hierarchy of languages influenced students' evaluations of themselves and participation in academic activities. Ahıska students regularly borrowed linguistic practices (Ebonics or Spanglish) from other linguistic nondominant students. This was made consequential as those practices were positioned as languages of the street not the school. The following exchange between Gabriel and the ESL teacher was recorded when Gabriel called Adaham "Loco [Crazy] Boy":

Mrs. Asya: You know street language, huh?

Gabriel: I learned English in the street fast . . . here is slow (Participant Observation, 5/13).

Ahiska students' proficiency in nonstandard English signified their engagement in "street" activities. It placed Ahiska students outside of the practices of monolingual White students, the norm, which River School attempted to emulate for students. Ahiska students' participation in the inner-city neighborhood literacies was seen at odds with academic activities and positioned Ahiska students as *street-smart versus school-smart*. Mr. Asya, the principal, clearly made such differentiations when he stated, "They speak street English. Their parents think 'my child knows English' but this is not true" (Interview, 9/26). In other words, we found the school's goals were in line with the goals of deficit views, which Paris (2012) explains, "The goal of deficit approaches was to eradicate the linguistic, literate, and cultural practices many students of color brought from their homes and communities and to replace them with what were viewed as superior practices" (p. 93). Principal Asya's statement was fitting since in River School, Ahiska students' main task was not to learn English to communicate but to learn its privileged academic form. The deficit-oriented paradigm was reproduced via rote memorization and teacher-oriented classroom activities in the ESL program. The students' multiple literacy practices were ignored, silenced, and framed as deficits.

This finding is important as the state's assimilationist ideology was reproduced even by Turkish teachers in a school founded by Muslim Turks who from an essentialist culturist perspective are "matched" with Ahiska students. The institutional factors situated in the philosophical underpinnings of Cemaat schools, as unfolded in River school, were contributing to the construction of marginalizing practices. In part, this occurred, because Cemaat schools are not designed to confront the status quo but to operate within parameters set up by local government rules (Turgut, 2010). River School, as a Cemaat affiliated school, was organized to realize the movement's global agenda. It lacked a critical pedagogy, which would support rich learning environments where student learning and freedom could be maximized and students would be able to develop a critical awareness toward their life (Ladson-Billings, 2005). In addition, the majority of Turkish teachers did not have teaching degrees, they were reproducing the educational models they brought from Turkey without a critical stance while forming their professional teacher identities in a state where institutionalized racism and deficit-oriented anti-immigrant paradigms were deeply rooted. As a result, Turkish teachers could not challenge, but rather contributed to the reproduction of symbolic violence, which operated through educational discourses that positioned nondominant individuals in subordinated relationships (Cummins, 2009). The following quote represents the reproduction of such paradigms. Herein, Mrs. Asya made meaning of the ELLs' academic struggles:

here what the state says [is] a child should come to a level where she can get out from the ESL class in a year. It is in [the state's] official website I think one year is enough . . . If a student stays in the program a second year this is because of his laziness carelessness the lack of care that the families show or the special ed. (Interview, 10/15)

We regularly observed this official script in action: Ahiska students were excluded from general education and not allowed to capitalize on their cultural and linguistic resources. Those, especially Adaham, who engaged in multiple literacy practices, slowly withdrew from school-sanctioned academic activities. In the absence of a full-time special education teacher, the ESL classroom was a place where linguistic minority students were taught acceptable school behaviors. Toward the end of the spring semester, Adaham stopped doing homework and received office discipline referrals almost daily (Document Analysis, 4-5/9). When special education teacher, Mrs. Beesly, was hired, several Ahiska students, including Adaham who failed sixth grade, were referred for learning disabilities due to disruptive behaviors and failing grades in the ESL classrooms.

