Narratives of displacement, resilience and education: Experiences of African students with a refugee background in Australian tertiary education

Alfred Mupenzi

A thesis in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

April 2018
Dedication

To God the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit

The Trinity - Three in One!

That I have always believed and depend on!

The unknown yet known

The invisible yet visible

The unmoved mover

The uncaused causer

You have always been my hope, comforter, Father and Mother

Hebrews 11:1

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Bible - King James Version (KJV)
Acknowledgements

The completion of this research study, to a large extent, was due to the willingness of my research participants to share with me their past experiences regarding their displacement transit countries and resettlement. To all my 11 research participants, I am grateful for trusting me with your past.

The reward will be according to how you have lived; I am eternally grateful to the small handful of fantastic people in my life that exuded enthusiasm and interest in keeping me in school so that I could reach such level of education. I certainly know that in order to achieve great things, we all need someone to support us morally, someone to believe in us that we can make it. Specific to me, I needed someone to believe that I am worthy of having the freedom to aspire and worthy of having the support of significant others in my endeavours and these specific individuals deserve a mention in this acknowledgement.

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Paul says in 2Timothy 4:7, ‘For I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith’ my crown will not only be the crown of eternal life after death, but also a PhD cap and degree in this physical world which I believe will open more doors of opportunities for us as a family.

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Statement of Authentication

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

Alfred Mupenzi
April 2018
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<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AMEP</td>
<td>Adult Migrant English Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATAR</td>
<td>Australian Tertiary Admission Rank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CET</td>
<td>Critical Event Theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRT</td>
<td>Critical Race Theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEET</td>
<td>Department of Education Employment and Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIBP</td>
<td>Department of Immigration and Border Protection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRC</td>
<td>Democratic Republic of Congo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFA</td>
<td>Education For All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>English as Second Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GLRA</td>
<td>Great Lakes Region of Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HECS</td>
<td>Higher Education Contribution Scheme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEPPP</td>
<td>Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDP</td>
<td>Internally Displaced Persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IEC</td>
<td>Intensive English Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IHHS</td>
<td>Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IOM</td>
<td>International Organisation for Migration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCVER</td>
<td>National Centre for Vocational Education Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NESB</td>
<td>Non-English Speaking Background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Government Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>New South Wales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCT</td>
<td>Post-Colonial Theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STARTTS</td>
<td>Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STAT</td>
<td>Special Tertiary Admission Test</td>
</tr>
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</table>
TAFE : Technical and Further Education
UN : United Nations
UNESCO : United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNHCR: United Nations High Commission for Refugees
VET : Vocational Education and Training
WSU: Western Sydney University
Abstract

This study investigates educational resilience through the narratives of displaced African students from the Great Lakes region of Africa and surrounding countries, in Australian tertiary education. The study provides an insider’s understanding of events in order to capture the educational experiences of refugee students in general, and African refugee students in particular. The study uses life history narratives of participants to explore the factors that enable students with a refugee background to be educationally resilient in spite of challenging life circumstances. The Banyarwanda of Rwanda say ‘Ijoro ribara uwariraye’, meaning that ‘the events of the night can only be narrated by the one who stayed awake’. In other words, no one can tell the lived experience of refugees more accurately than refugees themselves. Unfortunately for a long time, narratives about lived experiences of refugees have been told in the third person because the majority of the studies that were carried out used methodologies that kept participants passive rather than active. Participants [students of refugee background] in this study are special humanitarian refugees who have been granted refugee status in Australia.

The research process in this study, recorded the participants’ life experiences in great detail and covered three main life phases: 1) prior to displacement; 2) in transit countries; and 3) after resettlement in Australia. As a result of the data collected, the researcher employed several strategies to create meaning out of the narratives. The first strategy was reporting the contextual life story of the participant in their own words. The second strategy was ‘collaboration’ with the participants whereby each participant agreed with the researcher on the content in his/her narrative. Critical events were further developed by the researcher using information from the transcribed data. The third strategy was tracing the educational life journeys of participants from the transcribed data with a particular emphasis on motivational factors that enabled them to continue with their education through primary, secondary and tertiary stages.

Studying African students with a refugee background demands that we take into account the historical, political and social factors that characterize the contemporary world. This study therefore took a critical and reflective look at the historical context that informs the current experiences of Africans in post-colonial Africa. In so doing, the researcher employed a conceptual framework bringing together three interrelated theories: post-colonial, critical race theory and critical event theory. Post-colonial theory was used to understand the root causes
of people’s forced displacement in post-colonial Africa following the wars to independence and the civil strife in the independent states of Africa. Critical race theory was relevant in interpreting inequalities associated with the different forms of injustices and conflicts that emerged as a result of imagined and real threats about shared space and limited resources. Critical event theory was used to ensure that participants’ stories were interpreted in a way that was relevant and meaningful to the research agenda.

In order to understand the participants’ educational experiences, the literature review covered three main elements: policies impacting on education for refugee background students, enabling and disabling factors in educational transition to tertiary education, and suggestions for the way forward to address the challenges that students with a refugee background face in their pursuit of tertiary education. Importantly, the study distinguishes between two main approaches to students with a refugee background found in the literature: deficit approaches that focus on what is lacking in what these students can and cannot do, and strength based approaches that appreciate the knowledge, attitudes, and diversity that these students bring with them to the host community. In this study the strength based approach took precedence as it acknowledged the educational resilience of the refugee background students who participated in the study.

The discussion of research findings forms a single narrative through four major themes: 1) lived experiences of students with a refugee background during forced displacement, in transit countries and resettlement in Australia; 2) tertiary education experiences for students with a refugee background; 3) enabling and disabling factors in transition to tertiary education; and 4) impact of race, racism and gender on education for students with a refugee background. Three crosscutting findings in all categories are highlighted: i) the challenges associated with African students with a refugee background being seen as an homogeneous group; ii) alienation of these students arising from being denied agency and identity when they enter class/lecture rooms where their history, background and knowledge is not reflected in the curriculum; and iii) their limited ability to speak and write English has been directly translated as an inability to integrate and acculturate in the host communities.

The structure of chapters is as follows: a general introduction which also covers the researcher’s narrative, historical background on the meaning and effects of forced displacement on students with a refugee background, review of literature on tertiary
education for refugee background students, theoretical lens, life history narrative methodology, life history narratives of research participants and their education profile, discussion of findings, reflections, conclusions and call to action.
Chapter One: Conceptualizing Refugee Education and Refugee Crisis

1.1 Introduction

The intention of this study has been to conceptualise the experiences of African students with a refugee background in Australian tertiary education. The African students included in this study originate from the Great Lakes region of Africa and surrounding countries. There are sufficient similarities in the events that have displaced people within the 11 countries covered in this research. Participants in this study therefore exemplify the educational challenges faced by students with a refugee background in general, and most specifically, those originating from Africa. Understanding narratives of students with a refugee background contributes to demystifying assumptions and stereotypes about what it means to be a refugee and the struggles students with a refugee background encounter in their endeavours to access tertiary education. In the Australian context, tertiary education refers to university education or post-secondary Technical and Further Education (TAFE). The concepts of refugee education and refugee crisis are interrelated as one affects the other. In this study, the ability to overcome the effects of being a refugee and pursue tertiary education irrespective of the difficulties involved is what I have referred to as educational resilience. In this chapter, I have presented an insider’s life history narrative in the context of the global challenges presented by the refugee crisis. I have also presented the research problem, research objectives, and limitations evident in previous research studies.

1.2 Education for African students from the Great Lakes region of Africa and surrounding countries

African students with a refugee background have endured many difficulties resulting from forced displacement from their home countries and in their transient journeys to Australia. Their difficult experiences are twofold: first they have experienced forced displacement from their home countries leading to loss of home and identity; secondly, in transit countries, African students with a refugee background have been exposed to further losses including the loss of their loved ones. Moreover, African students with a refugee background have lived in difficult circumstances within the refugee camps and, above all, they have had to manage traumatic experiences resulting from civil wars and conflicts. Historically, African students with a refugee background come from a continent that has been characterised by ‘inter-state conflicts, anti-colonial wars, ethnic conflicts, non-ethnic conflicts, and flights from
authoritarian and revolutionary regimes’ (Lischer, 2014, p. 223). Some have come from countries that have experienced protracted civil wars and genocide; Rwanda, Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, Sudan and Burundi among others have endured chronic violent conflicts and are still experiencing some levels of instability (Amnesty International, 2016/17). Importantly, in many ways, African students are sometimes misunderstood as a homogenous group and consequently their differences in culture, background and identity are often ignored. Uptin, Wright, and Harwood (2016, p. 599) therefore suggest that students with a refugee background should be viewed in the ‘light of their individual complex histories, not in a way that can re-traumatise the students but by hearing their stories of hope and resilience’.

It is important to emphasise that African students with a refugee background are not responsible for the catastrophes that have defined their life history but rather find themselves confronted with circumstances that are not of their own making. I investigated a number of challenges encountered by refugee background students during forced displacement, in transit countries and resettlement in Australia, however, more emphasis has been placed on understanding educational challenges and the ways in which this cohort of students have overcome them. In their case study report, Naidoo, Wilkinson, Langat, Adoniou, Cunneen and Bolger (2015, p. 9) highlight that ‘many arrivals in Australia from Africa face additional challenges ranging from language, pedagogical difference and cultural orientations’. In addition to classroom level challenges, the education system in Australia has not addressed the challenges associated with how these students are perceived. For instance, Uptin et al. (2016) states that the system ‘quickly relabel[s] young former refugees with deficit terms rather than opening up a discourse to include the intricate complexities of each refugee experience’ (p. 598). In other words, difficult life experiences emerging from being uprooted from their home countries do not only affect them in their transient journeys but follow them to the resettlement countries. In learning about their life experience narratives, host communities, schools and institutions interested in helping African students with a refugee background may ultimately be able to address their individual specific educational needs more effectively.

In addition to relabelling these students using a deficit model, most of the interventions in support of refugee background students continue to highlight a needs-based approach rather than appreciating and rewarding the resilience that these students have brought with them. It
should be kept in mind that by the time refugee background students become visible at tertiary education and training institutions in Australia, they will have endured many challenges. This calls for a shift in thinking from a deficit model to a strength based model. This is because students with a refugee background, when given the opportunity, ‘can contribute to, as well as benefit from, the further development of a high quality socially inclusive university system’ (Terry, Naylor, Nguyen, & Rizzo, 2016, p. 7). Current educational researchers reject ‘the focus on “deficit” models for refugee background students which do not acknowledge the social and cultural capital that these students carry with them’ (Terry et al., 2016, p. 14).

When African students with a refugee background experience successful engagement and transition into education and learning, it translates into meaningful resettlement or good settlement (O’Sullivan & Olliff, 2006). In Australian humanitarian policy, meaningful resettlement is described in terms of settling well, that is, ‘living comfortably’ (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2011, p. 219) and this can be measured against a set of indicators of integration including their opportunities to access education and training (Ager & Strang, 2008). Access to education and training in this case becomes a means to develop self-esteem and confidence and above all have opportunities for employment and a better living standard (Onsando & Billett, 2009). The present study set out to discover factors that enable African students with a refugee background to pursue tertiary education amidst life and challenging circumstances in Australia. In so doing, I have employed a life history narrative methodology in order to provide a platform for the participants’ voices.

In highlighting the bias or gap in previous studies (Brough, Gorman, Ramirez, & Westoby, 2003; Harris, Marlowe & Nyuon, 2015; Windle & Miller, 2013) I have discussed enabling and disabling factors for students with a refugee background from an insider’s perspective. The next section presents an insider’s life history narrative, to illustrate the relationship between intricate life experiences and educational resilience.

1.3 An insider’s view

Using an insider’s view in addition to research participants’ life history narratives, I argue that it is fallacious to group African students with a refugee background as a homogenous group. This is because each individual student has experienced intricate complexities and present diversity in lived experiences and have different levels of needs, educational desires,
capacities and abilities. My own experience as a former refugee exemplifies the diverse and complex narratives that impact on educational trajectories. The majority of my research participants can identify with aspects of my story and together we have co-constructed narratives that speak to the world about the particulars of our own experiences, the injustices we have suffered and the impacts of ongoing mass displacements in the continent of Africa. In this study, students of refugee background including myself, as the researcher, have used stories to talk about our own journeys and how we have sometimes been shaped by each other’s perceptions, assumptions, and expectations, and how these are intimately tied to the ways in which African refugees are able to negotiate their place in the host communities.

I grew up as a child in double jeopardy as a refugee and an orphan. The double jeopardy began when my grandparents and parents were displaced from Rwanda in 1962 becoming refugees in Uganda until 1994. I lost my father before I was born in 1978 to the uncertainties that were prevailing in Uganda and I lost my mother in 1992 to HIV/AIDS. I was born into, and spent my childhood and adolescent years as a refugee in Kyangwali refugee camp in Uganda. I have also lived part of my adult life in Uganda in the shadow of Rwandan refugees. My grandparents and parents were among the Rwandans who fled for their lives in 1962 following ‘the 1959-1962 revolts in Rwanda which overthrew the last King of Rwanda, King Kigeri V (Jean-Baptiste Ndahindurwa), the younger brother of King Mutara III’ (Peter & Kibalama, 2006, p. 15). The king was forced into exile, first to Uganda and later to the United States of America where he died recently in 2016.

Rwanda is my family's country of origin but is also the country of origin for some of my research participants. Rwanda becomes the first country in the Great Lakes region of Africa (GLRA) to experience the refugee crisis in the late 1950s. The Banyarwanda (people of Rwanda) are spread over the Great Lakes region, which is commonly accepted to include Burundi (Lake Tanganyika), Rwanda (Lake Kivu), Uganda (Lakes Victoria, Edward and Mobutu), Tanzania (Lakes Tanganyika and Victoria) and Zaire (Lakes Mobutu, Edward, Kivu and Tanganyika) (Adisa, 1996).

In Rwanda, ethnic conflict has been a recurrent theme and the major cause of forced displacements. For instance, ethnic conflicts in 1959 and early 1960s resulted in ‘a sequence of events that led to the overthrow of the monarchy and the killings of Tutsi by Hutu in 1963 and 1973’ (Lemarchand, 1994, p. 589). Ethnic conflicts in Rwanda also reinforced the
political identities of Hutu, Tutsi and Twa, conflictual identities which were created by aspects of colonialism (Mamdani, 2001). As a result of the ethnic conflicts in Rwanda, the majority of the Tutsi fled for their lives to different neighbouring countries\(^1\), that is, to Zaire, Burundi, Tanzania and Uganda. My grandparents and parents were among those who went to Uganda. In Uganda, they first settled in Rukiga County refugee transit camp in Western Uganda, after which they were transferred to Tooro camp. A few years later they were transferred to Kyangwali refugee settlement located in mid-western Uganda where they settled for over 30 years from 1964 to 1995. I was born and raised a refugee until I was seventeen years old.

1.3.1 Education in the refugee camp

As a child between the ages of 7-12 years, I never knew I was a refugee, as the refugee camp we lived in had become our home. The refugee camp had a population of close to seventy thousand people and despite the huge population, we had only three primary schools including: Kasonga, Kyebitaka and Kinakitaka. I went to Kasonga primary school where I finished primary seven (P.7) in 1991. The education system in Uganda has seven years of primary divided into lower primary (P.1 to P.3) and upper primary (P.4 to P.7), and six years of secondary education also divided into two levels: ordinary secondary (S.1 to S.4) and advanced secondary (S.5 to S.6). At the University level, most degree courses take three to five years. At our primary school, more than 80% of our teachers were Rwandans, people with whom we lived and saw as our elders. Therefore, there was no stigma or abusive experiences at school simply because we shared a common identity. This favourable learning environment, however, might have been achieved at the expense of quality education since our teachers were semi-qualified compared to the Ugandan teachers who were favoured by the system as they were professionally trained.

After completing my primary school education, I was among the four fortunate children in the refugee camp that passed the Hoima Diocese seminary entry examinations set by the Board (HDSEB). As a consequence, I was admitted into the Catholic seminary to train as a future Catholic diocesan priest. This training opened doors for my education. The school I

attended for my secondary education, St. John Bosco’s seminary, was one of the best in the region. It had most of the basic facilities needed for a secondary school and even at the national level, it always emerged among the best in terms of academic performance.

For students within Kyangwali refugee camp, getting a chance to enter secondary education was a privilege, not a right, and it raised the hopes and aspirations of family members in terms of improved standards of living. The whole family would give up all they had by selling small animals, seasonal harvests, and anything else in order to keep their children in school. Families with children who had finished at least lower secondary/ordinary level (senior one to four) were afforded improved standards of living because their children were employed and were able to be financially supportive.

In the refugee camp, we used to celebrate World Refugee Day on the 20th of June each year. On the day, students from all levels would prepare entertainment including songs, poems and stories. These items of entertainment communicated the hardships that our parents and grandparents went through in leaving their home country. I remember seeing most of the older people becoming emotional and crying because it rekindled their past memories. The day was also a civic education day, where several political talks were given and words of encouragement and hope were communicated by the local leaders and elders to the refugees.

The other factor that reminded Rwandan refugees in Uganda of their identity was having family names in our ethnic language, Kinyarwanda. (Kinyarwanda is the language of the Hutu, Twa and the Tutsi of Rwanda. The people are known as the Bahutu, the Batutsi and the Batwa, or collectively as the Banyarwanda). In order to progress in education, refugee children from my generation avoided being named in Kinyarwanda, as this name revealed their identity as Rwandan refugees and exposed them to ethnic discrimination. This discouraged many Rwandan refugees from excelling academically because it caused them more trouble rather than giving them an educational advantage. Consequently, for the refugees in Kyangwali refugee camp, it was normal to finish primary school and then stay at home, become a farmer, a petty trader, or even a hooligan. This was because secondary schools were located far away and it was too expensive for most parents to afford. The available secondary schools were clustered in the Hoima district headquarters which was about 65km away from the refugee camp. The few available public schools for the district were very competitive because they were government subsidised with moderate facilities.
The available private schools were also expensive and only haphazardly responded to the crisis of inadequate public secondary schools. Moreover, while private schools existed, they were not competitive enough to provide quality education. Private investment in school education was a new concept and the investors were in the early stages of trying it out—schools were built in wooden classrooms and sometimes held mobile classes under the shades of trees.

1.3.2. Identity crisis and education

Regardless of the chances we had to access secondary education, we were always reminded by local students that we were refugees. I personally felt the weight of being a refugee when I started secondary education. Despite the fact that we were training to be priests in a Catholic church, local children still consistently identified us as refugees. In fact, no matter how brilliant we were, they always had to bully us and remind us of our status in a demeaning way. We therefore had to be persistent and resilient in order to bear with the abuses that would come our way. Even the school leadership would do little to discourage the abuse, especially when it was being done to a refugee student.

Another form of abuse that called for one to be resilient was when Ugandan students would make reference to refugee students using a demeaning prefix of ‘ka’ which reduces something in size. For instance, ‘Kanyarwanda’ would mean ‘small Rwandan’ as opposed to ‘Umunyarwanda’ using the prefix ‘Umu’ which refers to a person. We therefore lived a life that was hopeless and full of resentment. Indeed, from our very first experiences in primary education, as refugee students, we were always vulnerable and dependent. I remember vividly the books and pens we used and the stationery that they gave us at primary school, which had a label which read in part ‘Property of the Government of the Republic of Uganda. Not for sale’. At the beginning of each academic term, we all lined up to get stationery since most of our parents couldn’t afford to buy scholastic materials. This stationery was further subsidised by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR).

In addition to a lack of education, most of the families did not have enough food. We had portions of land that were so over cultivated they became infertile, and disasters like drought and floods worsened the situation. Ultimately, it is a huge challenge to be a refugee no matter where, no matter at what age, and no matter at what time because you are never fully accepted.
1.3.3 The double jeopardy of growing up a refugee and an orphan

My mother, Cyogamata Veneranda, was the fifth child of my grandmother’s eleven children. As a refugee child, she became the breadwinner for her family at a tender age. My mother went to Kampala, the Capital city of Uganda, to find a job after her primary school. (At that time in Uganda, children started primary schooling when they were 7 years old; I presume my mother finished primary seven when she was 14 years.) In the process of searching for a job in Kampala, she met my father, also a Rwandan refugee, who had become successful in his education and was an auditor in the public and private institutions of Uganda. Due to unpredictable life circumstances linked to the political governance of Uganda during the 1970s, my father disappeared in 1978 and no one knew of his whereabouts. During those days, it was normal to hear that someone had disappeared and no one would question it. A mere question about a given problem meant that you were questioning the authority of the government and sometimes, you would face trouble in the process. I did not only lose my father in this mysterious way but I subsequently lost my mother in 1992 to the HIV/AIDS pandemic which claimed so many lives at the time. This is when the double jeopardy of my growing up as a refugee and an orphan began.

As my mother could not manage to take care of me and go to work as well (working for her meant doing small businesses in the local markets because she was not educated to get a white collar job), she ended up taking me to the refugee camp ‘Kyangwali’ at the age of three to stay with my uncles, aunties, and cousins at my grandmother’s house. In the process I became a refugee child and went to school in the refugee camp. I remember that to attend school, we had to make some school contribution—disguised as school fees of 175 Ugandan shillings—buy school uniforms and provide some tools for cleaning the school compound like hoes, slashes and pangas (as opposed to what Australians would use as lawn mowers, brush-cutters or edge trimmers). All these cost money and some parents could not afford them as the ‘hidden costs to fee free schooling made it difficult for some families to send children to school’ (Williams, Abbott, & Mupenzi, 2015). At my grandmother’s house we were ten children and sometimes even more. What this meant was that it was ‘survival of the fittest’ because there was not enough to eat and even the little contributions for school costs were hard to find. Each child thus had to work hard to assist financially. I vividly remember starting to do petty trading in jack fruit, and selling seasonal harvests like beans and maize flour. That is how I managed to attend school. My grandmother was a mother of 11 children.
and although most of them (like my mother), had grown up and left the camp to go to the city to fend for themselves, those who had children and could not manage to take care of them in the cities, brought them back to my grandmother. My grandmother was separated from my grandfather so she was the sole supporter.

1.3.4 Resilience in my cultural perspective

From my perspective, reading or hearing the African proverbs in different African cultures says a great deal about the subject of resilience. In my culture, for example, (Kinyarwanda) of Rwanda, there are proverbs such as ‘Ubuze uko agira agwa neza’ which is translated to mean ‘when faced with given situations you can do nothing about, it humbles you’; ‘Kugera kure siko gupfa’ which means ‘facing adversities to the extreme does not kill you’; ‘Sakindi izaba ibyara ikindi’ meaning ‘the unknown will provide a working solution’ and ‘Ibyiza birimbere’ meaning ‘the best is yet to come’. These proverbs and many others, have taught us and reminded us, as Rwandans, to remain resilient when faced with adversity.

As a refugee child, I always wished to be successful in life. The major goal I aspired to was to further my education to the highest level possible. The rationale behind my desire was that in Africa in general, and the Great Lakes region of Africa in particular, you are defined by the level of education you have acquired. This might also be true for the rest of the world but in the context of this study and focusing on the African rationale, the more credentials you have the more respect you gain among local and national audiences. Opportunities for employment tend to be easier because you have broken the structural restrictions for working in both public and private enterprises.

As a refugee child you tend to lose self-esteem and confidence and your aspirations are influenced by the desire to regain the lost esteem and confidence. I have aspired in my life to have a family that values togetherness, love and care for each other. This too is influenced to a great extent by the fact that once an orphan you are always at the mercy of charities and the major goal while growing up is to try and change your poor history. The lesson I have learnt from setting goals and having educational aspirations is that the best way to do it is to improve your situation through higher education. Today, I aspire to gain my doctorate so that I am able to impart knowledge about the adversities that refugees encounter. I do this through both my personal experiences and the narratives of my research participants. I am particularly
looking forward to using the research skills I have acquired in order to contribute to the body of knowledge about the experiences of refugee background students.

What confronts a child who is born in such circumstances is definitely a tragedy and that is why research in the area of displacement, education and resilience is important to inform the world that what is happening to displaced people is a critical issue that needs to be addressed by policy makers. Understanding African students with a refugee background therefore requires creating a space for them to tell their life history narratives. This greater insight can in turn become the basis for establishing the appropriate support required for easier acculturation in host communities. In the next section of this introductory chapter, I turn from the story of an individual to the broader story of the refugee crisis that underpins the narratives of displacement of my participants and myself.

1.4. Refugee crisis

In this section the term ‘refugee crisis’ has been used to refer to the historical developments and global and country specific events that lead people to flee their home countries in search of security. I have discussed the definition of a refugee, factors leading to the unprecedented movement of people across borders, and the different initiatives that have been developed in response to the problem. The terms used to describe people who have left their homes not by choice are ‘refugees, asylum seekers and displaced people’ (Adams & Kirova, 2006b, p. 16). A refugee is pushed out of his or her country by political concerns (Bartlett & Ghaffar, 2013, p. 3) and by definition, refugees are people who no longer enjoy the protection of their state because that state will not or cannot protect them (UNHCR, 2011). They are displaced and forced to migrate because of armed conflict, persecution, violence and grave human rights abuses.

Most authors differentiate between displaced persons to determine who is a refugee and an asylum seeker. For example, refugees are understood as people who have been determined by the UNHCR and host government—in this case Australia—as meeting the criteria for refugee status as set out in the refugee convention. The refugee definition contained in the 1951 Convention forms the core of the eligibility criteria for refugee status. Pursuant to Article 1A (2) of the 1951 Convention, it states the term ‘refugee’ shall apply to:

a person who… owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion,
outside the country of nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or unwilling to return to it. (UNHCR, 2011, p. 80)

Asylum seekers are a different category of displaced people. UNHCR defines an asylum seeker as ‘an individual who has sought international protection and whose claim for refugee status has not yet been determined’ (UNHCR, 2009, p.23). According to Amnesty International Australia (2008, p.1) ‘not all asylum seekers will be determined to be refugees’. It is imperative to note that sometimes the terms refugees, asylum seekers, and other displaced persons are colloquially or interchangeably used to mean refugees (RCOA, 2017). Such usage is not strictly correct. The interchangeable usage of the term ‘asylum seeker’ with ‘refugee’ is wrong because the two words mean something different under international humanitarian law. In this study I limited my participants to those students who have already acquired the status of ‘refugee’ and are enrolled or participating in Australian tertiary education.