The school's pervasive deficit perspective and lack of a critical pedagogy were in contrast with Ahiska families' practices and goals, which aimed to encourage children's successful glocal adaptations and multiple literacy practices. Ahiska parents acknowledged that they were at times unable to provide as much direct support for their children because they had not yet developed mastery over academic English. Yet they strongly believed their children's language and academic performance would improve with motivation and provisions of material resources (e.g., food or clothes), more challenging academic activities in the school, and teachers' careful attention to children's progress, which they assumed River School could provide with its Muslim Turkish teachers and science- and math-oriented curriculum. Mr. Orag summarized this point. He was one of the key participants of the study because he served as a metaphorical and literal bridge between the school and the community. Mr. Orag, a tall gray-haired man in his early 50s, had grown up, received higher education and worked in Uzbekistan. Two of his eight children and one of his grandchildren attended River School where he worked as the custodian, driving a van to transport Ahiska students. He indicated that time was required for language acquisition and social adaptation with families' and Turkish teachers' active support:

When we came here, we were in bewilderment. We will come to ourselves in two years. It is very hard he [an Ahiska] does not know English. In Russia he could speak the language. If they did not give you a job, you could still go find a job. He didn't know what to do here and got confused. But you will see all will get well, Allah's will. (Interview; 8/10)

Mr. Orag took an optimistic stance about their current struggles in light of their past and saw learning English, a local-official and global language, as a critical component to success. Ahıska parents projected their children and community would do better, eventually.

Ahıska Turks' perceptions were in line with first generation's immigrant community characteristics that Suárez-Orozco (2000) identified: *value of extended family relationships, hard work, and optimism about the future*. However, Suárez-Orozco also noted the optimism that immigrant families have might not be realistic because the more time children spend in the United States, the worse academic, social, and physical health related outcomes they experience. In our case, we argue Ahıska Turks' optimism cannot be taken as purely unrealistic. Their positive perception of the future was based on a historically situated assessment of their collective past and the instrumental cultural artifacts formed on these foundations as well as their children's prior educational experiences in Russian schools. Ahıska parents and youth thought they had superior academic opportunities, school discipline, and higher expectations in the Russian schools. As Gabriel put it, "the Russian schools were smart" (Follow-up Interview, 23/5). Ahıska families asserted that Ahıska students who attended Russian schools and developed their writing and reading skills in Russian also had better academic literacy skills in English. In line with supporting literature that development of the first or native language supports acquisition of a new language (Cummins, 2009), Ahıska parents argued that such Ahıska students became and would be academically more successful:

. . . here, my daughter goes to the seventh grade. She says "these classes are not challenging. I have already passed those topics and I know them already." In Russia, the school was harder. Here it is mediocre. It means here is twenty percent lower. (Mr. Alihan; 7/8)

The cultural and linguistic resources, which Ahıska students brought to school, were not nurtured. Turkish teachers were in close relationships with families and saw them as their brothers and sisters. However, they also imposed the state's deficit view and self-righteous perspectives of Cemaat about how Turkish Muslim students should live, which were removed from Ahıska Turks' cultural history and expectations.

### ***Sticking Together: "Never Fight With Another Ahıska Even if He Says Something About Your Mother"***

The third assertion is based on the collective narratives defined as acting as a group and supporting each other in often-hostile resettlement settings. Within

various forms, such narratives have been found to be very common in immigrant families' discourses. Delgado-Gaitán (1994) demonstrated how Latino immigrants and refugee families from the Soviet Union coconstructed similar narratives. Ahıska families heuristically formed a unique configuration of such a cultural practice in three distinct resettlement countries, Uzbekistan, Russia, and the United States: Whenever they resettled in a new country, Ahıska people found out where, in the region, other Ahıska Turks lived, while keeping strong ties with faraway relatives in other countries (e.g., Azerbaijan or Turkey) in order to create social support and a transnational information network.

Sticking together has been functional for their community's survival. Five of the six families lived in the same apartment complex with other Ahıska. Although some families had never met before, they quickly formed a vibrant community life in the inner-city housing complex: If you visited them, you would find elders, seated outdoors, playing games such as backgammon under the constant Southwest sun. Adults socialized with other Ahıska who either lived in the same place or visited. Youth hung out in neighborhood parks, pools, or each other's houses. With Turkish flags on their windows, shoes left at the door, and sounds of a mixture of Turkish and Russian TV programs, Ahıska apartments were easily distinguishable. There was always a constant movement between and within the Ahıska apartments as their inhabitants moved in or out for work or school. On the other hand, their interactions with others in the neighborhood were very limited. Ahıska houses were clean and orderly inside. The houses opened for all other Ahıska families even though the conditions of the apartment complex were tough. During our study, for example, there was an insect infestation. Adaham told "he could not sleep and felt tired in school because of bug bites. His arms and neck were covered with clear marks of insect bites" (Field Notes, 9/25). In addition, violence was a common experience in their neighborhood. Mikhail described running into a violent incident on his way home.

It has fight every day\_ I went to the one person's house. And I was going back, the fight was in front of my eyes . . . In Russia I was not scared nowhere. But here, yeah . . . Because they are crazy here. (Interview, 16/3)

Ahıska families' resettlement activities included secondary migration in the United States to avoid the harsh living conditions of urban neighborhoods where they had been placed by local refugee resettlement agencies. At the end of our study, the Niyazov and Yektay families moved out of the state. The extended Ahıska social network helped them to find better jobs and schools in different states.

As for the academic-school context, sticking together provided an instrumental model of behaviors within two specific activities: *fighting* and *academic activities*. Ahıska students worked, acted, and fought as a group. Below is an example of how Umut expressed an enactment of this model: Umut was an athletic 13-year-old with dirty blond hair and hazel eyes. He practiced boxing and was selected to compete in the junior Olympics. Like his father, uncle, and grandfather, Umut was a gregarious boy with clear leadership qualities. He was describing the fight he had with some older kids who made fun of his “Russian” accent and yelled at him “Go back [to] Russia!” when he concluded,

I would never fight with Ahıska even they say something about my mom\_ because we are like the only ones in America. We have to like protect ourselves. They see we are protecting ourselves. And then they will say nothing. (Interview, 5/8)

Fighting as a social activity played an important role, for some Ahıska boys more than others. They trained in martial arts and constantly talked about fights they had engaged in or observed. Adaham, the master graffiti artist, seen as the most disengaged student and a candidate for special education, was an exception to this. In the school and the neighborhood, Adaham had been called names (“sissy girl”) since he was interested in art and avoided physical confrontations as his mother, Mrs. Yektay, stated. Mrs. Yektay, a factory worker studying English in a community college to continue her education in fashion, shared, “this caused quite a bit of stress for Adaham” (Mrs. Yektay; Interview, 9/8). Even though other Ahıska boys defended Adaham as Umut suggested in his quote, the mockery did not stop. Adaham had aspired to be an artist and was known for saving money for private painting classes. During his exit interview, Adaham stated unenthusiastically he would use his savings to *go to a karate class to learn how to fight* (10/17). He felt compelled to claim “a tough boy” position as a means of survival where his identity claim as an “artist” marginalized him. Adaham wanted to learn how to fight to defend himself and other Ahıska Turks if needed. In short, Ahıska refugees had been placed in impoverished neighborhoods and attended schools that were mostly ill prepared to address their needs and strengths. Sticking together was a form of countering marginalization and physical and positional domination threats in the resettlement countries.

River School had a firm approach toward physical aggression. Ahıska students were aware of the official approach, which made them avoid fighting on school premises. But, by the time we conducted the study, Ahıska students had already established their reputation in school as a group who were not to be “messed with” (Umut and Gabriel; Interview, 8/24). In official discourses,

these acts were explained as removed from their historical meanings and local functions. Ahıska boys' identities were being constructed as that of aggressive immigrants. Teachers attributed Ahıska students' propensity to fight to their cultural identity or to past traumatic experiences. Mrs. Randall, for example, explained the boys' aggressive style was the result of their past experience in "scary and violent" Russia (Participant Observation, 9/30). When the newly hired special education teacher, Mrs. Beesly, was asked if she had worked with refugees like Ahıska students—or the "Russian kids" as she named them—she recalled one of her former male students from Russia identified as "emotionally disturbed" whose father was known as a mobster (Interview, 8/30). Turkish teachers took a different yet still a narrow view. They explained Ahıska students' acts associated with sticking together as similar to the uneducated Turks living in rural Turkey whose "rude" behaviors were in contrast to that of urbanized Turks.