The 1951 convention relating to the status of refugees is the key legal document in defining who is a refugee, the rights of refugees, and the legal obligations of states towards them (Zimmermann, 2011). In 1951, the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration (ICEM) included an additional broad category to the above definition and defined a refugee as ‘any person who has been the victim of a war or a disaster which has seriously disadvantaged his condition of living’ (Demirdjian, 2012, p. 5). In 1969, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) Convention governing specific aspects of the refugee problem in Africa, Article 1(2) added another dimension to the definition of the term refugee:

The term ‘refugee’ shall also apply to every person who, owing to external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing public order in either part or the whole of his country of origin or nationality, is compelled to leave his place of habitual residence in order to seek refuge in another place outside his country of origin or nationality.

Irrespective of the definitions given, what is clear is that forced departure from a home country is distinguished from other forms of migration which may result from differential population or economic pressure (Zimmermann, 2011). Secondly, having crossed an international border denotes the difference between a refugee and a person displaced—usually temporarily—within his own country (an internal refugee) (Lischer, 2014). This study focussed specifically on refugee background students who arrived in Australia on special
humanitarian visas. These students arrived in Australia already categorised as humanitarian refugees with a permanent residence status in Australia (Section 1.11.2 on definition of resettlement p.21 this chapter).

1.4.1 Movements across borders

People’s movements across borders of their own countries are viewed in two ways: those who move freely in search of better opportunities in terms of employment and sometimes educational opportunities (migrants), and people who are forced out of their own country because of war, genocide and increased human rights abuses (refugees). This study has focused the discussion on people who have been forced to flee—refugees. The global community, mostly through the UNHCR, acknowledges two different approaches nation states use in welcoming refugees. In developing nations, they use the principle of ‘temporary rights to remain’ on the basis that groups of forced migrants have a prima facie\(^2\) claim to being in a refugee-like situation (Gallagher, 1989, p. 595). Developing countries therefore put an emphasis on fundraising to provide supplies like food, tents, water, basic health facilities and basic education to refugees in their designated refugee camps. By contrast, in developed nations, the emphasis remains on dealing with refugees on a case by case basis whereby applications for refugee status are approved individually and the accepted refugee usually acquires a permanent right to remain (Gallagher, 1989). The process of resettlement to developed countries takes a long time and is facilitated by two major parties: UNHCR on one hand and the potential recipient country on the other.

Despite the efforts and the approaches used by the two different sectors (developing and developed nations), there remains massive build-ups of refugee populations across different nation states imposing a huge challenge (Gibney, 2010). This results from the fact that the two approaches do not address the issues that cause flight or forced displacement (Gallagher, 1989). In other words, accommodation of the bulk of the refugee crisis—mostly in the developing world—has concentrated on temporary solutions to the problem. Instead of addressing the root causes of war and conflicts in source countries, the focus has been and is still directed towards providing temporary shelter in a recognised location designated as a refugee camp. According to Walker and Maxwell (2014, p. 6), the demand for supporting people who are in a refugee like situation especially in developing countries is huge and to

\(^2\) Prima facie means based on the first impression; accepted as correct until proved otherwise
manage it usually requires ‘a multilateral action bringing together humanitarian, political, and security interventions yet many governments, rich and poor alike, do not share this view and the refugee crisis continues to be a challenge to humanity across the globe’.

The crisis emerges because of a combination of many factors. This includes the decision by refugees to settle in the first country of temporary settlement because of security challenges, or the decision continue to a different country. The three major solutions by UNHCR (repatriation, integration, and resettlement) result progressively in some very small numbers being resettled in developed countries while the majority of the refugees are usually left to live in designated places identified by temporary settlement countries, most often in the remotest area of the country and these places are established as refugee camps (Loescher, 2003). Particularly in Africa, in the past few decades, we have witnessed few voluntary repatriations taking place in countries like Rwanda (1994/5) and Sierra Leone (2008). According to Gibney (2010, p. 2), ‘the larger and more obvious point is that countries that are the most poorly equipped to handle refugee flows due to their own economic security are the same countries that have been forced to provide the lion’s share of refugee settlement’.

The huge gap in the willingness to host refugees between the developed world and the developing countries results from a number of factors. First and foremost, in the post Second World War period, Europe experienced massive numbers of displaced people. They learnt lessons ahead of Africa and Asia on the burden that results from hosting big numbers of refugees (Adisa, 1996). During the period between 1930 to 1950, several initiatives were started in response to the cumulative numbers of refugees resulting from major world wars. Most of the initiatives were implemented in a consortium of different governments who started various organisations (Adisa, 1996). However, all initiatives became expensive for participating states. Some were disbanded and others formed until the refugee issue became a global problem to be contained by one statutory body, the United Nations. Historians of this period (Adisa, 1996; Gibney, 2010; Loescher & Scanlan, 1986; Ogata, 1995) trace how the League of Nations—that operated in the early 1930s—lost its popularity because of its failure to resolve the Ethiopian and Manchurian crises. Subsequently it was replaced by United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency (UNRRA) in 1945 with support from USA, Britain, France and Russia and aimed to promote and oversee the repatriation of displaced people in Eastern and Central Europe (Adisa, 1996). The UNRRA was then replaced by the International Refugee Organisation (IRO) which focused on resettling the remaining refugees
and those displaced by the war. Finally, in 1950, we witnessed the establishment of the Office of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) which intended to expand coverage beyond Europe and to other parts of the world that were experiencing refugee crises during decolonisation and wars for independence (Loescher & Scanlan, 1986).

Historical evidence reveals how the global movement of refugees has overwhelmed the United Nations Humanitarian Program under UNHCR which has had to work not only ‘with governments but also with opposition groups, guerrilla forces and contending political factions’ (Adisa, 1996, p. 79). The international community, especially the United Nations, is challenged with the need to evaluate current circumstances and revise, strengthen and develop innovative strategies to address the causes of refugee movements, to control the numbers involved and develop strategies to cope with the long- and short-term effects of these movements (Newman & Van Selm, 2003). The case of the Great Lakes region of Africa in this study (Chapter two) is an appropriate departure point because it dramatizes vividly the multidimensional nature of the tasks confronting international society in this respect and the need for urgent solutions.

1.4.2 The impact of the refugee crisis on education

In the post-world-war period, the world is facing challenges associated with the stigmatisation and negative perception of refugees and their experiences. By stigmatisation, I mean the way refugees have been identified as a burden on the global community, in addition to the way they have been treated and the impact this has had on their identity and agency. One recent example is the September 11, 2001 experience which has worsened ‘the perceptions about refugees and increased deep suspicion, and even fear, of refugees’ (Frelick 2007, p.37)

Australian attitudes have been shaped by other factors such as boat arrivals and off-shore detention policies by successive governments that have influenced public opinion. From these observations, a number of conclusions can be drawn about current assumptions and stereotypes about refugees and how these have impacted on education for students with a refugee background.

In the age of migration, ‘the newcomer in western countries has often been categorised as undeserving, and depending on the factors at play, asylum seekers may be constructed as the
migrants least deserving of state support’ (Kissoon, 2015, p. 12). As such, education for refugee background students remains at stake because the perceptions, assumptions and stereotypes that host communities hold affects their integration and acculturation not only in host communities but in schools and tertiary institutions.

In the wake of the terrorist attacks in the United States for example, and in the global war against terrorism after 11 September 2001, ‘refugee movements have increasingly come to be seen as an issue of instability. Refugees are viewed not only as people in need of protection and assistance but also as potential threats to national security and even as a potential source of armed terror’ (Loescher, 2003, p. 31). In such cases, students with a refugee background become victims of circumstances and their education is hampered because of the way they are perceived in the general refugee community.

Different governments have become sensitive to hosting refugees and asylum seekers for fear of security matters inside their borders. According to Dowtry and Loesher ‘these irregular migrants [are viewed] as something akin to human missiles, penetrating national defences (borders) and attacking state sovereignty and security, the domestic economy and social cohesion’ (1996, p.43).

In developing countries—which actually host greater numbers—refugees are frequently associated with problems such as crime, banditry, prostitution, alcoholism, and drugs. ‘In many instances, host countries do not have the capacity or willingness to maintain law and order in the remote areas where the largest numbers of refugees are often to be found’ (Newman & Van Sel, 2003, p. 35). Loescher highlights that, ‘refugees become the scapegoat for many of the host country’s ills, and governments and opposition groups are prone to use the refugees’ presence to encourage nationalistic and xenophobic sentiments’ (Loescher, 2003, p. 35). In some cases, host states have themselves armed or helped to arm refugee fighting groups as a weapon against the country of origin, but then found that they were unable to control the consequences of having done so. This occurred in the Great Lakes region of Africa particularly with Uganda supporting Rwandan refugees, resulting in the destabilization of the entire region in the late 1990s.

Education for refugee background students is not only hampered in home countries but also in transit and resettlement countries. Although to different degrees, in their home country, displaced students are interrupted in their education; in transit countries, they are confined
within refugee camps in remote areas where education facilities are minimal and security is an issue. Upon resettlement in a permanent host country, refugee background students are faced with another level of challenges associated with language, pedagogical differences and cultural orientations—challenges which overshadow the resilience that has characterised their survival (Naidoo et al., 2015). The current perceptions, assumptions and stereotypes about refugees in general can be seen as a recent development. Throughout the historical development of responses to refugee crises, organisations and international instruments have been established in good faith to reduce the effects and causes of the increasing scale of refugees and corresponding problems. In this study, while I acknowledge that the displacements of populations have affected every part of the human world, I chose to focus on educational resilience for African students with a refugee background in Australian tertiary education.

1.5 Content scope of the study

The content scope of this study is the issue of access and participation to tertiary education for students with a refugee background in Australia. Numerous scholars (Earnest, Joyce, de Mori, & Silvagni, 2010; Matthews, 2008; Naidoo et al., 2015; Windle & Miller, 2013), have focused on compulsory schooling and access to primary and transition to secondary education for students with a refugee background, but little attention has been given to access and completion of tertiary education by this cohort of students.

Ideally, education policy and practice calls for equity and equal access to tertiary education for students from all kinds of background (Onsando & Billett, 2009). Yet the cohorts of adult refugee migrants, who enter the education sector with previously interrupted schooling, are finding it hard to access and complete tertiary education. This study is aimed at focusing on the challenges associated with access to tertiary education for refugee background students. Those refugees (who are seeking asylum and living in the community in Australia) have been excluded from this thesis. Two categories of refugee background students were involved in this study: those who arrived when they were under 18 years, enrolled and progressed through the Australian education system to tertiary level; and those who arrived in Australia over 18 years of age and began their educational pathways by doing Vocation Education and Training (VET) programs at TAFE and later progressed to University education. Narratives of these participants in this study provide some insights into how government initiatives and
family support assist in building educational resilience for tertiary study and better understanding of the factors that increase educational resilience and success.
1.6 Situation analysis

This study is premised on the concept of resilience and the educational aspirations demonstrated by refugee background students to stay in school and finish tertiary education. International agencies like the UNHCR have shown that ‘the chances of a refugee completing secondary school are slim and the chances of reaching university indicate a low probability because of the challenges associated with forced displacement’ (Pflanz, 2016, p. 1). Only one in every 100 of the world’s refugees goes on to tertiary education (UNHCR, 2016). The difficulties involved in completing tertiary education by refugee background students include the lack of a student identity. Additionally, refugee background students might lack the ability to match the required skills, knowledge and demands of being a student: ‘The knowledge of how to “be a student”, and indeed look like one, entails many skills, behaviours, formative experiences and a great deal of knowledge’ (Miller, Mitchell, & Brown, 2005, p. 25). As such, it is likely that African students with a refugee background:

will leave school early, will never participate fully in society or in the decision-making processes of government, and that they will neither enjoy the benefits of good health, nor experience the upward mobility needed as adults to make them full contributors and partners in shaping and participating in the larger society. (Biscoe & Ross, 1989, p.586)

In resettlement countries like Australia, refugee background students are exposed to several other challenges such as placement into classrooms that are age appropriate rather than appropriate to their academic level. and they face social isolation, bullying, stress and academic failure (Ferfolja, Vickers, McCarthy, Naidoo, & Brace, 2011). Despite the many challenges, some refugee background students have displayed remarkable resilience and capacity to learn and eventually some of these students become strong survivors. They go to school every day, they persist, and they never give up. They work very hard, they value education highly and some refugee background students are able to progress to university and higher education and build a strong career pathway (Ferfolja et al., 2011).

This study includes examples of African students with a refugee background who are focused, resilient and looking forward to challenging the assumptions that group them into a single category. This research has allowed individuals to tell their unique stories in order to challenge the homogenous stereotypes that are applied to African refugee background students.
1.7 Research problem

Education remains a neglected feature of humanitarian intervention: ‘less than 2% of all humanitarian aid is directed at education and humanitarian appeals for education are consistently underfunded’ (United Nations Education, 2015, p. 5). Yet the most valuable resource refugee background students have is their education. This is because in the process of forced displacement from home country, through transit countries to resettlement in Australia, most refugees arrive with nothing materially but with the knowledge acquired in school and through other life experiences. Education exposes refugee background students to a host country’s culture and employment opportunities. In this study, student life history narratives challenge negative assumptions and deficit stereotypes, instead presenting these students as survivors who are educationally resilient. Achieving entry into tertiary education and graduating with different professional careers, as shown in the life history narratives in this study, serves as an indicator of their resilience and demonstrates that education for refugee background students acts as a liberating force and opens doors of opportunities.

1.8 Research objectives

The main objective for this study was to identify factors that have enabled students with a refugee background to be educationally resilient amidst life challenging circumstances. The three associated objectives were:

a) To highlight the educational lived experiences of refugee background students prior to displacement and resettlement in Australia,

b) To identify factors that enable or hinder transition to tertiary education for African students with a refugee background,

c) To examine the impact of resettlement in Australia on education pathways for African students with a refugee background.

1.9 Limitations in previous research

Some research studies (Khawaja, White, Schweitzer, & Greenslade, 2008; Shakespeare-Finch & Wickham, 2010) have not completely addressed the diverse nature of lived experiences for African students with a refugee background. Southern Sudanese arrivals from Africa, for example, have tended to represent the whole of Africa. This has effectively portrayed African
students with a refugee background in Australia as a homogeneous group. This gap in the scholarship may be a result of research attention concentrating on this particular group based on the political debates and hyperbolic media messaging. Southern Sudan was the third largest African birthplace group in Australia in 2009 (Hugo, 2009) and according to the RCOA (2017)

the fastest-growing refugee population in Australia, was spurred by the crisis in South Sudan. This group grew by 64% during the second half of 2016 from 854,100 to over 1.4 million, the majority of whom were children. Indeed, children made up an astonishing 51% of the world’s refugees in 2016 (p. 1).

Statistics reveal that progressively, entrants from Africa doubled from 2801 to 5616 in the years 2003–2004; and to 7100 African entrants in the years 2005–2006. Statistics from the Australian government indicate that in 2005–2006 the largest source countries were: Sudan: 3762; Liberia: 888; Burundi: 740 and Sierra Leone: 460 (Matthews, 2008). Today, there exists a vast unmet need for refugee resettlement from Africa and most importantly, there is a need for communities to engage in the sponsorship of refugees. In fact, as a result of this unmet need, resettlement and community sponsorship ‘were two of the key themes discussed when representatives of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), governments and NGOs from resettlement states and other inter-governmental bodies gathered in Geneva for the 2017 Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement (ATCR)’ (RCOA, 2017, p.1).

Other limitations in previous studies include:

- Failure to appreciate the life histories that have made African students with a refugee background who they are in their current condition. This is rooted in the ways these students have been grouped as people with the same needs, educational desires, capacities and abilities (Uptin et al., 2016).

- Students with a refugee background have not been given space to speak. This results from using a deficit model lens to interpret educational underachievement for refugee background students based on social status attributes like being victims, suffering trauma and having language challenges (Naidoo et al., 2015; Uptin et al., 2016).

- Resilience among refugee background students has been a concept aptly used by psychologists, while educationalists have been slow to take steps towards understanding educational resilience among refugee background students who access and complete tertiary education. This also results from the fact that some research studies have over
concentrated on the dominant social meanings portrayed by the media and political
debates. According to Uptin et al. (2016), ‘educators and researchers are running the risk
of reducing their own capacity to explore other ways of understanding former refugee
youths and miss out on more productive ways of conceptualizing the refugee experience’
(p. 600).

1.10 Methodology and theoretical framework

This study has used life history narrative methodology in order to provide the holistic
trajectory of displacement and education for the research participants and to detail the
complexities of their individual experiences. Their narratives cover prior life experiences
during displacement, in transit countries, and life in the resettlement country. This was done
to address the gaps in the existing literature because much of the research that has been done
previously has focused on the challenges these students face in isolation by focusing on
resettlement experiences and positioning these students in a deficit position (Brough et al.,
2003; Hutchinson & Dorsett, 2012). Refugee background students’ past experiences are not
acknowledged and their future aspirations are crippled by labelling them as victims and
traumatised people without agency or history (O’Connor, 2015). In this study, each individual
participant was given space and a platform to voice their life history, educational experiences
and aspirations, including the researcher who has included his own insider life history. In this
study the intention has been to treat the participants as intimate knowers of their experiences
who, by participating, could become more aware of their own agency and personal strengths
or resilience. Furthermore, through this study participants have begun to produce counter-
narratives to the dominant meta-narratives about students of refugee backgrounds.

The experiences of students with a refugee background in their countries of origin have been
unpacked using post-colonial theory and the challenges of discrimination have been
addressed using critical race theory. Postcolonial theory assists me to examine the histories
and legacies of colonialism that have contributed to the refugee crises and displacements that
have impacted on the people from the Great Lakes region of Africa and surrounding
countries. Critical race theory highlights the challenges of race and racism and has been used
in this study to consider educational exclusions that have been experienced by participants.
Finally, critical event theory was used to identify turning points in participants’ life history
narratives. Personal narratives formed a large section of transcribed data that was generated
during the interviews. In chapter six these narratives are presented using critical events to
capture the complexity of their stories and compress the narratives without losing their meaning. These life history narratives formed the raw data for analysis. Conclusions and recommendations were also drawn from the participants’ life history narratives. Therefore, the theoretical framework incorporating these three interrelated theories helps to make meaning through life history narrative methodology.

1.11 Operational definition of terms

For the purposes of consistency and clarification, I provide definitions of several terms that are used throughout the study:

1.11.1 Displacement

In this study, displaced persons have been defined as, ‘persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters’ (World Bank, 2015). All of the participants in this study including myself, have experienced multiple displacements that have impacted on their education.

1.11.2 Resettlement

Resettlement is seen as a tool for ‘protecting those refugees who either cannot or are unwilling to return to their country of origin due to the risk of persecution or the lack of fundamental human rights in their countries’ (UNHCR, 2009, p.24). The UNHCR defines refugee resettlement in the following way:

Resettlement involves the selection and transfer of refugees from a State in which they have sought protection to a third State which has agreed to admit them – as refugees – with permanent residence status. The status provided should ensure protection against refoulement and provide a resettled refugee and his/her family or dependants with access to civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights similar to those enjoyed by nationals. It should also carry with it the opportunity to eventually become a naturalised citizen of the resettlement country. (UNHCR, 2014, p. 21)

The process of resettlement therefore involves two major parties: UNHCR and the host country— in this case, Australia. The process of resettlement is often slow and tedious. It involves many interviews, storytelling, and a lot of background preparations on the part of UNHCR in asking different countries to accept the refugees, doing the paper work,
undertaking background checks on information provided by refugees, and overseeing their travels to the recipient countries.

In the long journey leading to final resettlement in Australia, some refugees and asylum seekers experience multiple losses, torture and trauma, and demeaning treatment in camps or detention centres (Abkhezr, McMahon, & Rossouw, 2015). The complexity of challenges before and after resettlement leaves the identity of students in particular in a form of ‘statelessness, placelessness, and functionlessness’ (Bauman, 2004, p. 76), which can interfere with their sense of agency and hinder their personal development as well as their educational and vocational outcomes (Abkhezr et al., 2015, p. 72). These and other challenges are what the research participants in this study have experienced. Asylum seekers who are not included in this study experience another set of barriers to their education while awaiting for status as refugees in the host countries (RCOA, 2015, White, 2017). Unless asylum seeker children are funded by special scholarships or charities, they are subjected to paying schools fees at international students rates (White, 2007).

Thus most of the participants in this study, not being asylum seekers, have not surrendered to these educational challenges but rather have remained resilient in their pursuit of education. There is sufficient evidence that refugee background students who have acquired some level of education have been able to integrate into the host communities (Hutchinson & Dorsett, 2002; Naidoo et al., 2015; Olliff & Couch, 2005).

1.11.3 Integration

After resettlement has taken its form, refugee background people are then required to integrate in the host communities and become active contributors to the development of the host communities and country. According to UNHCR, integration is:

- a mutual, dynamic, multifaceted and ongoing process. … From a refugee perspective, integration requires a preparedness to adapt to the lifestyle of the host society without having to lose one’s own cultural identity. From the point of view of the host society, it requires willingness for communities to be welcoming and responsive to refugees and for public institutions to meet the needs of a diverse population. (UNHCR, 2002, p. 12)

As opposed to the above definition, many examples show that refugees are rather, required to adopt and adapt to the dominant culture sometimes at the expense of losing their own identity (UNHCR, 2002). Integration relies heavily on how well refugees are received and supported
to become full participants in their new communities after final resettlement (UNHCR, 2013). Integration is important in addressing multiple domains such as ‘education and language, employment, acculturation, special physiological and psychological assistance, policy making, promotion of counter-racism within society, and workplaces and social and community inclusion interventions’ (Abkhezr et al., 2015, p. 73)

1.11.4 Resilience

This term is mostly used by psychologists to describe the process of bouncing back after adversity. In this study I have used resilience from another perspective: ‘resilience as being accumulated and as an accumulating set of resources that allows individuals and communities to make sense of the world around them, and to adopt, to adapt and even thrive’ (Wilson & Arvanitakis, 2014, p. 68). All of the participants in this study have articulated different accounts of how they have accumulated resources that have helped them to be resilient while facing educational challenges. Educational resilience and indicators of resilient people have been highlighted in chapter three of this study.

1.11.5 Students with a Refugee Background

The term ‘African students with a refugee background’ is used interchangeably with ‘refugee background students’ in this study. This nomenclature has been used because it places more positive emphasis on these student groups in contrast to terms such as: refugee students, non-White, at-risk, disadvantaged, and traditionally marginalized. When humanitarian refugees are given a country of permanent residence, they cease to be called refugees and eventually their identity is changed when they become naturalised citizens. ‘Naturalisation’ is typically defined as a transformative process whereby an immigrant, or more generally someone from outside the host country ‘become[s] naturalised’ by becoming a full member of the host country through citizenship acquisition (Goodman, 2010, p. 2). A full member of the society gains greater economic and social benefits than his or her non-citizen counterparts. The term ‘students with a refugee background’ is used to emphasise the transition away from refugee status.

1.11.6 Refugee

In Australia a refugee is an individual whose claim for asylum status has been granted, and therefore is no longer considered a non-citizen with unresolved status (Government of
Australia, 2017).\textsuperscript{3} The official definition by United Nations is given in section 1.4 in this chapter.

1.11.7 United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR)

UNHCR is understood as a United Nations agency that has the wellbeing of refugees and other displaced people in their mandate. As an organization, its existence has a particular history. In December 1950 the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was created by the United Nations General Assembly as a subsidiary body. It was established by the UN General Assembly in 1949 on the basis of Article 22 of the UN Charter, in order to provide ‘international protection’ as well as to seek ‘permanent solution for the problems of refugees’ (Ogata, 2005). According to Demirdjian, the UNHCR core mandate was ‘the protection and assistance of refugees and the search for solutions to the problems of refugees’ (2012, p. 4). In 1951 the United Nations Convention relating to the status of refugees was adopted. Two of its most important provisions were the definition of the term refugee (Article 1) and the prohibition of expulsion or return (Article 33). The establishment of UNHCR and the adoption of the UN refugee convention in 1950 and 1951 provided a formal global structure to respond to the needs of refugees and standards for their protection under international law. UNHCR provides protection and assistance not only to asylum seekers but also to refugees who have returned home but still need help in rebuilding their lives, local civilian communities directly affected by the movements of refugees, and stateless and internally displaced people (IDPs). IDPs are defined as ‘people or groups of individuals who have been forced to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of, or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalised violence, violations of human rights, or natural or human made disasters, and who have not crossed an international border’ (UNHCR, 2008, p. 21). The UNHCR and associated organisations are mentioned by the research participants in this study mainly because they have been positioned under the organisation’s mandate in their life history as refugees and during the resettlement processes.

1.12. Chapter outlines

Chapter one conceptualises refugee education and refugee crisis highlighting the impact of forced displacement on lived experiences of students with a refugee background and their educational aspirations. The chapter states the research problem and the motivation for the study by providing a situation analysis on education for students with a refugee background. The research objectives and methodological and theoretical frameworks which inform the study have been outlined and the chapter also presents limitations in the previous research studies, and defines several key terms used in the study.

Chapter two examines what is already known in the literature about forced displacement and the endemic nature of refugee movement. The chapter also explores the works of different scholars and what they have written on these contentious migrations between Africa and Australia, highlighting how the White Australia migration policy limited the admission of indigenous Africans and other non-white migrants in the early years.