It is important to note that attending River School afforded Ahıska students some advantages in regard to social positioning. Holland and colleagues (1998, 2001) pointed out that positionality and the official scripts associated with hierarchy, do not work in deterministic ways but are contested, negotiated, or orchestrated in figured worlds through the daily activities of participants. The orchestration takes place depending on participants' access to various spaces, voices, stances, and genres (with their semantic and referential aspects; Wortham, 2006). Interestingly, the acts of sticking together would have been interpreted and responded to more harshly in other schools where Ahıska children would have been most likely positioned as troublemakers or emotionally disturbed students as demonstrated in the literature recurrently (Bal & Artiles, 2007). Nasir (2004) reported on the identity construction of a Muslim African American boy (Karim) with behavioral difficulties in an urban Islamic school; Muslim African American teachers positioned Karim as a part of their imagined community and used an alternate interpretation to counter negative narratives and frame Karim's behavioral problems as the products of a temporary developmental phase rather than clinical symptoms of an inherited psychological disorder. In a similar vein, principal Asya acknowledged Turkish educators showed more understanding toward Ahıska students' rough play and aggressive behaviors since "those behaviors were part of their cultural repertoires as kids growing up in rural Russia" (Interview, 9/26). When an "American" teacher brought a couple of Ahıska boys to his office for showing aggression in the playground, he explained to the teacher "They were not fighting, just being rough" (9/26). His reframe of the incident solved the problem without disciplinary action. Unfortunately, examples of such less negative social positioning were not completely translated into understanding students' academic and linguistic resources and struggles in an education context within which heavily

teacher-oriented mainstream classroom activities privileged independent and competitive student work. Teachers' main complaint about Ahiska students was that the students always wanted to sit and work together. Acts of sticking together interpreted as Ahiska students' resistance and lack of knowledge about appropriate school behaviors were the main reason for their referral to ESL classrooms. The ESL program was seen as a curative space where Ahiska students and other minority students learned both academic English and school behaviors that were privileged and had not developed in their homes. In the ESL classroom, Ahiska students were discouraged and punished when they attempted to work together and to help each other during academic activities. They were expected to work independently and compete against each other in rote-drill reading and writing activities. Noticeable consequences of the exclusion and classroom organization were students' increasing disengagement. Additionally Ahiska students started to make fun of each other's pronunciation and grammatical errors and called each other such names as "stupid" or "loser" (Participant Observation, 5/20). The educators did not utilize the sticking together model as an educational resource but determined it was a deficit, which needed fixing. This defeated the purpose of the sticking together and turned students against each other during classroom activities where the *smart student persona* was defined on the grounds of other's failure. Therefore students were to compete rather than support each other to claim smartness.

To conclude our findings and demonstrate how Ahiska people heuristically coauthored the figured world of resettlement and collective narratives as key artifacts for Ahiska students' identity formation, below we present a powerful identity narrative shared by this community. The story includes the generic acts of the three themes, which emerged in our analysis, about resettlement and academic engagement and provides a model of success for Ahiska youth.