Chapter three is a literature review that unpacks tertiary education for refugee background students, highlighting the enabling and the disabling factors. Important in this chapter is the foregrounding of the gaps that exist within education policy in which refugee background students are invisible and subsumed into other categories of low socio economic status and non-English speaking background. In this chapter I have presented a conceptual framework on educational resilience defining how resilience is understood in this study as opposed to psychological and sociological perspectives.

Chapter four presents the theoretical lens which is made up of three interrelated theories: post-colonial, critical race and critical events theories. Post-colonial theory (PCT) takes into account the historical realities of different nations and how they were colonized and the impact of colonial legacies on the people of Africa. Critical race theory (CRT) has been used to interpret racial inequalities from a historical perspective. Critical event theory (CET) has been used to organize and articulate the progressive events that have defined and impacted on the African students with a refugee background participating in the study. The use of three theoretical models is explained as a tool kit that helped the researcher to interpret the complex issues that students with a refugee background have faced in their transient journeys.

Chapter five focuses on life history narrative methodology and it begins with the definition of key concepts: narrative, story and life history. In this chapter I have discussed the rationale for the use of life history narrative methodology and provided a detailed description of the
process of data collection, analysis and interpretation. Given the nature of the methodology used in this study, the researcher explored some emerging issues that have impacted upon the research processes.

Chapter six presents detailed participant narratives to illustrate the evidence that emerged. The stories in this chapter have been organized and transformed into suitable texts for analysis. The participants’ stories have been given a timeline and organised around critical events in order to focus on turning points that they each identified in their narratives. In addition to narratives, each participant’s education profile has been presented indicating how refugee background students have pursued education from primary through secondary to tertiary education and the motivational factors for their resilience in difficult circumstances.

Chapter seven discusses the research findings. Here I organise and analyse findings according to the life journeys of my research participants. The main themes covered are forced migration/displacement, transition, resettlement and integration/acculturation. The chapter also presents findings on educational resilience including different dispositions. I also cover other emerging issues related to gender, schooling in Australia and the impact of race and discrimination.

Chapter eight provides reflections, conclusions and recommendations. This chapter reinforces the importance of valuing lived experience. The conclusions drawn in this chapter present an overview of the whole research study, consolidating different emerging ideas and findings.
Chapter Two: Forced Displacement and Global Refugees

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I have singled out forced displacement as the major cause of the global refugee crisis. While the refugee crisis is a global issue, after World War II ‘legal and institutional adjustments have been made to deal with new refugee movements that have occurred predominantly, but not exclusively, in the developing world’ (Gallagher, 1989, p. 579). Newman (2005, p. 7) affirms that ‘developing countries shoulder the social and economic strain of the vast majority of asylum seekers and people displaced through conflict and state failure’. In this chapter, I have presented the global refugee crisis but with emphasis on the refugee crisis in Africa and particularly in the Great Lakes region of Africa and surrounding countries. Irrespective of the geographical location, Lischer (2007, p. 142) states that ‘violent conflict causes millions of people to flee their homes every year’ which in turn generates unprecedented numbers of people on the move looking to find refuge. Millions of people fleeing their homes create ‘logistical and humanitarian nightmares’ for different countries (Lischer, 2007, p.142) in addition to causing threats to international security, resulting in increased border protection measures by different countries and causing a lot of suffering to asylum seekers. Newman (2005, p. 7) says that ‘there has been a shift from the protection of asylum seekers to protection from them’; indeed, this has been exacerbated by terrorist attacks against the United States on 11 September 2001, as detailed in the previous chapter.

Although there are many causes of conflicts leading to the refugee crisis, Lischer (2014) says that ‘political violence is the most significant cause of refugee movements’ (p. 319). People’s movements during forced displacement, however, are explained in a wide range of phenomena ranging from broad determinants of refugee flows to individual decisions within specific conflict zones. In other words, during periods of conflict some people decide to flee while others choose to face the challenges as victims or live in the internally displaced camps within their country. Therefore, displaced people represent three categories (McCarthy & Vickers, 2012). Firstly, people fleeing conflict, violence, and/or fear of persecution and who are seeking refuge in protected spaces. These are referred to as ‘refugees’ (UNHCR, 2002). However, under international law, ‘a person is a ‘refugee’ as soon as they meet the definition
of refugee, whether or not their claim has been assessed. If they are found to be refugees, then they are ‘recognised refugees’ (RCOA, 2017a). Secondly, there are those who voluntarily leave their places of origin to acquire employment, greater security, or better conditions abroad. These are called ‘immigrants’ (International Organization for Migration, 2008).

Finally there are those who are outside their country of nationality or their usual country of residence and apply to the government of the country they are in for recognition as a refugee as well as permission to stay should they be recognized. These become ‘asylum-seekers’ (Refugee Council of Australia, 2011). This particular study is focused on category one: refugees. As highlighted in the previous chapter (section 1.4), refugees also comprise two categories: first, those who are housed in refugee camps in transit countries waiting to be repatriated, resettled in a third country or integrated in the host communities; and second, those who have been resettled in a third country like Australia. The target population for this study has been students with an African refugee background in Australian tertiary education who have been resettled on a humanitarian visa.

The term displacement is also broad in definition and scope. Troeller (2003) differentiates two major concepts that define displacement, i.e., migratory movements and the forced displacement of peoples. In distinguishing between the two, Troeller highlights that ‘migratory movement is related to the glaring inequalities in wealth between industrialized and poorer countries and the impact of market forces, and forced displacement is a consequence of armed conflict, persecution, and widespread human rights abuse’ (2005, p. 50). In this study therefore, I have defined forced displacement as a consequence of armed conflict, persecution, and widespread human rights abuse. Building on the insights of different scholars in this chapter, I have argued that forced displacement and the refugee crisis are major problems that the global community is grappling with and therefore the first analysis in this chapter focuses on the global trends of forced displacement.

2.2 Global trends of forced displacement

Each year the UNHCR produces a report on global trends of forced displacement. However, what remains critical is the fact that figures keep escalating. According to Healey (2016, p. v), by the end of 2015, ‘worldwide figures of forced displacement from wars, conflict, and persecution were at the highest level ever recorded by the UNHCR and continues to escalate’. The reasons for the continued increase in numbers of people being displaced can be understood as arising from failures of the UN principles of world order:
To understand the genesis of forced displacement, the continuing inability of the ‘international community’ to deal with this problem coherently and consistently, and the likelihood of future displacements, it is useful to look at the four underlying principles of world order, most of which are enshrined in the UN Charter…. These principles are: state sovereignty, the right to national self-determination, democracy (based on constitutional government), and respect for human rights. (Troeller, 2005, p. 51)

It is interesting to note that the four pillars of world order in the UN Charter—state sovereignty, national self-determination, democracy and respect of human rights—are the same points that explain the causes of forced displacement. Most African states are facing conflicts and civil wars for their failure in respecting the rule of law and the principles of democracy, and for large scale abuse of human rights. The current conflicts in Burundi and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), for example, result from the fact that the incumbent leaders are not willing to relinquish power and cling to power by force even when the general populace is constantly on the streets demanding that they step down from their leadership. Dictatorship and power struggles in some African countries have therefore overshadowed the values of democracy, state sovereignty and respect of human rights.

The impact of forced displacement is widespread and affects the global community. According to Forced Migration Review (FMR), ‘[historically], the growing number of people displaced within their own borders presents one of the greatest challenges to the international community’ (FMR, 1998, P.4). Presently, these numbers are reflected in the UNHCR 2015 global trends forced displacement report. The report unpacks the global challenges by showing annual figures; for example, the report states that ‘in 2015, forced displacement continued to affect an ever increasing number of people, reaching 65.3 million by the end of the year’ (UNHCR, 2015, p. 5). The report further highlights the progressive increase in forced displacement at global levels since 2011:

While the rate of increase has slowed compared with the particularly sharp rises of the past couple of years, the current numbers of displaced globally is nonetheless the highest since the aftermath of World War II. Since 2011, when UNHCR announced a new record of 42.5 million forcibly displaced people globally these numbers have risen sharply each year, from 45.2 million in 2012 to 51.2 million in 2013 and 59.6 million in 2014. This is an increase of more than 50 per cent in five years (UNHCR, 2015, p. 5).

Globally, at the end of 2015, the report highlights that ‘about half of the refugees were children, requiring focused efforts to address their needs and minimize the impact of forced displacement upon them’ (UNHCR, 2015, p. 8). Children, like students with a refugee
background, are hit hardest by the abuse of human rights and the impact of forced displacement. This is because they are denied a decent life, basic human rights, and above all they experience interrupted schooling and are exposed to other pedagogical challenges as they are resettled in other countries.

The global solutions to refugee crises, as defined by UNHCR and governments, have been threefold: 1) voluntary repatriation to the country of origin; 2) local integration into the country of asylum; and 3) resettlement to a third country (UNHCR, 2011, p. 81). However, relatively few displaced people are currently able to avail themselves of any of the three durable solutions. ‘Resettlement in third countries is limited in numbers and very expensive; voluntary return is hampered by lack of stability and peace; and full local integration and naturalisation are often blocked by policy restrictions’ (Harild, 2016, p. 4).

The contention around forced displacement and the international response to the problems of refugees can be understood by looking at the role of the governments in conflict zones. Inherent in the definition of forced displacement is the fact that political violence is the biggest factor and therefore finding a durable solution is the sole responsibility of the governments concerned. This is confirmed by scholars like Stein (1986, p. 267) who states that ‘refugees are caused by government action and achieving durable solutions is dependent on the political will, diplomacy, and statesmanship of governments’. In the same vein, (Ogata, 2005, p. 25) notes that ‘the refugee problems are essentially political in origin and therefore have to be addressed through political action. Humanitarian action may create space for political action but on its own can never substitute for it’. To this end, Harild (2016, p. 5) makes the relevant point that:

there is simply no way that present-day displacement needs can be covered by humanitarian financing and approaches, let alone solved. Given the lack of success by national and international stakeholders in addressing the roots of today's conflicts, they tend to linger on without any resolution in sight. Yet policymakers, planners and other actors see displacement as a largely humanitarian issue. They ignore its inevitable longevity, and the typical response therefore stays in a short-term mode. However, there is growing recognition that the present system is not working.

From my perspective, the failure to address the challenges of forced displacement by both governments and the international community is based on two major reasons: Firstly, all initiatives by different governments and international organisations are providing treatment to the symptoms of war and conflict, rather than treating the root cause of displacement, which has to do with practical solutions of stopping the wars and conflicts in prone countries.
Secondly, some people are gaining from conflicts in different developing countries and will do whatever it takes to insulate themselves from taking responsibility for all the atrocities that are being committed against humanity. What Africa in particular is grappling with is economic war because of Africa’s endowment with minerals. That is why forced displacement becomes a dilemma when it is induced by the very people who should be protecting the four main pillars of social order enshrined in the UN charter.

2.3 Forced displacement dilemmas

On face value, it is clear that forced displacement is a consequence of armed conflict, persecution, and widespread human rights abuse. However, fleeing involves a lot of decision-making that warrants closer examination. Running away from one’s home country translates into abandoning property including land, housing and other treasures. It also includes losing the familiar neighbourhoods, members of family and long-time friends. Davenport, Moore, and Poe (2003, p. 28) pose the question: ‘Why would someone choose to abandon her/his home, livelihood, and social ties in favour of an uncertain future elsewhere? Surely this is not a decision people make lightly nor is it one devoid of complexity’. The intentions behind people fleeing their homes are complex and not as straightforward as they appear. This is especially true in most developing nations in Africa where forced displacement has taken different forms. I highlight three examples from Africa.

The first example is evident in Rwanda right after the 1994 Tutsi genocide when the perpetrators (Hutu extremists) were displaced into the neighbouring DRC. ‘[T]his massive refugee flow in the context of genocide was not primarily composed of the group identified as the target of the genocide (the Tutsi) but of the groups identified as the perpetrators – (the Hutu)’ (Davenport et al., 2003, p. 33). This presents a dilemma in determining categories of forcibly displaced people and the causes for their displacement. Such a dilemma challenges researchers to consider a number of factors while drawing conclusions on the global trends on forced displacement. The four pillars in the UN charter (state sovereignty, national self-determination, democracy and respect of human rights) provide an answer as to why people flee their home country. Davenport et al. (2003, p. 32) state that ‘people will be apt to move away from their homes when they perceive their personal security to be at risk, toward other locales where they are apt to feel more secure’. In other words, people flee in order to feel safe from persecution, human rights abuse and conflicts but this definition becomes
complicated when the perpetrators of the conflicts and killings are themselves fleeing prosecution or retribution.

The second example is evident in the four pillars enshrined in the UN Charter. Not a single pillar addresses issues impacting individual members as a result of decisions made by the family. Although some governments might act to contain or control generalised conflicts, persecutions/abuse of human rights and its associated dangers such as targeted abductions by rebel groups impact individual families, so that some families are forced to flee. In other words, a dilemma about the identification of forced displacement arises when displacement is based on families seeking security for their loved ones. For example, acts of human rights abuses occurred where children were being abducted and taken as child soldiers and others as sex slaves by the Lord's Resistance Army, a rebel movement in northern Uganda (Gates and Reich, 2010; Prunier, 2009). As a consequence, families that had the financial capacity started shifting their children in particular from northern Uganda to other parts of the country that were safe. It is important to note that older members of the family remained in the conflict zone to protect their belongings as children were taken to safe zones to live on their own.

The third and the most complex form of forced displacements are those engineered by the government; for instance, the conflicts in Darfur which rapidly prompted a massive refugee and internally displaced persons (IDP) crisis, causing Kofi Annan to label Darfur as the worst humanitarian crisis of the time. Williamson (2007) says: The Darfur crisis

…is man made. It is horrific. It is preventable. Yet the carnage continues while the international community engages in political posturing and diplomatic half-measures. It's a disgrace. The echoes of this failure will long linger in the hallways of history. This mayhem and destruction must end. (p. 343)

The government at this point used induced displacement to facilitate implementation of policies driving land redistribution. This becomes a significant dilemma when governments, which are naturally assumed to be protective of citizens, become instrumental in encouraging forced displacement.

Irrespective of the dilemmas in locating the cause and effects of forced displacement, it is clear that the effects are wide spread and that the contemporary global community continues to experience an unprecedented movement of people. Highly affected by these movements
are students whose education is interrupted and they continue to struggle in their education pathways even when they are resettled in a third country like Australia. In the next section I will briefly explore forced displacement within the continent of Africa.

2.4 Forced displacements: Africa’s colonial experience

Research participants in this study represent 11 countries in Africa: Rwanda, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Sudan, Ethiopia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea Conakry. More emphasis, however, has been put on the countries in the Great Lakes Region of Africa (GLRA). This is because nine of the eleven research participants, who have been resettled in Australia, have experienced displacements within the GLRA.

Figure 1: African map showing land occupation by colonialists and the legacy of border drawing

Understanding African history that informs the contemporary situation of forced displacement requires that we view Africa in three major phases: pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial times.

Before colonisation, people moved in search of game, more fertile soil, or forage for their herds. With the incoming of Europeans, firstly as explorers and missionaries, events took another course. Historical evidence shows that pre-colonial African societies were considered primitive and backward by Western countries. As a result, the West sent missionaries and explorers to observe and record the culture and the way of life of African peoples. In doing so, these forerunners of imperialism paved the way for colonisation by branding Africa within their own frame of

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understanding. Brantlinger (1985) notes ‘explorers portrayed Africans as amusing or dangerous obstacles or as objects of curiosity, while missionaries portrayed Africans as weak, pitiable, inferior mortals who need to be shown the light’ (p. 180). Brantlinger further highlights that ‘missionaries were strongly tempted to exaggerate "savagery" and "darkness" in order to rationalize their presence in Africa, to explain the frustrations they experienced in making converts, and to win support from mission societies at home’ (p. 180). As a result of these early encounters, Africa started to experience colonialism.

Colonialism, ‘the conquest and direct control of other people’s land, is a particular phase in the history of Imperialism, which is now best understood as the globalization of the capitalist mode of production’ (Williams & Chrisman, 1994, p. 2). During this phase of colonialism, ‘European colonists and earlier generations of European writers of course had regarded vast regions of the world merely as blank spaces, lands without narrative, waiting to be: mapped, mined, and written into existence’ (Parker & Starkey, 1995, p. 3). As a result, the West asserted its hegemony over the rest of the world and ‘Western imperialist expansion was justified as the pedagogical project of bringing the underdeveloped world into the edifying condition of history’ (Gandhi, 1998, p. 70). Colonialism set a pattern for the current challenges that the continent of Africa is experiencing particularly with people’s displacement and forced migrations.

Post-colonialism is the period after colonialism otherwise referred to as decolonization. This period was characterised by African states claiming independence from European colonial domination (Flahaux & De Haas, 2015). Several revolutions took place that not only impacted on Africans but also on colonialists. Newman and Van Selm (2003, p. 13) reiterate that ‘as a consequence, the post-colonial conflicts in Africa for example, Angola, Mozambique, Congo, Nigeria, Rwanda, Burundi, resulted in huge numbers of displaced persons, both within and across boundaries’. Davidson says that ‘decolonisation heralded a phase of state formation, in which newly established African states have endeavoured to instil a sense of national unity in ethnically diverse societies, which often created considerable internal tensions and has regularly erupted in violent conflicts’ (Davidson, 1992, p.42) For Westin (2002, p. 2) ‘the extraordinarily large flows of refugees in sub-Saharan Africa have been triggered by a combination of factors relating to environmental conditions, demographic structure and population development, economic resources and ethnopolitical conflicts’.
I will conclude this brief account of colonialism and post-colonial Africa by discussing the most significant colonial legacy that impacted on the continent of Africa: the drawing of colonial boundaries on the African map. ‘The creation of artificial boundaries has been the basis of much suffering in African states as political conflicts have flared up from time to time on account of territorial claims and counterclaims’ (Khapoya, 2013, p. 135). The large flows of refugees have been prompted by ethnic and political conflicts because of the arbitrarily drawn boundaries by the European imperial powers (Westin, 2002). It should be recalled that:

Given the existence of nearly 2,000 ethnic groups, each one with its own language, rituals, and social norms, no one, not even the Africans themselves, could have drawn perfect national boundaries on the African continent. However, splitting large ethnic groups into many different states or placing groups with a history of mutual hostilities together in a single country (as in Chad or Sudan) has contributed to the specter of irredentism and civil wars that has wasted scarce resources. (Khapoya, 2013, p. 179)

For Westin (2002): ‘Boundaries divide one and the same ethnic community between different states but also place different ethnic groups together within the confines of one multiethnic state formation. Some states are bi-ethnic, Rwanda and Burundi being the most typical cases’ (p. 2). The colonial boundaries established at the time of the partition of Africa have been defended determinedly in the post-independence period. Some of the events from pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial Africa are the main source of conflicts and reasons for forced displacement on the continent. The historical realities with regard to forced displacement on the continent are many but in the following section I will highlight major conventions that aimed at finding solutions for those defined by international instruments as ‘refugees’.

2.4.1 Forced displacement after 1960

Africa started to experience the challenges associated with refugees during the 1960s and the broader conceptualization of refugee concerns for the UN in Africa was formalized in 1969 during the Organisation of African Unity Refugee Convention. Initially, forced displacement stemmed from independence struggles whereby governments were trying to establish national governments, i.e. UN charter pillar one (State sovereignty). According to Hamrell (1967),

By the end of 1963, there were some 400,000 African refugees, principally Angolans and Rwandese. By the end of 1966, the number increased to more than 700,000 African refugees, including individuals from Sudan, the Congo and Portuguese Guinea. By the end of 1972 the number increased again to more than one million, due mostly to new influxes from Ethiopia, Burundi and Equatorial Guinea. (p.14)
As a result of the escalating numbers of refugees on the continent, several pan-African conferences were organised to respond to the problem. The first Pan-African refugee conference was held in Arusha, Tanzania in 1979. Then in 1981, The International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa (ICARA I) was held in Geneva. The other International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa (ICARA II) took place in 1984. In all these conferences, the objective was to find durable solutions to the problems of refugees on the continent (Gallagher, 1989, p. 584). In today's Africa, forced displacement remains a major problem in some countries. The population of refugees continues to grow, economies of host countries continue to decline and there is uncertain international commitment to carrying more of the assistance of refugees in Africa. According to Healey (2016, p. 8), ‘today there are more than three million refugees in sub-Saharan Africa’ meaning that forced displacements among African countries are continuing. The next section focuses on the specific region of the GLRA to examine the cause and effects of the movement of displaced people.

2.5 Great Lakes Region of Africa - GLRA

This study is not a comprehensive representation of the continent of Africa, although examples have been cited from all over Africa regarding trends of migration from Africa to Australia. In the space available, I can only highlight some general migration trends within the GLRA and the surrounding countries which is the scope of this study and I do not claim to provide a complete picture of African migrations and displacements.

The Great Lakes region of Africa has hosted over 50% of the refugees on the African continent. In the past decades, ‘the entire Great Lakes area has experienced two major waves of mass human displacement: one in the late 1950s/early1960s and another in 1990s’ (Ogata, 2005, p. 5). In 2014-15, 190,000 people fled from their homes in Burundi and there was no improvement in the crises affecting the Democratic Republic of Congo (UNHCR, 2015). While external forces can be understood using post-colonial theory, the internal realities of individual countries are revealed by taking a look at the historical events of each country.

2.5.1 Rwanda

Rwanda is a country that has been characterised by civil wars and genocide. All conflicts have resulted from ethnic identities distinguished as Bahutu, Batutsi, and Batwa (Soudan, 2015). Forced displacements became visible in Rwanda in the 1959/1962 social revolutions
when thousands of people fled to neighbouring countries after the overthrow of the monarch. Rwanda was first colonised by the Germans who later handed the country over to the Belgians. The Belgians first favoured the ruling monarch but later changed side to the majority Hutu. ‘Belgians promoted divide and rule within the country to overturn the government’ (Soudan, 2015, p. 13). As a result of divide and rule, Rwanda started witnessing mass killings, abuse of human rights and people’s movements to the neighbouring countries as refugees.

The first event leading to massive displacement of people occurred in 1959, following the death of King (Mwami) Mutara III. During this time ‘all the Batutsi, rich and poor, were instant targets’ (Soudan, 2015, p. 19). By the early 1960s there were 150,000 Rwandan refugees in Zaire, Burundi, Uganda, and Tanzania. ‘To UNHCR the Rwanda refugees in the Great Lakes region of Africa were the first group linked with the decolonization process south of the Sahara’ (Ogata, 2005, p. 172).

The second historical event in Rwanda is the 1994 Rwandan Tutsi genocide. Before 1994, ‘the Batutsi had been the systematic target of discrimination, ostracism, and often slaughter conducted by the ruling power’ (Soudan, 2015, p. 53). During the genocide ‘thousands of people were slaughtered each day by the Hutu-led Rwandan Armed Forces (RAF), by Hutu extremist militias known as Interahamwe, by their neighbours, teachers, friends, and even, in some instances, by their own relatives’ (Dauge-Roth, 2010, p. 12). The genocide that took place in 1994 had a long history. As De Waal (1994, p. 1) puts it, ‘with the advent of colonialism, a rigid system of tribute and exploitation was imposed, creating deep grievances that underlie today’s violence.’ The Rwandan genocide became a catalyst for the number of conflicts that took place in the Great Lakes regions of Africa (Clarke, 2016). Phil Clarke, an expert on politics in the Great Lakes Region summarises this complexity in how Rwanda becomes a catalyst at the regional summit on peace and security in Luanda, Angola (October 2016):

One of the main reasons the regional actors have struggled to deal with the conflict situations in both Congo and Burundi is that the neighbours themselves are often also directly implicated in these conflicts. So Burundi accuses Rwanda of arming rebels who are now acting inside Burundi and over the past 15 years, Rwanda has backed various groups within eastern Congo. The hope of ending the problem of refugees and unprecedented people’s movement in the region is therefore a very far-fetched notion. (Clarke, 2016, p. 1)
Forced displacement in GRLA therefore presents a big challenge to both the international community and the countries involved.

2.5.2 Burundi

The turmoil in Rwanda significantly disrupted civil life in Burundi. Contrary to the Rwandan situation, in Burundi Tutsi were in power for a long time. The Hutus of Burundi staged an uprising to overthrow Tutsi power in 1972 and as a result there were forced displacements from 1973 in Burundi. Ogata, (2005, p. 174) says ‘a failed Hutu uprising in Burundi in 1972 led Tutsi extremists to carry out a large massacre of Hutus, followed by an outflow of refugees to Tanzania’.

In 1972 a large-scale revolt saw more than 1000 Tutsi killed (Crowther & Finlay, 1994). Though the Hutu won political power in the democratic election, the Tutsis maintained control over the military. With the Burundian Army Coup on October 21 1993, and the murder of President Ndadaye, violence spread across the country, resulting in the deaths of over 50,000 Hutus and the exodus of more than 700,000 refugees to Rwanda, Tanzania, and Zaire (Ogata, 2005). These were mostly women and children in a hasty escape while another 250,000 became internally displaced. To UNHCR, ‘the Burundi refugee outflow marked the beginning of the major humanitarian crisis of the 1990s, which engulfed Burundi, Rwanda and the entire Great Lakes region’ (Ogata, 2005, p. 174).

Today, Burundi is dealing with total chaos and another wave of people’s displacement with the general population failing to accept the current president. ‘Political rivalry that has characterised Burundi is purely political and ethnicity has been used as a tool to justify the rivalry (Clark, 2016, p. 2).

2.5.3 Eastern Zaire/DRC

Eastern Zaire has also experienced a lot of trouble in its history. This study however has focused on the forced displacements that took place from late August 1996 that witnessed a wave of civil wars, conflict and people’s displacement (Clarke, 2016)\(^5\). These wars and conflicts in eastern Zaire became very difficult with the involvement of all neighbouring countries, the Rwandan and Burundian governments (Clarke, 2016). The scope was

broadened with Uganda’s entry in November, and it developed into a major international crisis when Zaire rebel armies pushed deeper into its territory (Prunier, 2009). The war broke out when rebels supported by the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) invaded Zaire and sought to repatriate the Rwandan refugees who were perceived as a security threat to the new government led by the RPF.