## **A Collective Personal Narrative of Refugee Resettlement and Success**

Ahiska Turks have encountered persistent educational barriers in countries of resettlement (e.g., racially segregated dysfunctional schools and hostile social climates). They appropriated individual stories to author their collective past and future, to interpret present struggles, and to keep hope alive as lucidly voiced by Mr. Alihan in the epigraph:

Our nation has been exiled numerous times until we came here. We can even live among wolves. We have lived among Jewish people. We have lived among Uzbeks. We have lived among Russians. We will live among Americans as well. (Interview, 7/13)

Ahiska Turks highly valued formal education as a vital activity in the figured world of resettlement. During the study, one of the often-narrated collective stories was about discriminative acts experienced in Russian schools. In this story, Jamila, one of the eight children of the Orag family, appeared as the protagonist who faced injustice in a Russian school. Mr. Orag narrated a version of the story at his home while the first author attended a family dinner with the Orags (Interview, 7/8): Mr. Orag grew up and worked as a manager in the state-run cooperatives in Uzbekistan. After the 1989 pogrom, the Orag family was accepted with refugee status and resettled by the Russian government in a rural region famous for its swamps and exceptionally humid weather. Children started to get sick because of the harsh living conditions. So after several months, the Orag family moved to Krasnodar, a city in Southern Russia, following others who had previously settled there. The Orag family did much better in Krasnodar with Ahiska Turks' social and financial support. Yet Ahiska Turks faced an increasingly hostile social climate. Ahiska children were placed in segregated classrooms, imposed non-Muslim religious practices (e.g., forcibly making the sign of the cross) and excluded from higher academic tracks.

A Russian teacher routinely picked on Jamila, known as a hardworking and high achieving student. The teacher unfairly gave her lower grades because she was a Muslim Ahiska Turk and even worse an Ahiska student with high aspirations. Jamila was extremely saddened and even considered dropping out. Mr. Orag talked with the teacher and the school administrators; however, the conversations did not change the situation. Mr. Orag and the rest of the family did not give up and motivated Jamila to keep studying as a proud Ahiska who would abandon neither her academic ambitions nor her cultural identity. Jamila was determined to *fight back* and worked harder to the point that no one could question her academic performance. She was made aware of the history of the Ahiska as glocal settlers, encouraged to use her literacy repertoires, and accept community supporters who stuck together. Jamila came to understand her challenge was a collective challenge for the Ahiska community. She enacted a glocal identity that would not allow defeat while it also mediated her academic success. As a result of Jamila's understandings, the support provided by her community, and her perseverance, she completed school successfully before the Orag family moved to the United States. Specifically, after Jamila was accepted to a prestigious medical school within 2 years in the United States, her personal story became a stock narrative for glocal adaptation and sticking together practices. All Ahiska parents and students narrated Jamila's story while talking about their experience with educational discrimination, specifically in entry interviews. Some did not even know Jamila and her family in Russia but heard about her story in the

United States. Jamila's story was recounted and coauthored incessantly. She became an archetype that offered students an idealized version of how to fight against and rise above unjust educational practices in a resettlement country while maintaining Ahiska cultural identity.

## Conclusion and Implications

There is a rubric of international literature on the education of refugee youth. While growing, educational research literature in the United States, the top refugee resettlement country, lacks studies with robust theoretical conceptualizations to understand refugees' complex experiences and cultural resources that they bring into urban schools (Bal & Artiles, 2007; McBrien, 2005). To our knowledge, this is the first study on Muslim refugee students from Russia in U.S. schools. Studies working with refugee children often take place in traditional public schools (Matthews, 2008; Roxas, 2011). The present study concurrently took place within interacting cultural worlds: refugee students' houses, communities, and an urban charter school where Ahiska youth participated and formed their identities within the interactional context of personal, sociocultural, and institutional factors. With our rather unique research setting and cultural-historical theory of identity, our study advances the literature by focusing on coconstruction and orchestration of academic identities. Our approach is instrumental in unpacking the multilayered formations of personal and social experiences of refugee students as participants of a dynamic refugee community and an urban school.