2.5.4 Uganda

Before independence, Uganda was a prosperous country but by early 1986 Uganda ‘lay shattered and bankrupt, broken by tribal animosity, nepotism, politicians who had gone mad on power and military tyranny’ (Crowther & Finlay, 1994, p. 12). In this study Uganda is considered because it hosts millions of refugees from Rwanda, Burundi and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) (Adisa, 1996; Ogata, 2005; Prunier, 2009). As evidenced in my life history narrative and in the narratives of my research participants, Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania remain as the primary hosts of refugees in the Great Lakes Regions of Africa.

2.5.5 Kenya and Tanzania

Kenya and Tanzania have played a role in displacement by being a centre for refugees in the region. Whereas Tanzania has been politically stable, Kenya recently experienced what was called the 2007/2008 Kenyan crisis. In this research study, I have not recruited any African students with a refugee background who is a native of Uganda, Kenya or Tanzania but the majority of my research participants settled in refugee camps in these three countries. The next section presents the history behind African migration to Australia resulting from forced displacement.

2.6 Australia

Since October 1945, more than 7.5 million people have migrated to Australia and over 800,000 of these have arrived under the Humanitarian Programme. Thus Australia’s population has increased from about 7 million in October 1945 to 23.03 million as at March 2013 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017).

Since the abolition of the White Australia Policy in 1973:

 resettlement of refugees has been on the basis of the onshore component which fulfils Australia’s international obligations by offering protection to people already in Australia who are found to be refugees according to the United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, and the offshore resettlement component which
offers to resettle people from overseas who are subject to persecution and are outside their home country and are identified by the UNHCR as refugees in need of placement. (Terry et al., 2016, p. 10)

The African humanitarian intake rose from around 30% (approximately 1,960 people) in 2001-2002, to 43% in 2002-2003, 63% in 2003-04 and to 73% or 9,760 people in 2004-05 (Australian Government, 2007). Today, Australia is one of the ten countries in the world with an established annual resettlement program for refugees (Mbano, 2012, p. 3). In the next section I will track the trends of African migrants and refugees who have come to Australia.

2.6.1 Trends of migrations from Africa to Australia

Offshore resettlement programs in Australia offered no quota to African refugees prior to the 1980s. Jupp states that ‘between 1982 and 1987, African refugees represented 481 of a total intake of 75,000 Humanitarian entrants resettled in Australia’ (2001, pp. 689-690). In the late 1980s, refugees from the Horn of Africa (Ethiopians, Eritreans, and Somalis) began to arrive in Australia as famine, civil war and political unrest escalated in those countries (Hugo, 2009). Consequently, in the twelve year period from 1988 to 2000, Australia received around 10,000 humanitarian entrants from Africa (Community Relations Commission for a Multicultural NSW, 2006). There were of course migrants from Africa settling in Australia through non-humanitarian migration before this period: for example, Ghanaians and Nigerian students arriving from the 1950s to the 1970s under the Colombo Plan or ‘as British Commonwealth students eligible to study in Australia, who decided to stay on after their studies’ (Megarrity, 2007, p. 88). Otherwise, African-born settlers in Australia prior to 1980s were predominantly Europeans, including South and East Africans of British origin and Egyptians of Greek, Italian and Maltese origin (Hugo, 2009). These immigrants, mainly from South Africa, the former Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) and Kenya continued to form a large proportion of African arrivals in Australia (Jupp, 2001). Different African countries had different experiences that resulted in immigration to Australia as highlighted below:

a) There was a significant movement of East Africans of European origin out of Kenya during the war for independence. This was during the struggle for independence by different African countries.

b) [South] Africans left because of the apartheid regime but also the 1985 declaration of the state of emergency (Lucas, 2001, pp. 689-690).
The most spectacular increase has been in the Sudan born population, which increased from 4,900 in 2001 to 24,796 in 2008. Today the South Sudanese resettled refugees have reached 1.4 million worldwide (RCOA, 2017). However, there have also been substantial increases in a large number of smaller African birthplace groups, many of which include a large proportion of refugee-humanitarian arrivals, such as Burundi, Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra-Leone (Department of Home Affairs, 2018).

This study has focused on the recent arrivals from 11 countries in Africa: Rwanda, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Ethiopia, Sudan, Guinea Conakry and Sierra Leone. Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania have been hosts of most of my research participants.

2.6.2 Perceptions of African refugees in Australia

The arrival of Africans in recent years has presented a host of challenges to the Australian education sector. Those who arrive young and are supposed to be enrolled in school or tertiary education have been identified with complex prior life experience that impacts on their education. They have experienced protracted displacement, interrupted schooling and upon their arrival in Australia they are met with additional challenges of adjusting to a different school curriculum and culture. The Refugee Council of Australia, in their advocacy for refugees from Africa, had this to say:

Entrants from Africa are finding it more difficult to establish themselves than their earlier counterparts and, in particular, are experiencing lower levels of employment, lower workforce participant rate, lower levels of income, and more health problems and psychological distress. More needs to be done to target settlement assistance towards this group if they are to achieve full and active participation in Australian society (Refugee Council of Australia, 2003, p. 61).

The Refugee Council of Australia in their recent submission called for an increase in resettlement of African refugees: ‘Even though these people [refugee background students] are in a safe land, because there is no war there, they have another war….They have to live, they have to survive, sometimes in impossible ways… They are fighting a war for meaning for life. A war for existence (RCOA, 2017, p.20)

The government and the media have also played a big role in creating awareness of the challenges these students have faced. Hewagodage (2015, p. 38) highlights some of the comments by the former Minister for Immigration, Kevin Andrews, in his public
announcement published in the Australian newspaper *The Age* (October 3, 2007). Some of the points raised included: low levels of education, and spending decades in refugee camps in a war-torn and conflict situation. In addition to the challenges Mr. Andrews concluded that:

> they have the challenges of resettling in a culture which is vastly different from the one which they came from, I don't think anybody really denies that this is a challenge, it's really a matter of how we respond to that challenge and putting our head in the sand and pretending it's not there is not going to help the people concerned, and it's not going to help Australia. (Hewagodage, 2015, p. 38)

As a result of such comments from different sources, it came to a point that the Australian government reduced the quota for African humanitarian refugees. The justification was that ‘Australia is not …adequately prepared to cope with the special needs of African refugees, who commonly arrive with poor education, poor health, poor language skills and a history of brutalisation and trauma from years of civil wars and experiences in refugee camps’ (Reiner 2010, p. 12). Nonetheless, following the 2016 global trend report on forced migration, the Refugee Council of Australia held a different position from that of the government and recommended an increase in resettlement of refugees from Africa. ‘In view of pressing needs across the African continent, the Australian Government should ensure that the 2017-18 regional target for resettlement from Africa be set at no lower than 25% of the offshore program’ (RCOA, 2017c, p.5)

Different service sectors have also lamented the challenges they have faced while helping refugees of African background. Health services reported being stretched to the limit while schools did not know how to cope with so many traumatised and often preliterate children and young people. [Other areas of concern identified included] ‘employment, housing, education, communication with service providers, racism and discrimination, orientation support, and transport’ (Community Relations Commission for a Multicultural NSW, 2006, p. 33).

The reports above all point to an urgent need to rethink settlement policy and service provision, but none have highlighted how resilient these African refugees have been and how, over time, they have demonstrated abilities to adapt and become productive in Australian communities. This gap makes this study on resilience and education significant. I argue that the high settlement needs of these African refugee communities are not a product of cultural background but of the experience of protracted displacement which is common to refugees in the other regions of the world. We need to provide a platform where these refugees can share
their stories so that appropriate support can be provided based on their life experiences. This has been the focus of this study whereby participants have been given space to speak about their life histories.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the concept of forced displacement, highlighting global trends, and Africa’s experiences with a specific focus on some countries from the Great Lakes Region of Africa. This chapter also reviews the reception of African refugees in Australia under the humanitarian program. The settlement of African refugee background people in Australia has been a point of concern because much focus has been directed towards the negatives that this cohort of refugees brings to their host communities. The next chapter presents a detailed review of the literature on tertiary education experiences of African students with a refugee background in the Australian education system.
Chapter Three: Literature Review on Education for Refugee Background Students

3.1 Introduction

While there is a robust volume of research on experiences of refugee background students in Australian secondary schools, there is a dearth of literature on experiences of refugee background students in tertiary education. The available literature on tertiary education has addressed: school-university pathways (Naidoo et al., 2015); refugee access and participation in tertiary education and training (Ben-Moshe, Bertone, & Grossman, 2008); university response to the needs of students from a refugee background (Earnest, Joyce, de Mori, & Silvagni, 2010); challenges associated with language and education (Hatoss, O’Neill, & Eacersall, 2012); African students with a refugee background experiences at university (Joyce, Earnest, de Mori, & Silvagni, 2010); refugee background students in Australian TAFE education (Onsando & Billett, 2009) and the impact of TAFE inclusiveness strategies (Volkoff et al., 2008). The most recent is a report on existing literature on access and participation of students from humanitarian refugee backgrounds in the Australian higher education system (Terry et al., 2016).

In this chapter, I discuss and critique the works of scholars who have focused on the lived experiences of students with a refugee background in the transition to tertiary education. In Australia, these students arrive on humanitarian visa category Subclass 200 that grants them several rights—including the right to education—but because of the complexities associated with their past experiences, many do not make it to tertiary education. This study sets out to acknowledge those students with a refugee background who have been resilient enough to achieve higher education despite adversity. I have organised this chapter around four major themes: 1. access and participation to tertiary education for students with a refugee background; 2. an overview of Australian policies impacting on education for students with a

Refugee visa (Subclass 200) this visa is for people who are subject to persecution in their home country and are in need of resettlement. The majority of applicants who are considered under this category are identified by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and referred to the Australian Government for resettlement consideration. [https://www.border.gov.au/Trav/Relu/Offs/Refugee-and-Humanitarian-visas](https://www.border.gov.au/Trav/Relu/Offs/Refugee-and-Humanitarian-visas)
refugee background; 3. literature highlighting barriers to education for refugee background students, and 4. literature on educational resilience.

3.2 Access and participation to tertiary education for students with a refugee background

The academic and non-academic challenges in their endeavour to access and participate in the Australian tertiary education has been addressed by various scholars (for example, Ben-Moshe et al., 2008; Harris et al., 2015; Hatoss et al., 2015, Naidoo et al., 2015, Onsando & Billet, 2009; and Terry et al., 2016). Academic challenges are mainly limited language skills and unfamiliar curriculum. Non-academic challenges result from individual student lived experiences, perceptions, stereotypes and assumptions.

Academic challenges have impacted on access and participation of students with a refugee background in Australian tertiary education. For instance, limited ability to speak and write English by refugee background students has often been used as a measure of their inability to access and complete tertiary education. Ben-Moshe et al., (2008) focusing on both refugees and asylum seekers found that English impeded progress. These scholars highlighted that the lack of English skills necessary to pursue training and qualifications is the major obstacle to their access and participation in tertiary education.

Further investigations regarding access to tertiary education for students with a refugee background have been undertaken by Naidoo et al. (2015) who looked at the transition from secondary to tertiary education. The authors found that one of the major barriers was ‘language proficiency’ (2015, p.36). They stated that, not only do students with a refugee background need English for their communication but also subject specific language to access and complete tertiary education. In the same vein, Shakespeare-Finch and Wickham (2010) identify English as a type of acculturation difficulty impacting many aspects of refugee background students’ lives. These scholars found that students with a refugee background have high aspirations for educational attainment and a strong desire to succeed academically, but English Language remains the number one obstacle to access and participation in tertiary education.

It is a fact that access and completion of tertiary education can have transformative effects in refugee background students’ lives. Onsando & Billett (2009) hold the view that access to
education and training is a means to developing self-esteem and confidence and above all creates opportunities for employment and a better living standard. However, potential transformative effects can be compromised and difficulties exacerbated when they [refugee background students] enter class/lecture rooms where their history, experiences, background and knowledge is not reflected in the curriculum (Zamudio et al., 2011). In other words, when refugee background students enter schools and tertiary education systems in host communities, the unfamiliar curriculum and pedagogical demands limit their progress and completion of tertiary education (Naidoo et al., 2015). As a result of a failure to finish tertiary education, refugee background students limit their opportunities to enjoy the benefits that accrue from quality education such as employment.

In addition to unfamiliar curriculum and pedagogical practices applied by teachers, the other challenging aspect for African students with a refugee background happens when they are treated as a group with the same demands, desires and abilities. In many ways, African students are sometimes misunderstood as a homogenous group (Onsando & Billett, 2009). Their differences in culture, background and identity are often ignored and yet there is no homogeneity in the educational experiences of African students with a refugee background. As multicultural New South Wales (NSW) points out ‘African might convey a misleading sense of cultural homogeneity’ (Community Relations Commission for a Multicultural NSW, 2006, p. 24). In other words, it is fallacious to think of Africa and Africans in a homogenous way, given that ‘Africa is a continent with multiple diversities in terms of culture, language ability and experiences’ (Khapoya, 2015, p. 1). For example, students who arrive in Australia from Francophone countries (countries formerly colonized by France and Belgium) face different challenges from those who come from Anglophone countries that were colonized by Britain. These challenges include familiarity with English language cultural issues, as well as self-esteem and confidence in their endeavour to access and participate in tertiary education. As a result Ben-Moshe et al., (2008, p.8) concludes that in order to increase access and participation in tertiary education ‘there is need for the adoption of an integrated approach which recognizes the diversity of refugees [heterogeneity] as well as the relationships between the broader needs of refugees.’ It is in this respect that Terry et al., (2016) revealed the need to ‘acknowledge the social and cultural capital that these students carry with them’ (p. 14) and recognise their differences. However, Onsando & Billett (2009) caution that ‘the socially derived cultural heritage of many African people comprises subcultures that cannot easily be described or interpreted under a single definition’ (p.82).
In addition to classroom level difficulties, in tertiary settings the education system in Australia has not addressed challenges associated with how these students are perceived. These non-academic perceptions range from prejudice, stereotypes and assumptions. Most of the perceptions result from political debates and hyperbolic media messaging. Harris et al. (2015) states that, ‘media discourses of deficit, dangerous and traumatised people are limiting potential…’ (p.1227). these scholars therefore call upon successful tertiary refugee background students to speak back to such reductive notions of failure. Such social injustices and prejudices coming from political debates and media are the source of distress and discomfort for students with a refugee background and are experienced in addition to their existing learning challenges (Onsando & Billett, 2009). Scholars agree that there is need for demystifying assumptions and stereotypes about what it means to be a refugee and the struggles students with a refugee background encounter in their endeavours to access and participate in Australian tertiary education.

The other non-academic challenges resulting from individual student experiences begins from the time of displacement, in transit countries to resettlement processes in host countries. The cumulative level of trauma resulting from difficult transient journeys affects access and participation in tertiary education for refugee background students. For instance, Onsando & Billett highlight that ‘refugee life experiences impact on students’ learning activities and can also help them to reach goals in their education’ (2009, p.81). Scholars agree that the diverse nature of these lived experiences is opposed to grouping this cohort of students into people with the same needs, educational desires and abilities. In other words, ‘experiences of refugee background students cannot be easily subsumed under the term “refugee” that bundles all communities and individuals into a monolithic group’ (Terry et al., 2016, p. 5). Other than the difficult life experiences that these students encounter, the students also experience racial discrimination which has a negative impact on their access and participation in tertiary education. In their study, Onsando and Billett (2009) conclude that ‘the impact of racial discrimination extended to the participants’ feelings of being isolated and stereotyped as inferior beings (2009, p.84).’ Racial discrimination has in many ways deterred students from accessing and participating in tertiary education.

A range of studies have made recommendations as to how barriers to access and participation can be addressed (Ben-Moshe et al., 2008, Naidoo et al., 2014; Terry et al., 2016). Academic challenges could be addressed through both ‘ESL support from specialised teachers and
teaching that is more culturally inclusive’ (Terry et al., 2016, p.7). These scholars emphasise the need for engagement programs and strategies that are community based and with inbuilt capacity building approaches. Nonetheless, these strategies suggested by Terry et al., remain at a general level of response to refugees’ needs and desires which carries with it the additional risk of categorising refugee background students as homogeneous. Ben-Moshe (2008) approaches the solutions from a different angle by adding that teaching of employment skills to culturally inclusive teaching and language education. These scholars believe that the success of these programs will only be possible through collaborative efforts between educational institutions, community representatives and community based services. Thus, most of the scholars discussed above, made recommendations on training of educators on diversity and community partnerships. Partnerships could include organisation addressing torture and trauma (Onsando & Billett, 2009), university - school /TAFE partnerships (Naidoo et al. 2015).

Some of the extensive research into secondary education may also have implications for tertiary education for students with a refugee background. Olliff and Couch (2005) suggest that ESL provision for new arrivals is insufficient for academic purposes. Ferfolja et al. (2011) found that refugee background students need sustained tailored tutoring. Miller et al. (2005)—who also did an extensive study on African refugees with interrupted schooling—investigated the nature of educational experiences for students in mainstream high schools in Australia from the perspective of teachers. Interrupted schooling meant that students had missed out on many critical skills including aspects of cognitive development that would have been developed through early years of schooling. All of these studies focusing on secondary education have implications for access and participation in tertiary settings as well as the transition from secondary schools into higher education. Their recommendations on access and diversity suggest the need for research that focuses on tertiary students of refugee background. In this chapter secondary school issues are further addressed in section 3.4.

3.3 An overview of Australian policies impacting on education for students with a refugee background

At the tertiary education level, there is a low rate of participation of refugee background students. It is important to note that the low numbers of students with a refugee background across different universities and TAFE institutions make policy discourses about students with a refugee background critical. At the national level, there has been a failure to recognize
the specific requirements and support for refugee background students and the diversity that exists among them. The absence of any information on the educational aspirations and expectations of this cohort of students at the policy level reveals that there are no mechanisms for transference of good practices across the system (Onsando & Billet, 2009).

From the existing literature on education research, policies targeting students with a refugee background are limited and most often addressed in the recommendation section of empirical studies. In this chapter I have focused on national policies and tertiary education level policies that impact on students with a refugee background. The four main policies discussed include: 1. humanitarian program policy; 2. the student equity framework for higher education, ‘A Fair Chance for All’ policy; 3. widening participation policy at tertiary level, and 4. the Higher Education Participation and Partnership Programme (HEPPP) policy.

To begin, at the national level, Australia’s humanitarian program policy intent is focused on need, rather than on capacity to integrate. For instance, the 2016 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) global trends forced displacement report highlights the need for Australia to increase support for refugees, including those from eastern and central Africa through their annual quota resettlement scheme (RCOA, 2017a). In other words, refugees continue to be selected for resettlement in Australia according to the ‘intensity of the danger of their situation and their existing connections to Australia and Australians’ (van Selm, 2002, p. 74). The policy governing the choice of who comes to Australia on a humanitarian visa is based on positive discrimination targeting and prioritising those in acute need of protection. Therefore biased, hyperbolic and sometimes uninformed political and media debates surrounding the inability of refugees to integrate into Australian society miss the point (Stephen, 2003). That is to say, refugees who are resettled in Australia and students with a refugee background in particular need extensive support that will address their life trajectories and specific needs but also acknowledge their resilience.

Rather than lamenting the inability to integrate some refugee groups from specific countries into Australia, there is a need to tap into the wealth of knowledge and experiences that exist in Australia about acknowledging coexistence of different cultures. Australia is recognised as one of the most culturally and linguistically diverse nations in the world (Welch, 2007), with
28.2% of Australia’s estimated resident population (6.7 million people) born overseas.⁷ Australia as a country hosts great diversity in terms of culture and knowledge, making it a highly multi-cultural society.

There is no humanitarian education program policy addressing access to higher education for students with a refugee background. Scholars have however highlighted that the current research priority for Australian tertiary education is access for educationally disadvantaged students. For instance, Onsando (2013, p. 79) describes it as ‘social inclusion’ and argues that this policy direction is assumed to give opportunities to students with a refugee background to access high education. In Australia, it is held that ‘integration and social inclusion for refugee background students are achieved through education and training’ (National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2010, p. 13). According to Peacock, Sellar, and Lingard (2014) ‘the current national education reforms in the Australian schooling and higher education sectors have prioritised efforts to reduce educational disadvantage’ (p. 377). This is well explained in the recent evaluation of the success and failures of the social inclusion policy, herein referred to as the equity framework for higher education- A Fair Chance for All.

In 1990, the Australian Government developed a student equity framework for higher education. Within the framework, known as A Fair Chance for All, the Australian Government declared that: ‘all Australians should have the opportunity to participate successfully in higher education’ (Harvey, Burnheim, & Brett, 2016, p. v), and that this objective could be met by ‘changing the balance of the student population to reflect more closely the composition of society as a whole’ (Department of Education Employment and Training - DEET, 1990). Central to this vision was the establishment of six identified student equity groups: ‘1) people from low socioeconomic backgrounds; 2) Indigenous Australians; 3) people from regional and remote areas; 4) people with disabilities; 5) people from non-English speaking backgrounds; and 6) women in non-traditional areas’ (Harvey et al., 2016, p.v.). Participation targets, funding allocations and policy decisions would then soon follow the designation of these groups. These five categories continue to be the same after more than 25 years.

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In policy analysis, it can only be assumed that students with a refugee background have been subsumed under the Non English Speaking Background (NESB) category. Consequently, to place these groups under the rubric of NESB is ‘to overlook the specific history and situation that the various refugee background communities face, both with regard to their specific needs in terms of settlement and social inclusion, as well as the ways in which their diverse histories differently position them vis-à-vis their participation in higher education’ (Terry, et al., 2016, p. 5). Refugee background students have been an invisible group at policy level with their distinct learning profiles homogenized under ‘a one size fits all’ approach (Naidoo et al., 2015, p. 9). Scholars continue to advocate for ‘an overall program that is underpinned by an institutional policy framework, principles that recognize and celebrate the diversity of refugees, development of links and communication between refugee support services, refugee community members and the institutions and finally availability of resources’ (Ben-Moshe et al., 2008, p. 8).

Last but not least is the current broad agenda of government and university partnership to change tertiary participation rates by widening participation through a network of policies, including some that might be local to particular sites. The now ten-year old Bradley Review of Australian Higher Education (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008) made recommendations aimed at promoting inclusiveness of educationally disadvantaged groups in Australia and all universities are now implementing widening participation policies. The Bradley review recommendation (4) calls for: ‘an increase in the overall attainment rate to 40% for 25–34-year olds by 2025, and to increase the participation rate of low-SES students to 20% by 2020’ (Bradley et al., 2008, p. 45). Naidoo et al. (2015) highlight that while ‘many students in the low SES category are of refugee or migrant background’ (p. 5), refugee background students might present more complex challenges in their education that need specific policies to address them.

In addition to a fair start for all and widening participation policies, at tertiary level the policy on Higher Education Participation and Partnership Programme (HEPPP) was introduced in 2010 as a response to the Bradley Review. This policy aimed at increasing and reviving student equity by funding programs that were developed by different universities, and
sometimes across universities. This policy was aimed at building the educational aspirations and achievement of low-SES students. 

In trying to position refugee background students into this policy network, I argue that since Australia admits humanitarian refugees on a permanent residence visa category subclass 200 allowing them full access to government services including education (Ager & Strang, 2008), it can be concluded that refugee background students should benefit from the same policy recommendations and reviews. However, this does not erase the fact that the complexity and difficulties students with a refugee background bring with them demand specific policies to address them.

I will also argue that while there are some good Australian Government policy initiatives that have been put in place to support students with a refugee background, much of the support is directed to refugee background students upon their arrival. For instance, upon their arrival in Australia, refugees benefit from services offered under the ‘Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS) like enrolling children in school or Intensive English Centres and enrolling adults in the Adult Migration English Program (AMEP)’ (Community Relations Commission for a Multicultural NSW, 2006, p. 46). Most of the refugee background students arriving in Australia take English classes for a period of six to twelve months.

Critically, the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP), which is available for immigrants over 18 years of age, or English as a Second Language for New Arrivals (ESL-NA) program, which is available for those under 18, are short term interventions that take 6-12 months. However, several scholars have noted that it takes up to seven years to acquire the English proficiency necessary to function in Australian classrooms and even longer for some learners with interrupted schooling (Brown et al., 2006).

Other support services are provided, for example, by religious organizations in the non-government and not-for-profit sectors. These are increasingly deployed to deliver services ranging from school trips and uniforms to professional development and therapeutic

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interventions (Sidhu & Taylor, 2007) and all scholars are in agreement about the need for training volunteers and support workers for the important next step towards countering marginalisation and exclusion. These require ongoing vigilance, community and partnership arrangements between schools, government and nongovernment agencies (Terry et al., 2016).

The implementation of these programs does not happen without challenges. At the university level, conflicting ideas emerge in the efforts to increase access to tertiary education among low SES students. Naidoo (2004, p. 459) shows that: ‘the field of higher education is in fact not a product of total consensus, but the product of a permanent conflict’ and ‘despite the basic commonality of interests and values amongst universities and the social actors within them…there is never consensus or unanimity… but rather an ongoing state of conflict and tension’ (Peacock et al., 2014, p. 381). In addition to implementing policy initiatives, the corresponding education reforms cause ‘reform fatigue’ as program after program is introduced to combat persistent poor relative performances among students with a refugee background (Windle & Miller, 2013, p. 197).

In summary, scholars suggest that low SES students and refugee background students are often placed in the middle between policy makers and implementers. In doing so, specific needs for the success of low socio-economic status students in their educational pathways remain at stake and at the mercy of the two parties. Ultimately, researchers suggest that there is a need for research studies to identify durable and effective programs to support the needs of individual refugee background students. There is also a need to convince policy makers and advocates to ask respective governments to improve the support available for students with a refugee background in their communities. Universities in New South Wales, for example, have a Special Interest Group (SIG) that is facilitating meetings with representatives from higher education institutions to develop scholarships targeting existing and potential students from refugee backgrounds in NSW.10 With this in mind, the next section explores specific barriers to education for African students with a refugee background in Australian tertiary education.

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10 Refugee Education – NSW Special Interest Group (SIG) Terms of Reference.
3.4 Literature highlighting barriers to education for refugee background students

In this section I discuss the barriers to tertiary education for refugee background students by reviewing the work of different scholars. Australian tertiary education is offered both at university where students study towards an associate degree, diploma and above, and at TAFE where students acquire skills, knowledge and attitudes for work and graduate with certificates and diplomas (Bradley et al., 2008; Onsando, 2013). African students with a refugee background may have only had full access to primary education and intermittent access to secondary education. In most African countries the experience is that the global endeavour that funds education ‘invests mostly in universal access to basic education (primary and sometimes secondary) through the UN Millennium Development Goals and Education for All (EFA) initiatives’ (Williams et al., 2015, p. 932). Therefore, in the context of Africa, tertiary education is an individual family responsibility with only a few high performing students acquiring government study loans at universities. The other challenge in Africa is that the global target for all children to complete a full cycle of primary and secondary education is often hampered and interrupted by civil war and conflicts (Miller et al., 2005; Olliff & Couch, 2005). Therefore most African students with a refugee background arrive in Australia before acquiring tertiary education.

Students with a refugee background have come to Australia with a host of challenges that impact on their education. These challenges range from sociocultural dissonances, distress due to personal histories, academic and financial challenges and experiences of social exclusion (Earnest et al., 2010; Joyce et al., 2010; Onsando, 2013). In their pursuit of education, these students have been exposed to unfamiliar pedagogical practices that ignore their personal histories and sociocultural backgrounds. Additionally, they have experienced racial discrimination (Onsando, 2009; Onsando, 2013); Onsando & Billett, 2009). Despite the challenges, some scholars have applauded the motivation and aspirations to acquire education exhibited by this cohort of students. For instance, Earnest et al. (2014) state that ‘despite multiple difficulties involved in commencing and completing tertiary education, the dedication and resilience of these students in education is indisputable’ (p. 172). Lived experiences of refugee background students in higher education attest to their capacities and skills of adaptation, resilience, aptitude and a willingness to look forward (McMahon, 2007; Schoorman & Bogotch, 2010; Shah, 2008). Therefore, what refugee background students
require to transition to higher education is some level of support targeting their individual needs.

3.4.1 Barriers to education resulting from prior life experiences

Prior life experiences dictate the way humanitarian refugees acquire and access their education. Mundy and Dryden-Peterson (2011) say ‘the situation of refugees is unique in that they confront uncertainty related to the duration and location of their exile in addition to structural constraints imposed by the host governments that circumscribe how they imagine and plan for the future’ (2011, p. 87). Francis (2008) indicates that ‘many refugee background students have faced interrupted schooling leaving them with limited capacity to manage the demands in terms of quality and standards in the mainstream schools in Australia’ (p. 310). Prior life experiences affect resettlement and integration in host communities although resettlement processes also come with other barriers and challenges for refugee background students.

Prior life experiences are characterised by civil war and losses. These experiences have impacted differently on students with a refugee background although most of them show characteristics of being: ‘ill-educated, disoriented and having lived in shockingly deprived conditions’ (Hughes, 2002, p. 36). In the same vein, educational programming for students with a refugee background in transit countries is shaped by broader politics, whereby ‘UNHCR’s preference for repatriation often imposes the curriculum and language of instruction of the home country even in protracted conflict settings despite repeated calls from practitioners for a curriculum that faces both ways’ (Sinclair, 2001, p.80 ).

Prior life experiences for refugee background students impact on their present and future aspirations. These experiences create barriers to successful transition to tertiary education in Australia (Bartlett and Ghaffar, 2013; Naidoo et al., 2015; Onsando, 2013). Some of the prior life experiences include ‘forced displacement, significant difference in teaching pedagogy, politicization of refugee education and the unclear individual and economic development goals attached to schooling’ Waters & LeBlanc, 2005, p.130). For Onsando and Billett (2009, p. 81), prior life experiences are also called ‘pre-mediated’ and they serve to shape how individuals make sense of what they experience, that is, ‘how they construe and construct their subsequent experiences’. In other words, refugee background students interpret and
engage with what they subsequently encounter in Australia based on their prior life experiences from Africa.

Prior life experiences impact on all three phases of the journey: pre-displacement, transit countries and resettlement in Australia. In other words, these experiences emerge from the complete ‘refugee cycle’ (Audebert & Mohamed, 2010, p. 92); that is, from flight through to the day when a solution to displacement is found. Thus any study on tertiary education for refugee background students should not underplay the social processes through which migration and education interact (Rao & Yuen 2007). Scholars have concluded that prior life experiences have made schooling in Australia very difficult for refugee background students, decreasing the likelihood of successful transition to tertiary study which many were hoping to undertake (Cassity & Gow, 2005). Such experiences may intensify the impact of discomforting and uninvited experiences encountered by African students with a refugee background.

3.4.2 Barriers to education in the post resettlement experiences

Upon arriving in Australia and enrolling in school for the first time, the initial prospect of attending school or of achieving education success in Australia is exciting for students with a refugee background. ‘It is common for these students to declare strong ambitions to become engineers, doctors, nurses, teachers and the like; however, as they go along their path in education several challenges start to emerge and only few are able to sustain the journey’ (Brace, 2001, p.93). In their study, Khawaja et al. (2008, p. 503) found that barriers to education in post-resettlement included ‘a lack of environmental mastery, financial difficulties, social isolation and the impact of perceived racism’. For Shakespeare-Finch and Wickham (2010, p. 33), barriers included ‘a lack of survival needs, disease, and the lack of security and safety, racism and racial discrimination, employment difficulties, financial difficulties, and inadequate/inappropriate assistance, [and] difficulties with the English language for refugees’.

English language learning in post-resettlement is vital for attending school and entering tertiary education, yet these levels require a much higher level of proficiency than many students of refugee backgrounds have acquired. Poor levels of English skills create a substantial barrier to education and also limit employment options (Brown et al., 2006;
Hatoss et al., 2012). Scholars have found that language courses provided on arrival through the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS) do not adequately prepare potential refugee students for university study (Joyce et al., 2010, p. 95). In addition to lacking English language proficiency, students also lacked ‘Australian cultural knowledge’ (Brown et al., 2006). Such knowledge includes Australian current affairs, unfamiliarity with teaching techniques involving use of videos and group work, and lack of complex skills required for learning such as listening, summarizing and note-taking (Windle & Miller, 2013). At the school level, refugee background students often show lack of ‘topic-specific vocabulary of academic subjects, social understandings of how to be in the classroom, and learning strategies to process content’ (Windle & Miller, 2013, p. 178). According to Naidoo (2010b) ‘upon their arrival in Australia, many of these refugee students are placed in classrooms that are age appropriate rather than appropriate to their academic level and this increases the pressure on both students and school officials as both have to produce passing scores on standardized tests to achieve high school success’ (p. 140). For Ferfolja et al. (2011) ‘upon enrolling in high school, refugee students are required to negotiate the Australian education system; developing social networks, familiarizing oneself with schooling cultures and practices, and negotiating one’s progression through these’ (p. 4). Weekes, Phelan, Macfarlane, Pinson & Francis (2011) state that ‘most secondary schools, in particular, are busy places with each student having multiple teachers for different subjects and moving from room to room in a day, this becomes challenging for these refugee background students who have not grown up in this type of education system’ (p. 312). Matthews (2008), in her study on refugee schooling and settlement, talks about Africans and Middle Eastern refugee students and highlights two reasons why their education is of concern:

[F]irst because we [Australians] know little about the historical and cultural backgrounds of new refugees and the effects of pre- and post-displacement factors such as interrupted schooling, lack of literacy in mother tongue, trauma, torture, migrant status and reception, racialisation, acculturation and resilience; and, second, because English as a Second language (ESL) instruction and support are currently under-funded and poorly resourced. (Matthews, 2008, p. 31)

Therefore barriers to education during post-resettlement in Australia are not only the result of individual student challenges but are additionally, institutional. The school system in Australia does not provide the flexibility needed to address the specific needs of refugee background students. Thus in response to different needs presented by different categories of refugee background students, ‘schools and government departments experience an ongoing sense of crisis as to how to respond to the speed and extent of the changes in
lecture/classrooms’ (Windle & Miller, 2013, p. 197). As a result, institutions become the central focus for finding remedies to the challenges students with a refugee background face.

Teaching and learning cultures, belief systems and values have been noted as barriers to acquiring tertiary education for refugee background students. The methodology of teaching and learning in Australia for example focuses on visual-verbal approaches (Onsando & Billett, 2009). This is different from the African way of teaching and learning which is predominantly verbal. Earnest et al. (2010, p. 163) in their study on whether universities are responding to the needs of refugee background students, highlight that in Africa the teaching and learning approach is teacher-centred (no tutorials, group work or presentation assessments are involved), thus promoting ‘spoon-feeding’ as opposed to the preferred Australian mode of teaching which is student-centred, where students are forced to be more independent learners, do more individual research, are assessed in a variety of ways and need to be personally organised. All these differences account for the challenges students with a refugee background face in their desire to acquire tertiary education.

Amidst all other barriers, precarious financial situations for many refugee-background families become a barrier to transitioning to tertiary education. Students with a refugee background in Australia frequently take up supportive roles at home that hinder their progress to tertiary education. They have to combine schooling with domestic and family responsibilities (Wilkinson & Langat, 2012), have ‘moral obligations towards extended family members remaining in Africa and have to manage competing demands between study and work’ (Joyce et al., 2010, p. 85). Thus there is need to address barriers that hinder these students from transitioning to tertiary education, which call for a way forward.

3.4.3 Ways-forward in breaking barriers to education

As a result of these barriers, some scholars have recommended a number of service changes; for instance: ‘encouraging more intensive and flexible delivery of programmes to better meet the educational needs of these students’ (Olliff & Couch, 2005, p. 42). At tertiary levels, Naidoo et al. state that:

There are no formal structured programs addressing academic, literacy and learning needs and the few available programs tend to be ad hoc, short term and provided under the more general umbrella of student equity services. [Thus their report recommends] provision of extra support, clear pathways programs, special
consideration, effective school-university communication, and creating a positive word of mouth culture. (2015, p. 10)

Educational institutions are the settings in which many of the hopes of students with a refugee background materialize. Students from refugee backgrounds find educational institutions a safe environment: ‘they enjoy learning and the routine that educational institutions provide’ (Earnest et al., 2010, p. 156). Policies and programs suggest that the management of refugees is premised on developing sets of horizontal and vertical partnerships between the different levels of government, with community and with private sector organisations (Sidhu & Taylor, 2007, p. 293). Therefore, according to Hatoss et al. (2012, p. 19) ‘if western countries are to fully settle and support the integration of refugee-background migrants then educational institutions, including schools and government agencies, community groups and the community at large, need to play a part’. So institutions like universities and schools cannot do it on their own but rather need to work with different support sectors in the form of partnerships.

A solution to barriers that has been suggested is the training of teachers and support workers on the challenges refugee background students face. Naidoo (2010a, p. 47) suggests that ‘when teachers have not been sufficiently trained to understand the difficulties and experiences of refugee children, they frequently misinterpret the students and their families’ culturally inappropriate attempts to succeed in their new environment’. In particular, teachers meet difficulties balancing expectations for subject content learning and the language and literacy needs of their students (Windle & Miller, 2013, p. 199). In their practice, teachers of refugee-background students tend to prioritize welfare concerns, classroom management, and less prominently, preparation of students for examinations (Windle & Miller, 2013, p. 208).

Transformative education has been highlighted as the way forward in fostering education for refugee background students. Onsando and Billett (2009) suggest that education in host countries needs to be transforming in order to address the needs of refugee background students. Refugee background students seek to learn, live and work in their newly and quite distinct adopted country. Yet, the provision of a transformative education requires a clear understanding of how both the students’ socio-cultural heritage and refugee life experiences may affect their learning activities, and how learning experiences can productively assist these students to reach particular learning goals. (Onsando and Billet, 2009, p. 82)
Institutions however are cautioned not to look at African students with a refugee background as a homogenous group, given ‘they are difficult to classify in terms of identity, language, community and settlement needs’ (Cassity & Gow, 2005, p. 51).

By and large, it is important to remember that these students are resilient, have intellectual curiosity and a high motivation to use their education to give something back to their families, to their countries and culture (Wilkinson & Langat, 2012). Acknowledging the willingness among refugee background students to perform and do well in school remains a responsibility of institutions, schools and individuals who are willing to support these students as they are exploring new environments and opportunities. The next section explores resilience as an enabling factor for students with a refugee background in their transitions to tertiary education.

3.5 Moving from a deficit model to strength based model

As evidenced from the above literature, it is clear that there are two distinct groups of scholars who study the education of students with a refugee background. That is, those who have focused on the academic underachievement of students with a refugee background, highlighting what is lacking among them—thus a deficit approach (Brown et al., 2006; Harris et al., 2015; Miller et al., 2005)—and those who have examined the achievement of these students using a strength based approach whereby they appreciate experiences of refugee background students from their past, present and future (Brough et al., 2003; Hutchinson & Dorsett, 2012). This study too, has taken a strength based approach in the form of educational resilience although the academic underachievement for this cohort of students has been acknowledged.

By definition, ‘a strengths-based philosophical approach stands in opposition to a deficit approach because it does not focus on a person’s so-called shortcomings, deficits or dysfunction, nor does it label or disempower a person’ (McCaskey cited in Hutchinson & Dorsett, 2012, p. 66). A strengths perspective draws on a ‘power with’ approach rather than ‘power over’ approach, viewing refugees as the experts on their own lives and situations (Hutchinson & Dorsett, 2012, p. 66). Scholars with this perspective believe that labelling these students as ‘refugees’ has a negative connotation that holds them back in life, restricting them to a life as a refugee rather than including them as equal members in society. As a result of this labelling, refugee people can experience ‘internalised oppression’ (Australian

The deficit framing model according to Harris et al. (2015) covers:

low educational expectations, low tolerance of educators for different needs, inability to see education success or career-track options where they exist, attenuated migrant families who can’t quite understand, support or assist their aspirational children who would like to achieve western educational context. (p. 1228)

In the deficit model, students with a refugee background are viewed as ‘tabula rasa with no history, past experience, culture, anticipation skills…refugees in general are treated as if they are starting from scratch and this denies them agency’ (Hatoss & Huijser, cited in Harris et al. 2015, p. 1234). In other words, refugees are not looked at as people who have a history and past experiences that might shape their present. Therefore, in view of the two models, there is a need to focus on refugee background students and their strengths and what keeps them motivated instead of researching only the challenges that they face.

In this context of shifting the focus from a deficit to a strength based model, reference has been made to different definitions of resilience. Eades (2013) discusses resilience for students with a refugee background from a strength-based position whereby resilient individuals, families and communities are seen in relation to their ‘capacities, talents, competencies, possibilities, visions, values and hopes; rather than through their deficiencies, pathologies or disorders’ (2013, p. 3). In the same vein, resilience is also cumulatively built in an individual through testing times in their life experiences, and this corresponds strongly to how Wilson and Arvanitakis (2014) explain it: ‘resilience is more than an ability to simply survive…resilience is accumulated and as an accumulating set of resources that allows individuals and communities to make sense of the world around them, and to adopt, to adapt and even thrive’ (p. 68). For Gartland (2009) resilience is ‘a process by which individuals draw on personal characteristics and resources in their environment to enable them to successfully negotiate adversity’ (p. 9). As such, resilience is not seen as a static characteristic of an individual, but rather as a dynamic process across contexts and throughout the lifespan.

Students with a refugee background can easily be associated with challenges and deficits more than their strengths. Pathologies and deficiencies in their lives seem to be more visible than their competencies, capabilities and talents. Reivich (2002) says that: ‘[i]t is natural that when we hear stories of deprivation in the early years, we know intuitively that these
children/students are disadvantaged and they are at high risk of failing to achieve later in life’ (p. 16). On the contrary, hardships and adversity can also build resilience. Interpreted with the lens of African refugee experiences, resilience would then mean an ability to confront adversity and still find hope and meaning in life. The next section highlights studies that have been carried out with regard to how students with a refugee background have exhibited resilience amidst adversity.

3.5.1 Literature on educational resilience

Resilience has predominantly been defined from a psychological perspective as ‘a person’s ability to bounce back following adversity and challenge and connotes inner strength, competence, optimism, flexibility and the ability to cope effectively when faced with adversity’ (American Psychological Association, 2009, p. 1). Bouncing back following adversity has been defined by some scholars, for example Boss (cited in Luster, Qin, Bates, Johnson, & Rana, 2009) as ‘the ability to regain one’s energy after adversity drains it. It is more than “bouncing back”, which implies regaining the status quo; rather, it means rising above traumatic and ambiguous loss by not letting them immobilize and living well despite them’ (p. 207). According to Boss (2006), ambiguous loss is particularly stressful because of the uncertainty surrounding the loss, and it has resulted in depression, hopelessness, and immobilization in some individuals (p. 203). Resilient individuals recognize that there are things that they have no control over and find ways to accept this situation (Luster et al., 2009, p. 204). By contrast, educationalists define resilience as a ‘process rather than a fixed inner personal characteristic’ (Hutchinson & Dorsett, 2012, p. 60).

In this study educational resilience is defined as a process that brings together the intersectionality of history, social and political structures in addition to individual biography. Identifying education resilience is made possible in this study by use of life history narrative methodology which provides a platform for participants to speak about their experiences and for the researcher to understand the participants’ life histories.

3.5.2 Education resilience for refugee background students

Despite the difficulties involved, refugee background students often display remarkable resilience and capacity to learn. They find ways to negotiate their adverse circumstances, ‘searching for better education, supporting their families and trying to pursue and define a
successful career path to expand their vocational options’ (Abkhezr et al., 2015, p. 74). Moreover, Naidoo et al. observes that ‘while refugee background students often encounter significant barriers to their educational achievements, many are highly resilient and hold strong aspirations for their future, particularly in terms of their own educational achievements and attainment’ (Naidoo et al., 2014, p. 23). Likewise, Grandi states that ‘refugees have skills, ideas, hopes and dreams… They are also tough, resilient and creative, with the energy and drive to shape their own destinies, given the chance (Grandi, 2016, p. 1). We need to be cautious therefore when interpreting deficit discourses about refugee underachievement in school. By drawing from the ideas of different scholars, I will show that refugee background students are often successful learners who make great strides in their personal and academic growth (Cranitch, 2008), making it important to recognize and value the life skills, cultural understandings and potential benefits they might offer Australian communities (Olliff & Couch, 2005). Many students with a refugee background are highly motivated and see education as ‘the most important aspect of their life as it is a source of hope and future’ (Chegwidden & Thompson, 2008, p. 5). In fact, they frequently demonstrate enormous courage and strength (Tiong et al., 2006, p. 8) and often go on to thrive in their new country and surroundings (Hutchinson & Dorsett, 2002, p. 58). Thus Hewson, (2006, p.46). says that:

It is important that being a refugee is seen as only one part of a person’s identity. Refugee students are more than ‘just’ refugees. The term, particularly when applied to young people, connotes subjects who are perceived as at risk or as ‘victims’ – understanding that is reinforced through media representation. Such representations fail us to recognize the strength, fortitude and resilience of these young people…Refugee students are survivors … they have histories which have brought them to Australia.

Recent studies also provide sound evidence that ‘under similar socio-economic circumstances immigrants fare much the same in their educational achievements and attainment as any non-immigrant student (White & Glick, 2009, p. 174). Therefore, ‘examining the qualities of resilience and resourcefulness that young people bring with them to their schooling, out of often devastating personal experience, reminds us of the importance of the student’s hopes and aspirations for the future in the brave endeavour of their education’ (Hoddinott, 2011, p. vii).

### 3.5.3 Enabling factors to educational resilience

Hutchinson and Dorsett (2012) discuss three major enabling factors: ‘personal qualities, support and religion’. For example, they say that trauma and trauma counselling have been
given attention at the expense of resilience and coping strengths, ‘which may in fact contribute to or prolong the alienation of refugee people and impede their inclusion into Australian communities’ (2012, p. 56). According to Brough et al. (2003, p. 194) ‘refugees hold with them a past involving persecution or fear of persecution. Yet refugees also embody hope for a brighter future. Refugees, perhaps more than any other group, confront the challenges of the present and future in the context of a tumultuous past’. We need to look at refugee background students beyond the label of ‘refugee’. This is because our gaze can be restricted to transitions in lives rather than whole lives, to victims rather than survivors, to illness rather than health (Brough et al., 2003, p. 195). It is essential then, that we do not make assumptions about who refugees are and what problems they face. The only way we can achieve this is by listening to refugees themselves, and by attempting to understand their issues within their frame of reference. Therefore resilience in this case looks at the whole person and their entire experience as well as how they interpret what they have experienced, rather than focusing on what is missing in the individual’s life.

The enabling factors are directly related to the disabling factors and three major ones that have been highlighted by different scholars include: 1. ‘talking with friends, family, counsellors, medical practitioners and engaging in activities like sports’ (Brough et al., 2003, p. 204); 2. ‘reliance on religious beliefs, cognitive strategies such as reframing the situation, relying on their inner resources, and focusing on future wishes, aspirations and social support’ (Khawaja et al., 2008)—this factor is complemented by Shakespeare-Finch and Wickham (2010) who say that religious beliefs and practices provide a number of coping strategies by enduring the adversities of the ‘present’ for the reward of a ‘better future’; 3. ‘maintaining attachments with caring and supportive people, such as family members, mentors, neighbours, and people in the community help refugee background students cope successfully with loss’ (Luster et al., 2009, p. 203). For instance in their study Shakespeare-Finch and Wickham (2010, p. 26) show that ‘support from family, the Sudanese community, and Australian friends’ ‘assisted participants in adapting by providing a forum for discussion of problems and a distraction from stressors’.

It can be deduced from the above therefore, that education resilience for students with a refugee background is multifaceted and linked to several support systems like institutional support, family support, individual support, faith and religion. Irrespective of the source of support, individual life experiences from home country, through transit/temporary
resettlement to resettlement in Australia shapes students with a refugee background and their resilience and aspirations. Students with a refugee background emerge from the ordeal and whims of life that shape them into people who are able to handle life experiences as they unfold. Important to remember is that while some prevail, others struggle in the face of adversity in simply trying to make ends meet.

3.6 Conclusion

The literature in this chapter has covered the policy framework impacting on education for refugee background students in Australia, highlighting the enabling and the disabling factors in the transition to tertiary education. Evidence generated from the literature shows that refugee background students are not homogeneous and that students themselves form two major categories: those with some level of education and training prior to arrival, and those who have had interrupted schooling such that Australia is the only place where they are exposed to formal and systematic education. At the same time, the literature has cautioned that there is a set of prior life experiences including protracted refugee camp and transient journeys and experiences within the complete refugee cycle, that act as barriers impeding students with a refugee background from accessing and succeeding in tertiary education. An intersection between educational resilience factors/indicators and life history narrative research methodology has been developed for this study in order to articulate the efforts and the energies these students show in their pursuit of higher education. To conclude, the literature suggests that refugee background students are resilient in the sense that notwithstanding the challenges they have encountered in their past, they still remain focused on achieving their aspirations in tertiary education.
Chapter Four: Theoretical Lenses

4.1 Introduction

The goal of this chapter is to examine the educational disadvantage of African students with a refugee background through the lens of post-colonial, critical race and critical event theories. Using a theoretical lens helps to explain situations and relationships that African students with a refugee background have encountered in their lived experiences. Maclean (2015, p. xii) says: ‘if theory is to be useful then it needs to have a clear link to experience’. I also use the analogy of a tool kit because I do not employ one theory to explain students’ lived experiences but three interrelated theories (post-colonial, critical race and critical event). Each theory in the tool kit addresses a specific component in the life history narrative of my research participants. For example, post-colonial theory tracks historical events of colonialism and how they contributed to the contemporary refugee crisis. Critical race theory analyses different injustices that have resulted from inequalities and from the creation of the binary separation between ‘superior’ and ‘inferior races’. The third theory in this tool kit is critical event theory which highlights the major turning points that have impacted on the life of my research participants in their transient journeys. Critical event theory has helped me to organise the narratives of my research participants, tracking experiences in their life journeys from home country, through transit countries to resettlement in Australia.

4.2 Why the ‘tool kit’

It is evident in the academic literature, media, and government publications that African students with a refugee background are facing numerous challenges in their educational transitions. Although these students are struggling in many ways, negative assumptions and deficit stereotypes in media and other publications have cast a shadow over their educational resilience. The theories in this chapter provide multiple viewpoints on educational resilience for refugee background students in order to grasp the process that underlies refugee background students’ lived experiences, highlighting the need to see both their limitations as well as their strengths in pursuit of tertiary education in Australia.
Post-colonial, critical race, and critical event theories have served as an effective tool kit for this endeavour. These theories show the historical, social, and educational worldviews that have impacted on refugee background students, not only in their education; they also sharpen our ability to think logically, creatively, and with a good deal of insight about refugee background experiences. Tyson (1999) highlights how the range of critical theories complement each other to challenge perceptions, stereotypes and other limitations:

Critical theories are not isolated entities, completely different from one another, separated into tidy bins, like the tubs of tulips, daffodils, and carnations we see at the florist. It would be more useful to think of theories, to continue the metaphor, as mixed bouquets, each of which can contain a few of the flowers that predominate in or that serve different purposes in other bouquets. (p. 6)

Critical theory becomes an adaptable learning tool for interpreting research problems in the most different ways. To this end, I will now turn to the relationship between post-colonial, critical race and critical event theories to provide an understanding of educational resilience among refugee background students.