We found that the figured world of resettlement and its key artifacts (cultural narratives) are rich cultural-historical resources for Ahiska students as they innovatively and glocally configure their identities. As an experienced refugee group, Ahiska refugees have a dynamic figured world of resettlement that serves as a realm of interpretation and action for maintaining their cultural identities and adapting to different social contexts. They construct a cultural group identity signaled by multiple cultural and linguistic practices. Ahiska Turks selectively adapt to local sociocultural configurations by continuously mastering multiple literacies, supporting and defending each other and forming an active transnational social network. We do not claim the figured world unidirectionally determines the actions of Ahiska students and uniformly transfers "Ahiska culture" as a monolithic system from one generation to another. Rather, based on our study, we identified the Ahiska refugee community orchestrated engagement within multiple activity systems and time scales in a constant dialogue with their individual and group histories and the immediate circumstances in which the figured world and its artifacts were utilized and continuously revised.

Our findings shed light on one refugee community's resettlement effort and how the figured world of resettlement provided a context for forming refugee students' academic identities within urban schools. Schools ought to utilize refugee students' cultural-historical resources and foster their ever-evolving identities. By this way, urban educators can facilitate refugee students' learning of new cultural practices (e.g., literacies) while nurturing multifarious student identities and practices to support the development of rewarding interpersonal relationships with their students (Ladson-Billings, 2005; Milner, 2011). Such hybrid cultural practices would give students economic and social advantages in the age of globalism (Sánchez & Salazar, 2012; Suárez-Orozco, 2000). The reproduction of deficit-oriented paradigms and the lack of cultural responsiveness in urban schools are well documented (Paris, 2012; Wortham, 2006). Our study elucidates, however, a new face of a widely known phenomenon in a transnational context: Muslim Turk refugee students formed identities in/through glocal activities while interacting with a transnational religious movement and the dominant educational ideologies about diversity in a border state.

Our findings demonstrate the importance of the policy context. Academic programs and practices informed by assimilationist policy initiatives and English-only movement negatively influence refugees' identity formation; thus school behaviors and academic engagement (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006). Following our findings and current research, we suggest charter school districts and state educational agencies include, as an asset, the diverse experiences and resources of refugees by implementing culturally responsive multilingual education programs (e.g., transitional or enrichment) where refugee and other linguistic minority students receive support in native languages and target language within collaborative academic contexts. Moreover, education agencies should offer educators training to understand refugee students' complex experiences beyond cultural essentialism and deficit-oriented perspectives. Ladson-Billings (2005) warned against the deficit-oriented perspectives and essentialist conceptualizations of culture and stated a need for transformative culturally responsive pedagogy. In River School, a prototype of an emerging global Islamic educational institution, a critical culturally responsive pedagogy was not employed. Ahıska cultural practices were constructed as deficits rather than strengths by Turkish educators who were simultaneously forming their professional identities as U.S. teachers through the deficit-oriented cultural models they brought from Turkey and the assimilationist monolingual ideology dominating educational policy and practices in the border state. This finding contributes to refugee studies for capturing complexities and within-group diversity in refugee communities. It also begs for further empirical investigations in similar educational settings.

Approximately 1.6 billion Muslims live around the world within vastly diverse contexts. Islamic practices are as diverse as the practices of other religions and always situated in various cultural, historical, and spatial processes of power and privilege. Prior work on Muslim immigrants has tended to rely on explanations based on cultural mismatches between “universal and homogenous” Islamic values and practices of those communities and also “universal and homogenous” dominant Western culture in schools (Gibson, 1997). Such overgeneralizing foci may lead to a limited understanding about refugees’ social and personal transformations. Inseparable from Turkish language and ethnicity, Ahıska Turks use Islamic practices functionally in response to the dilemma between maintaining cultural cohesion and adapting to a resettlement country.

The theoretical orientation toward more comprehensive understandings of identities that are ever evolving and situated in cultural-historical milieu is receiving a growing interest but still largely absent in the education literature (Wortham, 2006). Holland and colleagues’ identity theory afforded us a dialogical and nonessentialist identity conceptualization. As active social agents, Ahıska students authored themselves by giving innovative and improvised responses to sociocultural positions, roles, and statuses offered to them in their new surroundings. Their improvisations emerged as they participated in multiple activities and communities of practice such as the Ahıska refugee community, an urban neighborhood, and a charter school run by a transnational Islamist movement in a border state. We conclude that Holland and colleagues’ identity theory provides educational researchers tools to understand the complex personal transformation of refugees and study how refugee students, as active agents, form themselves by innovatively orchestrating what they bring and what they find in U.S. schools.