To begin with, post-colonial and critical race theories have their historical origins in colonialism. In this study, colonialism emerges as the main cause/source of wars and people’s displacement in the continent of Africa. This is because colonialism ushered in divisionism in societies among colonial states. For instance, Zamudio et al. (2011) state that:

The colonisation of the Americas, Africa and the Asiatic world by the European powers set the foundation for contemporary racial inequality. These colonial processes divided the world between conquered and colonizer, master and slave, white and non-white i.e. other. (p. 4)

In education, students with a refugee background have encountered these binary divisions impacting on their lives as ‘an outgrowth of a history of oppression’ (Zamudio et al., 2011, p. 4). These divisions are founded and explained in the process of colonialism. That is to say, ‘colonialism is the determining marker of history’ (McClintock, 1994, p. 293). This statement calls for an extensive debate that is beyond the scope of this chapter. However, I will highlight what is most important for this particular study. Colonialism in this study is defined according to Williams and Chrisman (1994, p. 2) as: ‘the conquest and direct control of other people's land. …’ The process, intentions, means and the end of colonialism can be made explicit by examining the political, historical and economic contexts of colonial countries. The colonial phase, particularly the rapid acquisition of territories by European nations in the late nineteenth century (most famously in the 'Scramble for Africa'), represents the need for
access to new (preferably captive) markets and sources of raw materials, as well as the desire to deny these territories to other competitor nations. From another perspective, McClintock (1994) shows how colonialism was more than the exploitation of resources and labour of colonised countries and included: ‘systematic interference in the capacity of the appropriated culture to organize its dispensations of power’ (p. 295). The concept of ‘power’ is important for this study because much of the conflict in Africa is politically motivated based on the desire by specific individuals to have control over available minimal resources. All these interacting forces that define colonialism, can be used to explain the educational challenges encountered by refugee background students in home countries, through transit countries to resettlement in Australia. In order to make this explicit, I will use the example of Rwanda in the Great Lakes region of Africa, which witnessed the appropriation of power during colonialism. Ahluwalia’s account of Rwanda puts into context the effects of colonialism and the clear divide among Rwandans brought about by colonisers.

The colonial powers in Rwanda—the Germans and the Belgians—disrupted the balance that existed among the Rwandan ethnic groups. The colonisers compartmentalized the Tutsi and Hutu on explicitly racist assumptions whereby the Tutsi were considered to be more intelligent because they appeared to be ‘more European’. By utilizing such racist assumptions, Rwanda was administered through the Tutsi monarchy and an elaborate system of chiefs. ‘The Tutsi were privileged in every aspect of the colonial state. …The colonial policy of ‘divide and rule’ however ossified and heightened differences that fundamentally altered the manner in which the two groups viewed each other’ (Ahluwalia, 2012, p. 191).

Across the globe, records indicate that historically, attempts have been made to oppose such divisions with limited success; for example the 1950s wars for independence in Africa and the civil rights revolutionary movements in America are examples of people of colour fighting for their rights and identities (Omi & Winant, 1994). Therefore, post-colonial and critical race theories are relevant in understanding the historical and contemporary unprecedented movements of people across borders in developing countries and most especially in Africa. Zamudio et al. continue to say that ‘the process of colonialism did not end with formal independence but … the structures and effects of colonialism continue to endure’ (Zamudio et al., 2011, p. 35). Thus the tool kit used in this study brings together post colonial theory and critical race theory with critical event theory in explaining the tensions that existed among African states and the cause of peoples’ forced displacement. In the next
section, I will explain the relationships between the three theories. The intention of the theoretical tool kit is to elaborate the educational disadvantages that African students with a refugee background faced as a result of displacement and loss of sovereignty/ownership of their respective home countries.

In the theoretical tool kit, post-colonial theory takes into account the historical realities of the European imperial invasions into the continent of Africa from the fifteenth century onwards (chapter two of this study). This theory has focused on the causes of forced displacement in colonial and post-colonial Africa. Critical race theory has been used to interpret racial inequalities from a historical perspective. This theory reveals racialisation as one of the causes of conflict and subsequent refugee crisis. Critical event theory has been used to organize and articulate the progressive events that have defined the challenges in Africa particularly, tracking the transient journeys of my research participants. It is imperative to understand this theoretical tool kit by making reference to the tenets that inform each theory. I will begin with post colonial theory.

4.3 Post-Colonial Theory (PCT)
In this study, post-colonial theory has been used to understand the status of Africans in the new world order; ‘highlighting two antagonistic cultures, that of the colonizer and that of the indigenous community which produces an unstable sense of the self’ (Tyson, 1999, p. 403).

In using post-colonial theory, I am interested in an examination of the kinds of knowledge produced by the discourses surrounding the aftermath of colonialism in the troubled regions of Africa, whereby, ‘the object, product, and survivor of this necessarily incomplete process is the postcolonial subject’ (Pillow, 2012, p. 46). The theory is used to ‘analyse, explain, and respond to the cultural legacies of colonialism and imperialism, to the human consequences of controlling a country and establishing settlers for the economic exploitation of the native people and their land’ (Dash, 2016, p. 48). In terms of scope, post-colonial theory involves a discussion about experiences of various kinds. For example:

migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation, difference, race, gender, place and response to the influential master discourse of imperial Europe such as history, philosophy and linguistics and the fundamental experiences of speaking and writing by which all these come into being. (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2006, p. 2)

Post-colonial theory ‘asks for justice, seeks to speak to the vast and horrific social and psychological suffering, exploitation, violence and enslavement done to the powerless victims of colonisation around the world’ (Parsons & Harding, 2011, p. 2). It challenges the superiority of the dominant Western perspective and seeks to reposition and empower the marginalized and subordinated ‘Other’ (Smith, 2007). In this chapter I have used the theory to explain the global refugee problem and its impact on tertiary education for African students with a refugee background in Australia. In order to demonstrate the relevance of this theory to this study, I will discuss its tenets.

4.3 Tenets and perspectives of post-colonial theory

Early proponents of the theory include Edward Said (1994), Homi K. Bhabha (1994) and Gayatri Spivak (1996). Concepts and perspectives that define post-colonial theory are presented below:

4.3.1 Alterity /Otherness

The first two interrelated concepts or perspectives of post colonial theory are alterity or otherness. Alterity is derived from Latin meaning ‘the state of being other or different; diversity, otherness. Its English derivatives are alternate, alternative, alternation and alter
ego’ (Ashcroft et al., 1998, p. 11). The Othering concept in post-colonial theory goes beyond refugees and extends to privileged and under-privileged people, bringing in cultural differences, gender differences and other man-made divisions. In education, students with a refugee background are treated as ‘Others’ in relation to the dominant culture. However, Ashcroft, et al. (1998) insist that ‘while [e.g. African students] may be 'Othered' from the colonizers, they are also different from one another and from their own pasts, and should not be totalized or essentialized’ (1998, p. 4). Some students with a refugee background may be ‘othered’ in educational contexts as ‘Africans’ but they are not homogeneous as a group. In this study African students with a refugee background have been identified as individual persons with different abilities and desires acknowledging their agency and history/identity.

4.3.1.2 Double consciousness

The other tenet of post colonial theory is double consciousness which communicates the way people perceive the world. Post-colonial theorists often describe ‘colonial subjects as having a double consciousness or double vision’ (Ahluwalia, 2012, p. 403); a consciousness or a way of perceiving the world that is divided between two antagonistic cultures, that of the coloniser and that of the indigenous community (Tyson, 1999). Although mixing up two cultures is positively branded as ‘hybridity’ (Ashcroft et al., 1998), its effects on an individual are enormous. In the cases of double consciousness, the culture of the colonised suffers most because colonised people tend to imitate the culture of the colonisers. It is never the other way round given the challenge of superiority and inferiority complexes. Double consciousness becomes relevant in this study because it describes the challenges associated with ‘a sense of belonging’ for students of refugee background in a new culture. Sometimes refugee background students are unsure whether to identify as Africans, Australians or hybrid individuals such as African – Australian. The dilemmas experienced by refugee background students while integrating in the host communities are evidenced in their respective stories (chapter six in this study) and discussed in chapter seven.

4.3.1.3 Hybridity

Hybridity is one of the most widely employed and most disputed terms in post-colonial theory. Hybridity commonly refers to the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonisation. As used in horticulture, the term refers to the cross-breeding of the two species by grafting or cross-pollination to form a third, hybrid species.
Hybridization takes many forms: linguistic, cultural, political, and racial (Bhabha, 1995). Bhabha (1994) analyses the colonizer/colonised relations stressing their interdependence and the mutual construction of their subjectivities. Bhabha contends that all cultural statements and systems are constructed as a space that he calls the ‘third space of enunciation’ (Bhabha, 1994, p. 34). This use of the term has been widely criticized, since it usually implies negating and neglecting the imbalance and inequalities of the power relations it references. Third space is relevant to this study because students with a refugee background enter schools in western education and are exposed to the western curriculum which is a shared social space. Third space theory can show us the uniqueness of refugee background students and the ways current western education policies exclude them.

4.3.1.4 Ambivalence

Ambivalence is used to describe the hesitant nature that exists between colonisers and the colonised. This happens when people demonstrate a simultaneous attraction towards and repulsion from an object, person or action. According to Bhabha (1984), it describes the complex mix of attraction and repulsion that characterises the relationship between colonizer and colonised. The relationship is ambivalent because ‘the colonised subject is never simply and completely opposed to the colonizer.’ (Ashcroft et al., 1998, p. 13). Ashcroft et al. (2013) say that:

The problem for colonial discourse is that it wants to produce compliant subjects who reproduce its assumptions, habits and values – that is, ‘mimic’ the colonizer. But instead it produces ambivalent subjects whose mimicry is never very far from mockery. Ambivalence describes this fluctuating relationship between mimicry and mockery, an ambivalence that is fundamentally unsettling to colonial dominance (p.13).

Bhabha’s argument is that colonial discourse is ambivalent because ‘it never really wants colonial subjects to be exact replicas of the colonizers – this would be too threatening’ (1994, p. 87). There is sufficient evidence from the literature to show that students of refugee background encounter an ambivalent situation when they come into contact with a new culture, education and when seeking employment opportunities. In the new culture they learn to imitate the natives but still hold onto their own culture because of connections to their families. In education they try to integrate but in turn they might become a threat to the domestic students when it comes to competition for the available employment opportunities. In the process, the attraction to belong and the repulsion from the host culture becomes apparent.
4.3.1.5 Mimicry

Extreme ambivalence is manifested in mimicry which makes mimicry an important concept in explaining the binary distinction. Tyson (1999, p. 421) interprets mimicry as a reflection of ‘the attempt of the colonized to be accepted by imitating the dress, behavior, speech, and lifestyle of the colonizers’. Mimicry demonstrates an ambivalent relationship between the colonizer and the colonized: Ashcroft et al., (1998, p.139) explains that mimicry is never successful, rather it results in a ‘blurred copy of the colonizer’ and can be quite threatening.

The binary distinctions between colonizer and colonized created by post-colonial theory, continues to cause an impact at different levels in society. For instance, it is common to read and hear people use these binaries: colonizer/colonized, white/black, civilized/primitive, advanced/retrograde, good/evil, beautiful/ugly, human/bestial, teacher/pupil and doctor/patient.

4.3.1.6 Conclusion

Therefore, following the understanding of the concepts in post colonial theory, I chose the theory for this study because it was helpful to make the international community understand how refugees from Africa continue to struggle with the impact of colonialism. Said (1993) points out that ‘the strengths of post-colonial theory lie in its attempts to grapple with issues of local and regional significance whilst retaining an emancipatory perspective’ (p. 350). It is this task that needs to be confronted when studying students of African refugee background. Post-colonial theory has been relevant to this study because I was able to examine the root causes of people’s displacements and adversity. It is important to mention however that understanding the post-colonial nation state in Africa is challenging because it represents the extraordinary movement of peoples throughout the world. In post-colonial Africa, what has remained after colonization still has an impact on the welfare of Africans and in particular African students of refugee background from the Great Lakes region of Africa and surrounding countries. In the next section, I will discuss critical race theory and its impact on this cohort of students.
4.4 Critical Race Theory (CRT)

4.4.1 Introduction

Critical race theory was a response to the inequalities of our times and it was a threat to the established way of doing things in the twentieth and early twenty-first century. Originating from a tradition of resistance to the unequal and unjust distribution of power and resources in America, critical race theory sought not only to ‘ascertain how society organizes itself along racial lines and hierarchies but to transform it for the better’ (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 12). Critical race theory in this study enables ‘a critique of racism as a system of oppression and exploitation that explores the historic and contemporary constructions and manifestations of race in different societies’ (Preston, 2013, p. 100).

What is important however, is that critical race theorists are ‘committed to re-narrating the dominant racial frame that writes people of colour into the story through consistently negative images that are anointed as facts’ (Leonardo, 2013, p. 20). Critical race theorists use counter storytelling to change the script. Race and racism are real issues that society today is still grappling with both locally and internationally. Critical race theorists view mainstream education as one of the many institutions that ‘both historically and contemporarily serve to reproduce unequal power relations and academic outcomes’ (Zamudio et al., 2011, p. 4).

4.4.2 Race and Racism

In order to internalise the tenets of critical race theory, it is important to deconstruct race and racism first. Given that this study is focused on African students with a refugee background, the definition of racism by Pollock (2008, p. xvii) is particularly relevant. He sees racism as any act that ‘even unwittingly … allows racial inequalities in opportunity as if they are normal and acceptable; or treats people of colour as less worthy or less complex than white people’.

In education, CRT is precisely the intervention that ‘aims to halt racism by highlighting its pedagogical dimensions and affirming an equally pedagogical solution rooted in anti-racism’ (Leonardo, 2013, p. 12). This can be realised by encouraging greater tolerance, understanding and respect for cultural and religious differences, while promoting the values that people share, and striving to build an inclusive nation which offers hope and opportunity (Leonardo, 2013).
Many refugee background students have succumbed to racism in school and have either dropped out of school and other social life activities or not transitioned to tertiary education. Some studies suggest that migrant populations ‘experience significant harassment and discrimination, as well as low quality schooling’ (Bartlett & Ghaffar, 2013, p. 6). Regardless of their level of education, many migrants, especially those who are racially different from the dominant group, encounter ‘varying degrees of prejudice, racism, rejection, or differences’ (Adams & Kirova, 2006, p.4). However, stories of migrants in books and popular movies often portray those refugees who arrive in host countries as:

foreigners and aliens at first, who eventually learn the ropes, assimilate and then become naturalized citizens in the host country. The ideal immigrant quickly sheds his or her ‘foreign’ ways and becomes a true native without a ‘hyphenated’ identity. (Kao, Vaquera, & Goyette, 2013, p. 3)

The challenges that African students with a refugee background face in Australia are best understood by looking at the historical development of race, racism and racialisation. It is a commonly held view that ‘race emerges when social space becomes, or threatens to become, shared’ (Wolfe, 2002, p. 51). Other examples of how racism is evident can be seen in European colonisation of Australian Aboriginal people, African Americans, First Nations people and Brazilians of African origins (Wolfe, 2002).

### 4.4.3 Tenets and constructs of critical race theory

There are five major tenets in critical race theory:

1. Race as a ‘social construct’ which categorises people according to physical features (Osborne, 2002).
2. Differential racialization which means that people in power can racialize people in different ways at different times (Brooks, 2009).
3. Material determinism gives material advantage to the majority race (Pollock, 2008).
5. Intersectionality, a focus on the multidimensional framework such as gender and class (Preston, 2013).

The continued inequalities and injustices in the contemporary world today can be explained using the lens of critical race theory which manifests itself in the above tenets. According to
Taylor, Gillborn, and Ladson-Billings (2009) ‘the assumptions of white superiority are so ingrained in political, legal, and educational structures that they are almost unrecognizable’ (p. 4). This relates to education in that ‘we learn to value the Western literary canon and Eurocentric curriculum as superior to the traditions developed by oppressed groups’ (Zamudio et al., 2011, p. 4). Those very beliefs are also embedded in our education system. Students of colour find themselves tangled in the middle of all these racialized (i.e., race-based) social relationships, structures, institutions, ideologies, and beliefs. Following the summary of its tenets, a definition of critical race theory can be stated as ‘an epistemological and methodological tool, to help analyse the experiences of historically underrepresented populations across their particular educational experiences’ (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 12). In this case, the experiences are those of African students with a refugee background.

4.4.4 CRT Constructs

In addition to the tenets that have been outlined in the previous section, there are three major constructs in critical race theory, namely: interest-convergence, whiteness as a property and counter voice storying.

4.4.4.1 Interest Convergence:

Interest convergence explains why change, when it occurs, is often ineffective. The construct of interest convergence has two dimensions whereby racial equality will be granted when it serves the purpose of those in power but when it threatens those in power, then ‘whites’, out of fear of losing their superior positions, revert to racial inequality. In this case racism as a social construct turns out to be a tool for self defense or for protecting personal interests. According to Malcom X (cited in Zamudio et al., 2011, p 35) those who protect their self-interests using racism ‘don’t eliminate an evil because it is evil or because it’s illegal or because it’s immoral; they eliminate an evil only when it threatens their existence’. In Australia, examples of interest-convergence are evident in the area of economics. For example, Australia accepts skilled migrant workers as part of its immigration program. This interest in skilled workers does not happen in a vacuum, rather, it serves the interest of Australians when these migrants are able fill in the skills gap. Refering to America’s experiences, Zamudio et al., (2011, p.34) says that the ‘interests of whiteness influences the timing and effectiveness…’ the timing and effectiveness happens when whites are determing the skills gaps that can be filled by skilled migrant workers. The interest for nation states to
accommodate refugees however may be twofold: responding to the humanitarian appeal for people in need but also benefiting from the skills and knowledge that refugee background people might bring with them to the host countries.

4.4.4.2 Whiteness as property

Property ownership confers particular rights and privileges; property ownership can be conferred to intangible objects. According to Harris (1993), whiteness has a property value (in terms of rights), with the core characteristic being ‘the maintenance of white privilege and domination’ which is hidden or masked by institutional practices that legitimise racism (1993, p. 715). In today’s world, the law has accorded ‘holders’ of whiteness the same privileges and benefits accorded holders of other types of property, and one of these privileges and benefits of property is the absolute right to exclude (Harris, 1993, p. 731). In this way, high quality education operates to exclude those students who do not have economic means, status and the dominant racial identity. This is how education intersects with race and whiteness as property.

4.4.4.3 Counter storying

One of the greatest contributions of critical race theory is its emphasis on narrative and counter-stories told from the vantage point of the oppressed. Critical race theorists agree that an ‘opposition voice to the dominant or master narrative is an effective tool in making visible the structures, processes and practices that contribute to continued racial inequality’ (Zamudio et al., 2011, p. 5). In education, ‘narratives, testimonies and storytelling from a minority perspective provide educators with a set of tools to challenge the policies and practices that privilege the experiences and the tacit truth of the dominant group’ (Zamudio et al., 2011, p. 6). In this study I have used life history narrative as a platform for the research participants to share their narratives as well as to air their views and perspectives regarding issues of race and racism and how these have impacted their educational pathways. Thus this study has taken the approach of having history narrated from a minority perspective. These stories demonstrate their resilience as opposed to stories by the media and in some government publications indicating their inability to acculturate, integrate and excel in the Australian education system. Counter storytelling therefore demystifies dominant group stories.
Although race is a social construct, its effects are real. Therefore, knowledge learned through examination of racial inequity should be used for social justice and social change. In conclusion, the critical consciousness that develops from understanding the operations of structures of privilege and disadvantage in the lives of students better prepares them to confront and overcome educational and social challenges. This type of understanding allows all students to better appreciate the nuances involved in how their own lives intersect with larger social structures. It also allows students to gain an awareness of how these structures might privilege some over others.

It is clear that in order to address challenges faced by students with a refugee background, I need to employ both post-colonial theory and critical race theory so that their prior life experiences could be understood. Nevertheless since the majority of the experiences highlighted by my research participants originated from their particular historical encounters, critical event theory is also relevant to understand how each event becomes critical in the context of what actually happened and why it happened.

4.5 Critical Event Theory

The life history narratives in this study have given emphasis to specific episodes/critical events in the participants’ life experiences. According to Woods (1993) an episode or a critical event is that ‘which has a profound effect on the life of an individual with significant and potentially life-changing effects’ (p. 357). Critical events therefore are: ‘highly charged moments and episodes that have enormous consequences for personal change and development; they are unplanned, unanticipated and uncontrolled and they are both positive and negative events’ (Sikes et al., 1985, p. 230). These critical events guide us to ‘think with the story or narratives’ (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 747), so that, ‘participants are likely to find it easier to talk about specific times and places’ (Riessman, 2008, p. 24). Depicting critical events in the lives of my research participants resonates with and becomes relevant to life history narrative methodology in this study (Chapter five), because narratives or stories are better understood when they highlight specific events describing human action. According to (Webster & Mertova, 2007) an event becomes critical in that it has some of the following characteristics.

It has impacted on the performance of the storyteller in a professional or work-related role; it may have a traumatic component, attract some excessive interest by the public or the media, or introduces risks in the form of personal exposure to: illness, litigious action or other powerful personal consequence. (pp. 73-4)
However, what makes a critical event critical is the impact it has on the storyteller. Importantly, it is impossible to predict or plan to observe a critical event. Critical events are deemed critical only in hindsight. And so, ‘their fuller impact on what one understands and the world is realized only in retrospect, such events can then be characterized by time, challenge and change’ (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 74).

Measor, (1985, p. 61) identifies three types of critical events or critical phases: ‘extrinsic, intrinsic and personal’. ‘Extrinsic critical events can be produced by historical and political events, intrinsic critical events occur within the natural progression of a career and personal critical events can be family events, for example illness (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p.74)’. The longer the time that passes between the event and recall of the event, the more profound the effect of the event has been and the more warranted is the label. Over time, the mind refines and discards unnecessary detail and retains those elements that have been of changing and lasting value. The critical event will have challenged the storyteller’s understanding or worldview and the event is likely to have changed their experiences and understanding, informing future behaviour and understanding. Lee (2012) relates critical events to transitional points: ‘identifying key transitional points show how external educational changes affect an individual’s internal value changes and learning processes’ (p. 47). This reveals how life may indeed be experienced as a series of events throughout one’s educational life trajectory.

Critical event theory therefore has helped me to classify occurrences in my participants’ life into critical and supporting events, which are often overlooked or not revealed through traditional empirical methods. Therefore, critical events are ‘a valuable and insightful tool for getting at the core of what is important’ (Lee, 2012, p. 56). In this case the key critical events that have occurred in the life history narratives of my research participants have been recorded in the research data, and through critical analysis they have contributed to research findings.

Any critical theory both defines and is defined by the problems posed by the context it attempts to address (Giroux, 2001, p. xx). In studies such as mine on narratives of displacement, resilience and education, the theoretical framework must take account of the entire journey from the beginning to the end to serve the purpose of ordering educational experiences by conceptualizing processes through various transition points and phases.
Critical event theory, therefore, articulates specific features in the lives of research participants within their narratives and these include: moments of interaction with a parent, colleague or any other person that had an impact on their lives. It may include incidents that made them think differently, or caused research participants to question or change their assumptions, beliefs or practices and incidents that increased awareness, challenged understanding, or changed their practices. As described in the next chapter, the use of critical events has guided the development of my participants’ stories.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the theoretical framework bringing together three theoretical models: post-colonial, critical race and critical event theories. The relationship of the three theories to my study has been highlighted in this chapter. It is against this historical and theoretical landscape that I began to write the chapters that follow: methodology, analysis of my data, organizing categories and findings that speak about educational resilience among refugee background students. In the next chapter, I will discuss the use of life history narrative as a methodology.
Chapter Five: Life History Narrative Methodology

5.1 Introduction

The aim of my research was to achieve an understanding of what enables refugee background students to be educationally resilient amidst adversity. This has been accomplished through the use of life history narrative methodology. This chapter defines life history narrative methodology and its key concepts: narrative, story and life history. It also presents a discussion of the rationale for the use of life history narrative methodology, a detailed description of the process of data collection, analysis and interpretation and an exploration of emerging issues that have impacted upon this study.

Fundamentally, ‘research is about furthering understanding, increasing the universal sum of knowledge, and making better sense of whatever it is that is being studied’ (Sikes & Goodson, 2017, p. 66). Life history narrative methodology does this through foregrounding accounts of lived experiences as the source of knowledge building. Life history narrative methodology draws out what Atkinson (2001) suggests is of the most importance to participants and their experiences. He says that:

I have felt that it is important, in trying to understand other persons’ experiences in life or their relations to others, to let their voices be heard, to let them speak for and about themselves first. If we want to know the unique perspective of an individual, there is no better way to get this than in that person's own voice. I am also interested in having the person tell his or her story from the vantage point that allows the individual to see his or her life as a whole, to see it subjectively across time as it all fits together, or as it seems discontinuous, or both. It is, after all, this subjective perspective that tells us what we are looking for in all our research efforts. (p. 125)

Giving an opportunity to people to tell their own stories in life history research reduces the colonising aspect of having others tell your own story and, according to Goodson, Biesta, Tedder, and Adair (2010, p. 33) ‘it reduces the research power imbalance because, in life history narrative research, the researcher has less control over the participants while they are narrating their stories’. In addition to giving power to the narrator, the individual story of lived experiences in life history narratives counteracts the assumptions and stereotypes that are advanced in meta-narratives about other cultures. For example, that all people of a particular cultural group have had similar experiences with similar results. This can be challenged by listening to life history narratives of that particular culture.
Life history narrative methodology is a means to learning at the same time as it is a channel through which vulnerable people like students with a refugee background are able to speak about their lived experiences. The ‘act of narration’ is itself a learning experience (Goodson, 2010, p. 45). Thus, storying as a form of narrative gives the events of the past a meaning that may have been hidden and that can be brought into the open and better known through people telling their lived experiences.

Although we come to learn from these stories, it is also clear that learning is not static. Smith and Watson (2010) talk about the dynamic nature of life history narratives, suggesting that ‘we might best approach life narrative, then, as a moving target, a set of shifting self-referential practices that, in engaging the past, reflect on identity in the present’ (p. 1). Life history narratives of students with a refugee background communicate multiple displacements and critical events that occurred while they moved from their home countries through transit countries to resettlement in Australia. The life history approach in such instances does not require that a narrative settle into a rigid form but it does require the ‘contextual richness’ and retrospective view that enables ‘social and political purchase’ for narrative accounts (Goodson, 2017, p. 5). Making sense of a life is an ongoing process, rather than a terminal point or a final achievement. Life history enables analysis at multiple levels and recognises that the individual story is always intertwined with larger stories.

Through telling their stories, storytellers make the present meaningful, and their listeners become aware of the nuances of their pasts. In other words, the process does not stop with the storyteller but rather may impact on listeners although in a different way. Through this process, Goodson et al. (2010, p. 2) suggest that: ‘the stories we construct about ourselves and our lives can help us to find meaning and new direction or can support us in coming to terms with the way things are and with who we are’. The next section turns to the operational definitions of terms as used in the methodology and details the importance attached to life history methodology in this study.

5.2 Operational Definitions of Terms in the Methodology

Life history narrative methodology has been used in this study to refer to an extensive record of the participants’ lived experience (Chapter 6 for this study). Originally, the term narrative (Latin: Narratio) means, ‘a story if it refers to an utterance presenting events that are ordered in time and have their cause and effect (dynamic elements), and a description when it
describes the character and the environment associated with these events (static elements)’ (Kafar & Modrzyewska-Swigulska, 2014, p. 12). In this chapter, both aspects of narrative as a story and as a description have been embraced; that is why narrative and story have been used interchangeably or as fits the context to capture the experiential quality of telling a story. Life history narrative was taken up as a methodology that was supple and sensitive enough to explore the complexity of individual educational trajectories that were continuously re-formed as refugee background students shuttled across multiple borders, trying to survive and be educated.

5.2.1 Narrative

The use of life history narrative constricts the breadth and the diversity of studies that fall under the ‘narrative’ rubric. Tierney & Clemens show the overlapping nature of narrative research in its broad categories of ‘autoethnography, biography, cultural biography, life story, oral history, and testimonio’ (2012, p. 26). In qualitative research, narrative has been increasing in popularity and numerous scholars have given descriptions of the meaning they attach to narrative. Josselson (2006) describes narrative as: ‘a process that involves the gathering of narratives – written, verbal, oral, and visual – focusing upon the meanings individuals ascribe to their experiences, seeking to provide insight that befits the complexity of human lives’ (p. 4). Stephens and Trahar (2012) have comprehensively defined narrative to include major components of the relationships in terms of content, form/structure, audience and context. Narrative to them is:

the relationship between what is being told i.e. its content; how it is being narrated i.e. its form; for whom it is intended i.e. its audience; and where it is occurring i.e. its context, bearing in mind the context may shift from the original location of the generation of the narrative to a new location where it is being read or heard. (2012, pp. 59-60)

In the same vein, Bruner (1990, p. 35) defines narrative as ‘an organizing principle by which people organize their experience in, knowledge about, and transactions with the social world.’ In other words, individuals make sense of the world and of themselves through narratives, both by telling them and listening to other peoples’ stories. Squire, (cited in Bold, 2012, p. 23) proposes three key functions of narrative as: supporting human sense-making, re-presenting experience, and promoting transformation. Polkinghorne (1988) sees narrative as ‘the primary scheme by which human existence is rendered meaningful’ (p. 1) and for Erben, (1998, p.13) ‘lives have to be understood as lived within time and time is experienced
according to narrative’. Therefore, in narrative research, meaning is made by shaping or ordering experiences through time.

Like other scholars, I will argue that narratives are forms of identity work where people actively engage in processes of self-formation and, through the process of narrating their story, ascribe meaning to their lives (Squire, Andrews, & Tamboukou, 2013). Narrative was the only method that could capture the elaborate and diverse pathways to schooling taken by the students with a refugee background in their study prior to resettlement. This required the narratives from each individual to be kept distinct, rather than flattening them into themes and abstractions.

Many authors have written about the ways that narratives make sense and how they can transform experience and understanding for both storytellers and their listeners. They emphasize that narratives are always produced through processes of selection and representation. Therefore, in addition to outlining definitions of narrative by different scholars, it is important to remember that: ‘the stories we tell create a past of which we have memories and a future about which we have hopes and fears and can thus bring about a sense of the present in which our lives are lived’ (Goodson et al., 2010, p. 1). Thus narratives in this study have been described in accordance with critical events or turning points in the lives of the participants in order to capture the changing contexts, the process of change and the intentions of the narrator. In the narrative interviews, my participants presented personal storylines of their ongoing struggles in order to find purpose and meaning in their past. Cognizant of the static and dynamic nature of narratives in this study, I have generated narratives from my participants capturing their experiences from multiple contexts and points in time. The stories of displacements in this study cover a wide scope ranging from home country through transit countries to resettlement in Australia.

5.2.2 Story

I use the word ‘story’ to mean a narrative structure that organizes or employs human events through time, and that is always a construction by the teller. According to Goodson et al. (2010, p. 1)

… we exist and live our ‘lives’ in and ‘through’ stories…. the stories of our parents, our generation, our culture, our nation, our civilization, and so on … Stories have the potential to provide our lives with continuity, vivacity and endurance... Stories can
give our lives structure, coherence and meaning, or they can provide the backdrop against which we experience our lives as complex, fragmented or without meaning.

For Grumet (1988, p. 87), ‘to tell a story is to impose a form on experience’ and these stories can take different forms and can be told in different contexts. Storytelling in different contexts makes participants reaffirm their original story, sometimes modifying them, and at other times creating new ones (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994). A story of a life, therefore, is in the telling that gives meaning to experience. Stories are valued and defined by Turner and Bruner (1986) as ‘culturally constructed expressions which are among the most universal means of organizing and articulating experiences’ (p. 15). It is important to remember that ‘stories preserve our memories, prompt our reflections, connect us with our past and present, and assist us to envision our future’ (Kramp, 2004, p. 107). This is commensurate with the choice of my methodology as life history narratives highlight the life experiences of my research participants and the impact those experiences have had on them.

The positive impact of storying has also been highlighted by Bold who suggests that ‘storytelling may increase the storyteller’s capacity to make important life changing choices through re-representing a past event and speculating about future development’ (2012, p. 23). This suggests that the story telling impacts on the narrator but it can also be assumed that the story will impact on the listener as well as the reader, although the impact might vary accordingly. All participants may have their lives changed in some way by the shared experiences and thus stories become a way of making sense of and organizing our lives. Finally Atkinson (2007) concludes that a story:

is the story a person chooses to tell about the life he or she has lived, told as completely and honestly as possible, what is remembered of it, and what the teller wants others to know of it, usually as a result of a guided interview by another. (p. 232)

In this study, participants told stories of their lives, what they could remember at the time of forced displacement from their home country, what they could remember about their experiences in transit countries/countries of temporary settlement, and stories on circumstances around their selection for resettlement to Australia. In addition to transient experiences, participants were requested to provide the profile of their educational experiences at three different stages including primary, secondary and tertiary education.
5.2.3 Life history

Life history covers the life of an individual to include the social, historical, and political contexts that have had an impact on that person. Scholars who work as life historians suggest that the ‘stories people tell about their lives can provide insights into the interaction between the individual and their social worlds and, thereby, give some clues as to how the latter work’ (Sikes & Everington, 2001, p. 10). In other words, life history enables analysis at multiple levels and recognises that the individual story is always intertwined with larger stories. The context of a life history is further highlighted by Hatch and Wisniewski (1995, p. 125) who say that: ‘the analysis of the social, historical, political and economic contexts of a life story by the researcher is what turns an individual story into a life history’.

It is rare to talk of a story without speaking about history because if you think of stories as ‘life as told’ then it is through storytelling that you come to know ‘life as experienced’ (Heikkinen, Huttunen, & Syrjala, 2002, p. 62). Taylor explains that ‘in order to have a sense of who we are, we have to have a notion of how we have become, and of where we are going’ (1989, p. 47). For Abbey, ‘human beings make sense of their lives as an unfolding story in a way that gives meaning to their past and direction to their future’ (2000, p. 38). Riessman (2001) states that ‘individuals’ narratives about their troubles are works of history as much as they are about individuals, the social spaces they inhabit, and the societies they live in’ (2000, p. 698). Goodson (2013) concludes that ‘the historical context of life stories needs to be further elucidated, and they need to be understood in relation to time and periodization’ (p. 31). In this study, the social, historical, political and economic contexts for each of my research participants have been extensively covered in Chapter three (in this study) and further details about the historical experiences of my research participants have been incorporated into their life history narratives in Chapter six. My methodology therefore brings together life history and narrative to look at the broad sweep of a life story, the wider contexts of history and culture in postcolonial contexts, and the specific moments, events or turning points in each person’s life.

It is clear therefore that the three terms: narrative, story and life history are interrelated and sometimes used interchangeably. Whereas narrative is much broader, story is sometimes defined as a narrative and life history articulates specific times and events bringing out the cause and effects. Nonetheless, the three concepts are not only channels for generating
accounts of life experiences but also communicate the social historical and political contexts that define the life trajectories of research participants. Therefore, upon examining these arguments by different scholars, life history in this study focused on the lived experiences of students with refugee backgrounds as the object of inquiry. In the following section I discuss why the methodology was the most appropriate in this particular study.

5.3 Why life history narrative methodology?

Refugee background people are typically storytellers because of the challenges associated with their displacement and forced migration. Their voices and their stories might be the best resource they have. This is because their stories became the basis for their status. The stories they tell the UNHCR give them the status of being called ‘refugees’ and this status provides them with protection from further harm under international law and other UN instruments. O’Connor reflects on the diversity of stories that refugees tell.

Refugees’ stories on many occasions have been heard by different interest parties for example, a UN representative will need to hear how they fear for their lives in their home country. An NGO representative in a host country will need to hear how they have no possessions or identification. A human rights activist will want to hear the violence they have witnessed. (O’Connor, 2015, p. 25)

Sikes and Goodson (2017) emphasize the inherent diversity of narratives, in that ‘all stories, all biographies, can be told from various perspectives and in a range of styles’ (p. 63). Refugee background students have a story they have told to the UNHCR that defines why they should be granted resettlement in Australia. They also however have other stories that provide more nuanced accounts of their personal aspirations and identities. In reading their stories, different people are able to understand the changing nature of identities for students with a refugee background. Life history narrative methodology in this case, ‘serves as the ideal means for understanding how people see their own experiences, their own lives, and their interactions with others’ (Atkinson, 2007, p. 235).

People of refugee backgrounds understand the power of story and they already know that the context in which their stories are told shape their stories in particular ways. Stories of students with a refugee background, therefore, are important because they define their past, present and illuminate their future aspirations. However, a life history narrative is not history that is discovered, it is a story that arises from lived experience. It is a retelling of one’s life as a whole in the voice of the teller, as it is remembered and in a language that is deeply felt. Given an opportunity, people will share their life story and what is needed is someone to
listen or someone to show a sincere interest in their life story. However, there are those who may be reluctant for reasons of being intimidated, embarrassed, or ashamed or simply be insecure about it or uncomfortable with it. Nevertheless, the benefits of storytelling about one’s life and reflecting on the content of one’s particular story are many, as highlighted by Atkinson (2007, pp. 235-236). He suggests that storytelling can lead to:

- A clearer perspective on personal experiences and feelings
- Greater self-knowledge and a stronger self-image and self-esteem
- Sharing of cherished experience and insights with others
- Joy, satisfaction, and inner peace
- Purging, or releasing, of burdens and validation of personal experience
- For people who have suffered trauma, storytelling can be central to the recovery process
- Creating a community, showing that we have more in common with others than we thought
- Helping other people see their lives more clearly or differently, and perhaps inspiring them change something in their life
- Allowing others to know and understand us better, in a way that they hadn’t before
- Providing a better sense of how we want our story to end, or how we could give it the good ending we want.
- By understanding our past and present, we also gain a clearer perspective of our goals for the future.

Although all values attached to a life history narrative give advantages to the research participant, not everyone will experience a life history narrative interview in the same way. The benefits of telling a life history narrative extend far beyond a specific individual to the general community and to the future generations who will read and know about what happened at a specific time in the lives of other people.

**Methodological model**

Drawing from the aforementioned justifications for the use of life history narrative methodology, I have developed a model representing why life history narrative methodology was relevant to this study.
The model highlights the importance of tracking the past and present experiences of research participants but also shows the possibility of predicting their future aspirations. Ultimately, the process renders meaning to human life experiences. Further reflections on the choice of life history narrative methodology are outlined in the following sections.

5.3.1 Suitable for research participants

Storytelling is part and parcel of African cultures. It is the means that people used to pass on information from generation to generation. Africans have a very rich oral history embedded in proverbs, songs, poems, rhymes and above all, stories. In this way people learned about each other’s life from their own perspective. Asking participants to tell their stories therefore becomes a way of appreciating and recognising their cultural values. Given their exposure to different cultures, life history narrative methodology was ideal as it invited them to tell their stories and provided opportunities for reflection on the complexity of their life experiences.

Furthermore, in cultures where written history dominates and is more influential than oral history, life history narrative methodology enables a shift from keeping personal stories in memory to transforming them into written narratives. Life history narratives in this case become appropriate for influencing public debates about the wellbeing of vulnerable members of a given community. In this study, I wanted to recognize, honour, and value
cultural values and life experiences of students with a refugee background by developing written versions of their stories. The focus on their education in the written versions of their stories can reveal to others how students with a refugee background have learned to confront challenges of racism and discrimination both in the classroom and in their respective host communities.

Apart from appreciating the culture, my research participants have been made active contributors to this research study. Researchers and writers in the academic sector have often used methods of research that make target groups passive participants as opposed to active. Life history narrative on the contrary positions participants as the knowers of their own experiences and therefore participants become active contributors to the research study. Bornat and Diamond (2007, p. 22) highlight that: ‘history belongs with people and communities, not experts’ therefore life history narrative research should focus on documenting everyday community life in consultation with the very members of that specific community, in this case refugee background students. Thus life history narrative methodology:

- provides ideals of education and empowerment and becomes substantive knowledge building process through the intersection of personal experience, historical circumstance, and cultural frame and can not only transform participants but also inform public policy when addressed to relevant authorities (Atkinson, 2007)

Life history narrative methodology was suitable for researching African students with a refugee background because they are familiar with storytelling and in the telling of their stories they realised that they share much in common with other refugees. In the process, they contribute knowledge about the experiences of students with a refugee background in higher education and this information can be useful to other researchers studying students from refugee backgrounds.

5.3.2 Learning tool

Life history narrative methodology has been used in this study as an example of how stories of refugee background students can increase learning among teachers, administrators and other actors who have immigrants’ wellbeing in their mandate. Thus this study intended to illuminate the trajectories that students with a refugee background have experienced and that they are still experiencing in different forms. The benefit to this learning extends from a particular individual to the community. Learning from different experiences people encounter
in their day to day life is important for allocating the appropriate support that they may need. Information about the past and present of refugee background students can be relevant to institutions that host them in order to attend to their respective needs. Teachers then become aware of their struggles and this may reduce the tendency to misinterpret their academic underachievement. Life history narrative methodology becomes the means and a channel to knowing all these experiences of refugee background students.

5.3.3 Catalyst for healing and change among participants

Life history narrative methodology tends to bring out participants’ life experiences, revealing their transient journeys and cultural orientations. Both Heikkinen et al. (2002) and Sparkes (1994) draw attention to the ‘deliverance’ potential of life history narrative methodology for participants in that ‘the possibility to tell and re-tell one’s life story seems to help people to perceive their life as more organized, to assign new meanings to experiences and to undergo a healing process’ (Heikkinen et al., 2002, p. 45). Life history narrative methodology has the potential to help individuals view themselves as empowered to deal with the pain in their life trajectories. ‘Telling these stories and framing them within a life history approach can act as a powerful force for change in the teller, the researcher as listener-writer, and eventually, the reader’ (Sparkes, 1994, p. 179). Although not always guaranteed, individuals may change for the better as they use storytelling as a platform to share their painful experiences. On the other hand however, there is also a possibility of rekindling or reawakening bad memories of the past and thus storying could also traumatised people by returning to disturbing events. Life history narrative methodology ‘integrates ways of knowing and being known and is therefore intimately linked with questions of identity which might change in the process of storytelling’ (Watson, 2012, p. 460). More so, this does not limit life history narrative methodology to simply telling the story of what a selected set of events means to a certain group of people, but rather brings out the changing nature experienced by the participants in the processes of recalling their past and sharing their painful moments in their life histories.

In this study, participants have been able to share and hear stories of others. In the process of interviewing I shared an insider’s story of how I grew up as a refugee and an orphan. In doing so the research interview became more reciprocal and collaborative. In hearing other stories, participants come to realize that they are not alone in the struggle they have gone through. Such an experience might lead to healing the wounds of the past for participants because they are no longer in solitude. This is reiterated by Delgado (1989, p. 2437) who says: ‘stories
about oppression, about victimization, about one’s own brutalization - far from deepening the despair of the oppressed, lead to healing, liberation, mental health’.

A typical example of the liberating or emancipatory effects of storytelling is that of Rwanda, where stories told by genocide perpetrators and survivors become the source of reconciliation among two ethnic groups. In Rwanda, after the 1994 Rwandan Tutsi genocide the Government of Rwanda used Gacaca, a community justice program, to tell stories of what transpired in order to forge a way forward for reconciliation. The program involved bringing the perpetrators of the 1994 Genocide into the open and among the survivors at a community level and giving them a platform to make a confession or tell the story of how they carried out the genocide, mentioning the names of those they killed and where they were hidden in order to locate their bodies and give them a dignified and decent burial. The government used this strategy to reduce pressure on the overcrowded prisons and as a local solution to problem solving. The confession/story telling system was effective so long as the perpetrators were willing to tell the whole story and the truth about what happened. Those who willingly made a confession were pardoned and given light punishment, mainly community service, rather than remaining incarcerated in prisons. Evidently in Rwanda, many people were pardoned, many other dead bodies were revealed where they were hidden and given a decent burial. As a result both the perpetrators and the victims received healing and found a reason to live together irrespective of the atrocities and the loss that was incurred by the survivors. It is clear therefore, that knowledge from life history has also offered hope for preventing such events from happening again. In this case, using narratives and life history methodology brings different perspectives to the past-present relationship and the relationship to social change for research participants. Focusing on life history builds a more humanistic focus on the individual experience within the process of social change (Plummer, 2001).

5.3.4 Counteracts Meta-narratives

Life history narratives provide more particular, contextualised accounts of history than the grand narratives that disregard individual experiences. Grand narratives are ‘totalising and explanatory purporting to embody universal essential truths. They also de-link or de-contextualise knowledge and knowledge production from context and culture’ (Stephens, 2017, p. 50). Meta narratives seek not only to describe and explain the world but also to legitimate it. ‘They are not ideologically neutral but rather problematic and complex competing knowledge systems established and constantly nourished by western hegemony’
Meta narratives have existed as ‘gospel truth’ and until counter narratives are developed, no one will ever understand the other side of the coin. Life history narratives have the potential to be counter narratives to these overarching grand narratives.

Africans, for example, have been denied a voice in the generation and legitimation of alternative narratives and discourses. During the time of my schooling in Africa, at high school, our economics classes were dominated by the grand narrative of Rostow in what he called the five stages to economic development (Rostow, 1962) or the linear, modern and capitalist stages to economic development that were presented to developing nations. These stages were meant for the utilisation of scientific knowledge, leading to growth of productivity and expansion of international trade. In addition, it was advanced as a set of politically neutral technical goals to be achieved for the deserving poor. Thus as a methodology for economic development, it was meant to be: 1. advanced as the only story, 2. to serve the interests of all, and 3. to suggest that the west would provide and advocate for it as well as bear financial responsibility. Rostow argued that ‘the process of industrialization currently experienced by the underdeveloped portions of the world is essentially the same as that experienced in the past by the already industrialized nations, at least in its broad technological and social aspects’ (Dalton & Bohannan, 1961, p. 398). Such economic meta-narratives have been successfully advanced and funded by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. From the very beginning, counter narratives were presented from some African leaders such as Julius Nyerere of Tanzania and Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana but these were silenced, and development in Africa has remained a myth.

Many other meta-narratives have been used to silence and colonise the poor and thus have overpowered counter narratives because of the inequalities and injustices that have existed in modern societies. This is explained by critical race theorist Delgado who says that:

Inequality and injustice are sustained, in part by the ways in which privileged members of society insulate themselves from the suffering of others and so, narratives of marginalized groups can disrupt this insularity and it counteracts the fact that the dominant group justifies its privileged position by means of stories, stock explanations that construct reality in ways favourable to it. (Delgado, 1989, p. 2437)

What Delgado is advocating for are counter stories rather than looking at colonial legacies that have impacted on developing countries. Paying attention to people’s stories opens up possibilities for generating new stories which challenge the thinking/narratives of the
dominant members of the society. As Delgado points out, ‘If we [developed countries] deepen and humanize ourselves, then we must seek out storytellers different from ourselves and afford them the audience they deserve’ (Delgado, 1989, p. 2439). What makes Delgado’s input relevant to this study is the fact that some communities have been historically silenced by the processes of colonialism and other forms of oppression. Stone-Mediatore (2003) does not call it silencing but disempowerment: ‘there has been disempowerment of people who have been excluded from official knowledge production … [they have been] denied the epistemic value from a central means by which such people can take control over their own representation’ (p. 2).

Therefore, it can be concluded that the use of life history narrative methodology enables history to be rescued from elites, and ordinary people from oblivion, when they get to tell stories about the past and the present. In this case, scholars (Hamilton & Shopes, 2009) conclude that, in the process of giving ordinary people the chance to speak and contribute to knowledge building, the voices of the ordinary people are heard and their stories become part of the larger historical and cultural picture. That way both meta-narratives and counter narratives find a neutral point of departure in trying to address the ills of inequality and injustice that have prevailed for so long.

As a result, life history narrative methodology brings out the whole story of the participants’ experiences, defines their identities, allows them to be active by giving them a voice. Above all life history narrative methodology brings out counter narratives that become informative and challenge the already existing and long upheld meta-narratives. In the next section, I will turn to the pragmatics and outline the methods that I used to collect data, interpret and present findings in this study.

5.4 Study methods

This section presents the sampling procedures, data collection, analysis and interpretation. The sample size increased from the original intention of recruiting 10 participants for the study to 11. Participants were placed in two categories: those who arrived in Australia and enrolled directly into TAFE, and those who came to Australia when they were young and started their education right from primary school through high school and were now at University. In total I had six university students (Noel, Ali, Biruk, Alhassan, Anna and Fatima) and five TAFE students (Juliet, Francine, Gamariel, Zawadi and Ismael). My own
life history narrative (in chapter one) which is not analysed in this study does have a place in this thesis as well as in the interviewing process.

5.4.1 Sampling

After getting ethics approval from the Western Sydney University Human Research Ethics Committee, I consulted the leadership of the Great Lakes Agency for Peace and Development International, inviting their members to volunteer as participants for my research study. Only one participant responded although she later recommended two other participants. Through other networks at the university and Salvation Army I was able to link up with other students who connected me to more students. In other words the sampling method or the participants’ recruitment took the form of ‘snowballing’. According to (Morgan, 2008, p. 815) ‘snowball sampling uses a small pool of initial informants to nominate other participants who meet the eligibility criteria for a study. The name reflects an analogy to a snowball increasing in size as it rolls downhill’. In snowball sampling, as commonly used in life history narrative methodology, ‘the researcher works with a participant who tells him/her of friends or colleagues who might be prepared to participate’ (Goodson & Sikes, 2017, p. 77). In this study, I had the experience of using snowball sampling whereby some of my research participants brought, recommended and made reference to other participants who were willing to participate in my research study and had refugee background stories to tell. The only challenge was that not all participants were within the geographical coverage of my scope, although they fulfilled all other conditions. As a researcher, I made a conscious decision and used my discretion to include them. Thus the scope of the study changed from covering Great Lakes Region of Africa only to include countries like Ethiopia, Guinea Conakry and Sierra Leone. These countries that were added are neighbouring countries that have been affected by similar challenges and entangled into colonial histories. Although participants were invited to recommend other participants, the criteria that were followed while selecting my research participants had three major elements: Originally from Great Lakes Regions of Africa (Rwanda, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo/DRC, Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya) and now three other countries that were added (Sierra Leone, Ethiopia and Guinea Conakry); came to Australia on a Humanitarian visa under UNHCR and should have gone through the Australian Education system ever since they arrived, progressing through to University, College or TAFE pursuing Vocational and Education Training (VET) courses. The above characteristics were relevant to the aims of this study because resilience
and education are well articulated by those who have experienced challenging circumstances and are able to tell their life stories.

5.4.2 Data collection

Data collection using life history narrative methodology calls for two participants, namely the researcher who is willing and ready to listen and the participant who is willing and ready to share life experiences. The methodology is best suited to people who are able to listen attentively and hear beyond what is actually being said, and who can ask pertinent questions in a non-threatening manner. According to life history and narrative methodology scholars, ‘the act and art of listening, really listening, is perhaps the most important requirement of the life history researcher’ (Goodson & Sikes, 2017, p. 73). On the side of the participant, the methodology demands the willingness to share one's own experiences.

Specific attention was given to educational experiences in their life of displacement from their home countries to their resettlement in Australia. I met with participants two times on average in order to build greater rapport and to share transcripts of the first session to ask for further detail of particular events that emerged within the first interview. The first interview/meeting took 60 minutes and the second took 30 minutes. This was the standard for all participants. In this study some of my research participants requested that their real names be used instead of pseudonyms. From an ethical point of view, it was important to honour their request and their stories rather than erasing them by anonymity.