Continued research efforts are needed to counter the pervasive essentialization of refugees’ and other nondominant cultural groups’ practices and identities. Among others, Said (2003) and Spivak (1988) demonstrated how *Oriental Others* and *Subaltern Subjects* are represented with deeply embedded hence, almost invisible, overly generalized paradigms in the West by social scientists—even by those who claimed “insider” positions to immigrant and refugee communities. Future studies of glocal adaptation among refugees should focus on localized events as well as complex interplay of contradictory and unequal national and global processes and distributed social agency (Hall, 2004). We believe culturally historically situated understandings of refugee communities can help educational researchers and teacher educators to disrupt narrow conceptualizations of cultural practices and resources of nondominant communities in the transnationalism age. This will challenge deficit-oriented ontologies and epistemologies and contribute

to complex conceptualizations of culturally relevant or culturally sustainable pedagogies whose goal is to support nondominant students “in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence” (Paris, 2012, p. 95). As Paris suggested, “it is important that we do not essentialize and are not overdeterministic in our linkages of language and other cultural practices to certain racial and ethnic groups in approaching what it is we are seeking to sustain” (p. 95). Heuristically constructed figured worlds of resettlement and practices and artifacts that refugee students bring challenge current theories and methodologies about identity, culture, learning, and development relying on static spatiotemporal contexts. Refugee communities provide learning opportunities where researchers and practitioners can capture diverse experiences and interests of nondominant communities. This effort can contribute to the transformation of the educational research literature currently riddled with major shortcomings (Ladson-Billings, 2005).

As presented in this article, glocal adaptation not only challenges the earlier mainstream formulation of social adaptation and identity formation as a one-way street (aliens to citizens) but also challenges the newer acculturation models that still locate social adaptation within the boundaries of nation-states (as being here or there; Warriner, 2007). Specifically, in an age of hyper communication, massive transportation, and myriad experiences of transnationalism, glocalism is a more applicable concept for social adaptation. Portes, Escobar, and Arana (2008) argued transnationalism is more relevant to the first generations but loses its relevance over time. Based on our findings, we argue transnationalism may continue to have relevance for the second or third generations, specifically in intergenerational refugee communities such as Ahıska Turks and Jewish diaspora in the United States (Arzubiaga et al., 2009; Hall, 2004; Rebhun & Ari, 2010). These communities reproduce their ethno-religious identities in relation to their transnational activities (e.g., multiple literacies and glocal adaptation) in what Anderson (2006) called imagined communities. Our findings on glocal adaptation strategies have a potential to reconceptualize multifaceted identities, experiences, strengths, and practices of newly arrived immigrant/refugee students and designing *culturally relevant resource pedagogies* in urban schools (Milner, 2011; Roxas, 2011). We recommend researchers develop culturally historically situated understandings of how hybrid identities are coconstructed by refugee students not as free-willing autonomous individuals but as social agents within the constraints and possibilities of multiple cultural worlds. Such investigations can inform practitioners to facilitate the formation and nurturance of inclusive and transformative learning communities. These learning communities foster refugee youth’s and families’ multiple identities and practices

and utilize those cultural and linguistic resources for *all* students and teachers in urban schools for individual and social transformations.

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### Author Biographies

**Aydin Bal** is an assistant professor in the Department of Rehabilitation Psychology and Special Education at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. His research interests include minority students experiencing behavioral difficulties, social-historical-spatial construction of difference, culturally responsive school-based interventions, and Cultural-Historical Activity theory.

**Angela E. Arzubigi** is associate professor in the School of Social Transformation at Arizona State University. Her research areas include immigration, childhood, and family adaptive processes.