5.4.2.1 Use of time-lines in data collection

The stories I collected from my research participants were substantial, covering on average two thousand words each after transcription. In order to streamline them and give them a structure, I developed time-lines following the advice of life historians Goodson & Sikes (2017), who suggest that,

although it is important not to create a ‘chronological strait jacket’ or pre-defined set of sequences or stages, one useful way to start life history research is by inviting participants to construct a time-line of key events in their life and where appropriate limit it to those experiences which relate to your research. (p. 81)

Timelines are useful in prompting memories and concentrating attention but also provide a structure for interviews and enable the narrator to create phases in their life as they recount their life histories. In this study therefore, I developed an interview guide based on five major
areas that I intended to develop through my research participants’ life stories. These areas included participants’ pre and post displacement experiences encompassing: 1. education, 2. work experiences, 3. family and other people’s influence, 4. racial discrimination and 5. future aspirations. Related to my timeline, Goodson and Sikes (2017, p. 81) outline numerous possibilities that include place and date of birth, details of childhood including a description of home and experiences, occupations of family members, education experience profiles, relationships and future aspirations.

While I limited my research prompts for my participants to the aspects of displacement and education that were relevant to my topic, much of the information in the above shortlist surfaced in the process of using life history narrative interview. For example, prior life experiences for my participants meant that they highlighted their family composition before the war, disruptions after the war, experiences of separation and migration. Furthermore, chapter six in this thesis (life history narratives of participants) reflects how these timelines were very helpful in establishing critical events/turning points in my participants’ stories. Timelines as well as critical events gave a structure to the stories of my participants which translated into thematic data analysis.

5.4.2.2 Interviewing and engaging with participants

Before the interview, participants reviewed and signed the consent form. They were also given a copy of the participant information sheet and verbally consented to audio recording. Participants were informed of the research aims and design, the number of interviews expected, confidentiality, recording and transcribing, and how I planned to arrive at the research texts. Thereafter, participants were encouraged to ask any questions about the research as an ice breaker to kick start our discussion. This was followed by sharing my personal story of how I was exposed to the experience of being a refugee for many years of my life. Sharing my story was intended to build more trust and a closer relationship with the research participants. Goodson (2000) talks about giving and taking in narrative interviews and says that ‘there are two participants in the research who see the world through different prisms of practice and thought’ (p. 20). In life history narrative however, ‘where participants’ lives are revealed, perhaps it is only fair that researchers’ lives are too - at least, in so far as what is told is really relevant to the project in question’ (Goodson & Sikes, 2017, p. 85). In other words, the interview process is never a ‘one way traffic’ because trustworthiness is enhanced by mutual reciprocity. In this chapter under the section of ethics I have covered the
role of the researcher in life history narrative methodology. Life history narrative scholars also recognise that ‘there is also the issue of actually and explicitly giving voice to the researchers themselves which is, in effect, a further acknowledgement of the polyvocality of social life’ (Coffey, 1999, p.188). I have not only included a section on the role of the researcher in this chapter, but have given presentations and also written articles for publication that show my own voice on issues of refugees and education.

5.4.2.3 Interview venue, timing and recording

Participants were given one hour to tell their stories in their own ways and at their own pace. Most of my participants were invited to Western Sydney University (WSU) campuses in different locations and that is where we conducted our interviews. I used a tape recorder to take down the life stories of my participants because ‘most life historians prefer to use tape recorders rather than rely solely on note taking’ (Goodson & Sikes, 2017, p. 83). However, researchers should keep in mind that some people may be inhibited by the knowledge that their words could come back to haunt them, and there are those who find it extremely difficult to speak fluently in the presence of a tape recorder. In the case of this study one of the research participants did not allow tape recording and felt she was freer to speak off record which I did for her convenience. I therefore took notes along with her storying. Difficult as it was, transcription happened co-currently with interviewing. As a result, the interview took two hours instead of one. Therefore, different experiences are likely to alter interpretations resulting in the description of diverse realities.

5.4.2.4 Interview questions

The major source of my data was in-depth interviews of individual research participants. According to Chase (2005), when life history narrative researchers gather data through in-depth interviewing: ‘they work at transforming the interviewee-interviewer relationship into one of narrator and listener. This requires a shift from the conventional practice of asking research participants to generalise about their experiences to inviting narrator specific stories’ (p. 423). In this study, participants’ stories were gathered through interviews and then transcribed—written in the form of stories and smoothened as they were written up in this thesis. While individual stories in this thesis were kept distinct to avoid flattening them into themes and abstractions, at the same time smoothening them meant selecting critical events or turning points as they unfolded in the participant’s story. Inevitably hesitations, repetitions
and other minor errors were reduced for clarity and to ensure the clear flow of the stories. I took time to explain to the research participants the details of the interview and what it would entail—that more than one meeting would be needed, and that they would travel to where the interview was to be held or meet somewhere at their convenience. In total, eleven participants consented to participate. Participants were from different universities and TAFE colleges across Australia. The main interview question as indicated below, allowed a shared learning and the other questions sought further details particularly to do with research participants’ arrival in Australia, their specific educational experiences and their future goals for their education and career pathways. (Interview guide in the Appendix)

**Question one:** Thank you (Participant name) for accepting to participate in my interview, I will share with you a little bit about myself (Researcher takes 5 minutes to tell his story). I know that talking about personal experiences while you were a refugee sometimes is not very easy but this is an interview to guide me in my research study on students who were formerly refugees and I am aware that you are not anymore a refugee but a citizen of Australia. So, I would like to work with you to tell a story of your life regarding your refugee background and if it is ok with you please talk to me through your life story as you see it and as you know it. Feel free, relax and you may stop whenever you feel like.

The opening question was lengthy and carefully worded. However, the stories that followed were very different in their detail. In the process of interviewing, participants were encouraged to share as much detail as they could remember. I took notes in the process as well as voice recording because some events in their stories took more time than others. To balance up the critical events within the participant’s story the questions that I added to the main question were quite flexible, varied and multi-directional. For instance, if I wanted more information on forced displacement I asked a question like ‘could you remind me what happened? Let us go back to your education in your home country, what actually happened?’ There are many examples in the questionnaire because some questions developed in the process of the interview and others were asked as a follow up on specific events in the second interview. This shows how life history narrative methodology needs to build rapport and create a trusting, relaxed environment for participants to be able to share their lengthy life experiences.

### 5.4.2.5 Follow-up interviews

In the follow-up interviews, I realised that most of my participants had grown more trusting of me. Some of them would resume certain points they made during the first interviews and even provided supplementary information that they were not ready to disclose in our first
meeting. They could share their emotional turmoil and painful experiences and this helped me to understand some ideas that were not originally clear. This made my transcript clearer and concepts and experiences were better understood from the perspectives of my research participants. It is recognised by life historians that ‘repeated interviews may allow participants to resume themes at a more profound level and even bring up sensitive topics’ (Heikkinen et al., 2002, p. 49).

5.4.2.6 Transcription

I chose to carry out the transcription myself so that the lessons I learnt in the process of transcription could assist with my data analysis. Life historians Goodson and Sikes say:

There is no doubt that doing your own transcribing enables you to become familiar with the data. It can also aid analysis in that ideas and themes can emerge or be developed as a consequence of repetitive listening and intimate engagement with the data (Goodson & Sikes, 2017, p. 84).

Furthermore, I also noticed that some of the research participants preferred to use the local languages (like Kinyarwanda of Rwanda, Kirundi of Burundi and Swahili of East Africa) during the interview, all of which I was comfortable to translate. I observed during the interview context that my participants sometimes were hesitant to speak and build confidence to answer my questions. Thus I was careful to provide them with sufficient time to decide whether to continue their participation, or whether or not to answer particular questions. The ethical considerations for this approach included a consideration of the place of the researcher in the study. It is also important to note that each interview experience had its own unique lessons. Some participants were very excited to participate in the research interview and others took time to gain confidence and freedom to participate. Nevertheless, to me as a researcher, each interview laid the foundation from which to improve the sessions for the next interview. All these experiences were helpful in the process of transcription and indeed increased my familiarity with the data.

5.4.2.7 Co-construction

In this research study, life history narratives were generated through interactions and sharing of personal stories. Both the researcher and the research participants shared their experiences of being refugees and stories of the research participants were co-constructed between the researcher and the research participants. This is because life history work is so often collaborative with the researcher seeking meanings and explanations together with the
research participants (Goodson & Sikes, 2017, p. 85). It is said that ‘truth is constructed in interaction and this is the principle of dialectics’ (Heikkinen, Huttunen, Syrjälä, & Pesonen, 2012, p. 9). The principle of dialectics is based on the idea that social reality is constructed as a dialectical process in interpersonal discussion. Life histories in this study were co-constructed between the research participants and the researcher. This interaction happened in a mutual way whereby the researcher posed a question and allowed time for the participants to respond, and then the researcher made further follow up to seek clarity on details of the story, ideas and concepts that were not very clear. In addition to this, after transcribing and re-writing the story, I took the story back to the participant and we agreed on the content of the story before it could be considered as research material. Hatch and Wisniewski say:

In narrative research, the location of the voice of the research participants is emphasized. Knowledge is often formed through discussions with the research participants in the form of dialogue. The intention is for the narrator and researcher to reach a joint, intersubjective understanding, in which the narrator assigns meaning to things in his or her own voice. (Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995, p. 113)

At our first encounter, the majority of my research participants voiced their astonishment. They were surprised that the life of an ordinary person like them could be interesting for research. They confessed to me that they have always seen and heard stories of great men and women being the ones that are published. This study added value by including otherwise ordinary people into research and this makes their stories recognisable and distinct.

5.5 Analysis

After generating life histories from my research participants, the next step was to generate thematic areas that informed my research through data analysis. According to Goodson and Sikes (2017), ‘analysis is about making sense of, or interpreting the information and evidence that the researcher has decided to consider as data’ (p. 84). In order to fit the information and evidence into data for analysis, I used critical events and developed education profiles for each of my participants. The recorded transcripts were transcribed and converted into written narratives. Prior to analysis of the transcripts, in the first interview three pre-determined thematic areas formed the structure of the story and these were: 1. Life before displacement, 2. Life in transition/transit countries, and 3. Life in Australia.

My approach to constructing the written narratives was informed by three main approaches summarised by Germeten (2013), adopted from Riessman (2003, p. 333). The story generated in the first instance is what Germeten calls a ‘holistic position’ which is the whole life.
history, the sum or mixture of every event or experience the person remembers, like a novel of a life. The second phase that I undertook as I worked with the transcripts was ‘smoothening’ the hesitations, and structuring the stories into three layers. In other words, the data was formed into layered narratives/stories. In the presentation of the life history narratives in the next chapter, the first layer is the boxed narrative that highlights the social historical context of the country and the displacement from home country for each participant. This layer is presented in the first person as narrated by the participant. (This is equivalent to what Germeten called the ‘short story of life’). The second layer was the narrative of critical events. I derived critical events from the transcripts, wrote them in my own words providing context and linked them to the direct quotations of my research participants (Germeten calls this ‘Specific story’). The third layer in my research was narratives of education which I called ‘education profile’ for each participant.

As a researcher, I went back and forth over the transcripts to determine moments that were highlighted as critical events or turning points. Thus I compacted and summarised parts of the story but was also mindful of keeping their stories lively by including their own words where they were exact to make their stories important and compelling. In the whole process of smoothening the life history narratives of my participants, I involved research participants to ensure that their voices were well represented. I was also mindful of establishing themes that were relevant to the research question which sought to find out factors that enable refugee background students to be educationally resilient. The goal of analysis for this study was to interpret the meanings that participants ascribe to events and actions, how they make these meanings their own, and how they negotiate these meanings in interactions with other people (McCormack, 2004). In this study thematic areas were developed prior to interview in order to structure the interview. This was useful because it prompted memories for my research participants but also supported my data analysis process.

Ultimately, I arrived at the conclusion that the path for resettled refugees remains difficult to navigate. The thematic analysis offered (Chapter 6 of this study) cannot include all of the fascinating particulars contained in hundreds of pages of transcription and hours of interviews. Above all, the full transcripts reveal the resilience, intelligence, and optimism of the African students with a refugee background. In the stories we are able to learn about what it means to lose a home, a language, a family, and a culture. These stories speak back to the
discourses of power and meta-narratives that perpetuate the conditions that disrupt the lives of millions of individuals across the globe.

5.6 Ethical considerations

My ethics approval was given through the Western Sydney University Human Research Ethics Committee and I diligently followed the approved ethics standards and procedures while doing my research study. Two ethical issues emerged during the study that impacted research design, analysis as well as ethical issues. These emerging issues were: the place of the researcher in the study and the researcher as an insider. These are examined in the following sections.

5.6.1 The place of the researcher in this study

As a new researcher I had little knowledge of what I was going to encounter. I did not anticipate the feelings that would accrue through the processes of my writings and in the interviews. According to Erkkila and Makela (2005, p. 234) ‘the researcher is seldom prepared to encounter the variety of roles and emotions that may emerge in the course of interview’:

all factors contributing to the process of narrative research should be critically evaluated… It is not enough to present the content of the story, but we should also ask how we as researchers, have contributed to the process of research (McEwan, 1995, p.166).

Traditionally, research reports have been stories of what aspects of a given phenomenon have been studied and how. Why and by whom a certain phenomenon has been studied are not questions that have often been answered in the course of research, nor have they even been asked explicitly (Heikkinen et al., 2002) yet Elbaz-Luwisch and Pritzker (2002) state that: ‘academic norms in particular, norms against expressing emotion and against revealing failure may be the main impediments to engaging with personal stories in ways that can transform our understandings and allow for critical readings’ (p. 288).

It is against this background that the place of the researcher in the study emerged. In this particular study, I had no escape but to express my emotions and feelings. I used my personal experiences as foundational and my personal story was part of the rationale for this study on the narratives of displacement, resilience and education.
This study encourages the voice of the researcher to be included. While I was listening to the participants’ stories, I could not help my thoughts from meandering to my own experiences. My personal story—which I shared with my participants—became alive in my mind every time I heard my participants’ stories and even feelings and things I had not been aware of for a long time started coming up. At the time however, I forced myself to concentrate on what the interviewee was saying and only allowed myself to return to the transitory emotions I had had during the interview later when I was refining my own story. It was then that I started realizing that my family protected me as a child from the troubles of being a refugee so that even in a refugee camp, I never felt like a refugee. This taught me that as a researcher you cannot be a completely neutral outsider.

This sentiment is expressed by Erkkila and Makela (2005) as follows: ‘our own life experiences orient our interpretations, and the life-story to be interpreted orients our life, even if only by evoking minor memories and past incidents. The need to listen to other people’s life stories awakens a desire to consider one’s own life story and helps us interpret our own’ (2005, p. 233).

From the perspective of my research therefore, it is imperative to reflect on the role of the researcher in the study because particular to life history narrative research, a life history interview is more like a two-way mirror than a unidirectional process where the researcher is separate from the researched (Elbaz-Luwisch & Pritzker, 2002).

5.6.2 Research and researched relationship

The second important element that emerged during my research study was the relationship between the researcher and the researched. The concept of the researcher and the researched has been developed and discussed by different scholars; for example, Banks (1998, p. 14) offered a four part typology that recognizes the complexity of the researcher’s position: ‘the indigenous-insider, the indigenous-outsider, the external-insider, and the external-outsider’. The typologies suggested by Banks can be interpreted using different lenses; however, in this study, pairing can be directly related to my experience as a researcher. I was considered as an indigenous insider African who understands the challenges African students with a refugee background have faced. At another point I was considered the indigenous outsider when some of my participants especially those from Rwanda took me for a spy because I did not arrive in Australia on a humanitarian visa but on a student visa under the sponsorship of the
government that they fled from. Thus I became the external-insider as opposed to another researcher, say from Australia, who if they were researching with the same cohort of students would be considered an external outsider. In all typologies, I was at one level considered to be holding the same values, beliefs and views of refugee background students but at another level I was different. In other words, standpoints can shift, and power can intervene to problematize data collection and post field work analysis. At the end of my data collection, I was faced with the question of my own motive in doing this kind of research although my main motivation was derived from my desire to write my personal story and I was curious about the motives of my participants for allowing me to write about their educational trajectories.

From this study I discovered that researching the in-depth-experiences of African students with a refugee background (my research participants) and gaining knowledge of ways that they have coped with adverse conditions, requires some experiential knowledge of the diversities that exist among Africans in terms of culture, language and historical backgrounds. Moreover, as an African who has experienced the life of being a refugee, I have the privilege of being situated inside the narratives of these students because at one time I too, was marginalized in the larger societal context as ‘Other.’ At the same time, however, I share African identity with the research participants but not their particular cultural identities and not the humanitarian refugee status and therefore I was sometimes considered as the ‘Other’ to my research participants.

Nevertheless, research participants developed some connection to and identified with my story, and in the process trusted me and found it easy to narrate their own. Conscious of ethical demands, I maintained the participants’ respect and autonomy; anonymity and confidentiality also governed the publication of the research findings. For some of my research participants who wanted to be recognised with their own stories, I used their first names while for those who did not want their names recognised, I used a pseudonym. I also co-constructed narratives together with my research participants to avoid misrepresentation or misinterpretations in my participants’ stories. The process of co-construction took the form of taking the transcripts back to the participants for checking and changing and adding some elements that were not clear. It also involved participants endorsing the critical events that were highlighted within their individual stories.
5.7 Conclusion

This chapter forms the core of the whole research study because it guides the process and the form of data collection and presentation. This chapter has articulated the means and the measure to complete the research study on resilience and education of African students with a refugee background within the Australian tertiary education system. At the end of my data collection, I discovered that I had two categories of student participants: those who arrived in Australia when their ages could not permit them direct entry into the mainstream secondary school and had to go through TAFE institutes, and those who came to Australia when they were still young, and did some of their primary and secondary schooling and are now at university completing their degrees. Therefore, in the following chapter the narratives are organized into these groupings.
Chapter Six: Life History Narratives

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents life history narratives that have been collaboratively developed by the researcher and the research participants during interviews and refined by the researcher. Life historians Goodson and Sikes (2017) highlight the need for a collaborative way of developing life history narratives that can bring out the interactive nature of the process. They suggest that the two participants in the process are named as ‘co-researcher, collaborator or research partner’ (p. 77). In this research study, life history narratives of my research participants form the research data and the source of information for answering the research question: What are the factors that have enabled students with a refugee background to be educationally resilient amidst life challenging circumstances?

The life history narratives in this study confirm the assertion made by narrative scholars Lemley & Mitchell (2011) that ‘we use stories to make sense of our experiences and justify decisions … to reassure ourselves that we have come through life’s challenges and have learned something’ (p. 218). The stories of my participants covered their complex life trajectories from home country, through transit countries to resettlement in Australia. In consultation with my participants, I compressed their stories into suitable texts for analysis. In doing so, I used a critical events framework (CE) in order to give their stories a structure but also to retain the main information that answers the research question. The process of reducing the narrative texts around critical events is what Higgs, Horsfall, and Grace (2009, p. 246) have termed ‘sanitising or smoothening’ and the process of sanitisation removes ‘hesitations, gestures for emphasis and additional meaning’. The need for reducing data in the participants’ lengthy stories is also echoed by Gannon (2009) who highlights that ‘individual stories may be smoothed from raw interview data to create coherent accounts of lived experiences’ (p. 74). Higgs et al. (2009) acknowledge the difficulties involved in sanitising or smoothening stories whereby narrators try to appear transparent and researchers avoid being visible in the stories that are told. They say that, ‘we tend to write ourselves out of the stories we tell; we negate our bodies, responses, feelings, dreams, passions and write in a cool detached, disembodied manner’ (p. 248). In the previous chapter (Chapter 6), I discussed the place of the researcher and researched in order to explain the complexities I encountered in
writing and smoothening the participants’ life history narratives, which are presented in their compressed forms in this chapter. In total, eleven participants were included in this study and the table below provides an overview of how their stories have been organised and their transitions into Australian education. The crisscrossing nature of borders and continuous movement of people to and from Rwanda and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) gives a unique experience of people’s forced displacement and therefore the six Rwanda and DRC participants’ stories come first. In terms of their education profiles, all of the participants from Rwanda and DRC came to Australia as adults and their transitions into Australian education were via post-school pathways. These participants now have a TAFE qualification and are aspiring for a university education. The remaining five participants initially accessed Australian education through schools, with one participant completing both primary and secondary schooling in Australia. Two participants from Ethiopia and Guinea Conakry had a direct transition to university within Australia from secondary school. Four participants have used TAFE education as a pathway to university and six participants are still pursuing diplomas or certificate IV at TAFE. Two participants had accessed tertiary education before arrival in Australia, in Rwanda and Sierra Leone. In total, there were five female and six male research participants.

Table. 1. Showing participants’ country of origin and transitional levels of education within Australia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of Origin</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Australian school education</th>
<th>Australian tertiary education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rwanda</td>
<td>Francine</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>TAFE – Diploma (Business)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Noel</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>TAFE as a pathway then to University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gamariel</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>TAFE (Certificate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRC</td>
<td>Ismael</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>TAFE (Certificate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zawadi</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>TAFE (Diploma – Enrolled Nurse)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Juliet</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>TAFE (Certificate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burundi – Tanzania</td>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>Yes (Yrs. 9-12)</td>
<td>TAFE – University TAFE pathway then to University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dan</td>
<td>Yes (Yrs. 11-12)</td>
<td>TAFE pathway then to University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sierra Leone</td>
<td>Fatima</td>
<td>Yes (Yrs. 10-12)</td>
<td>TAFE – University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudan – Kenya</td>
<td>Biruk</td>
<td>Yes (primary and secondary schooling)</td>
<td>University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia – Kenya</td>
<td>Alhassan</td>
<td>Yes (Yrs. 9-12)</td>
<td>University</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.2 Life History Narratives

Life history narratives in this section articulate specific features or turning points which I have called critical events (CE). These events appear as an encounter with another person, organisation, or moments with peers that had an impact on participants’ lives and influenced the participant to think differently or caused him/her to question or change their way of life. Participants’ life history narratives are organised into three major sections, namely: Context, Critical Events and Educational Profile. The Context (contained in the text box) provides an introduction to each Participant and indicates the wider historical events and pressures that shaped their stories, from their perspectives. The critical events section identifies the particular turning points that were emphasised by each participant as significant to their educational and life trajectories. The Educational Profile section describes their pathways through primary, secondary and post-school education.

6.3 Participant one: Francine

I am originally from Rwanda and I was born in 1983. During the 1994 Rwandan genocide, I lost my Father. My mother, my young sister and I like many other Rwandans fled to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in May 1994. In DRC we were faced with another civil war and we lost our mother through unpredictable circumstances. My sister and I continued the journey with other people to Zambia. This was a long journey that took us about two years from 1998 to 2000. We were finally settled in Meheba refugee camp in Zambia in 2000. In 2010 my sister and I were among the most vulnerable people in Meheba refugee camp where we had settled for ten years and through the support of United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), we were selected for resettlement to Australia.

6.3.1 Critical Events

Francine’s story has four major Critical Events (CE) and these events give a highlight of the long trail of her journey from Rwanda, through DRC to Zambia. Francine and her younger sister were resettled in Australia in 2010.

- Selection for resettlement to Australia
- Interaction with other people
- Centrelink sponsorship
- Vocational education award winner for NSW 2016
6.3.1.1 Resettlement to Australia

Francine and her sister were identified as among the most vulnerable and needy children in the camp because they did not have any biological parents or relatives that they knew. The chance to be chosen for resettlement in Australia was a breakthrough and a miracle for them. The process of applying for refugee status was however tedious. It involved filling in application forms, then a three month interval of waiting followed by oral interviews, and finally a confirmation letter advising them of the country which had accepted them for resettlement. This became a turning point in their life together because coming to Australia gave the two girls hope and a new orientation for their lives.

6.3.1.2 Interaction with other people

In her statements, it is clear that Francine applauds the support she received from some people in her life. Francine says that ‘the support I received from different people in my life and the inspiration I got from my father when I was still young are the two reasons for who I am today’. In her life history narrative, Francine talks of her pastor in Zambia, her late father, the government of Australia, and the support she has received from other specific individuals who have impacted on her life.

Her Pastor in the refugee camp in Zambia encouraged her to go to school. ‘My pastor hoped that one day we would go back to Rwanda and so he urged me to go back to school and work hard so that in future I may have a career and get employed, have a good life and become a responsible citizen in Rwanda’. Francine thinks that her late father has always been her inspiration and a role model for her to stay in school. When she was growing up, her father used to tell her, ‘if you want to buy shoes for yourself, then you should go to school and study well.’ He also stressed that ‘if you go to school, you will know how to speak with people, respect them, and above all respect yourself’. Her father said ‘people who have never gone to school always look unprofessional due to lack of knowledge’. Francine believes that a person who has gone to school and the one who has never gone to school are different. Her father thought that those who have not gone to school were ‘Inkandagira bitabo’ which is translated to mean people who walk/step on top of books because of ignorance of the value and knowledge content in those books. She narrates her father’s experience with another family that threw away an expensive French dictionary. Because her father understood the value of that dictionary which he was able to read, he picked it up and always used it as a
reference to teach in schools and with his own children. Francine admired the fact that her father was respected in their community; people used to call him ‘Mwarimu’ which means teacher.

In Zambia, Francine was despised by a lady who doubted her capacity to write a report during a women’s association meeting. Francine was nominated to be a secretary for the meeting and to take minutes for the Great Lakes Region Women Refugees Association (GLWRA). She overheard one of the ladies speaking in doubt of her capacity to write a credible report and take minutes for the meeting in her local language: ‘ee uriya mu sekuritare wabo se, ndaba ndebe, abantu bafata umu sekuritare utarize bakamushiraho ndaba ndebe ibyo arri bwandike.’ Meaning ‘oh that secretary of theirs, people who choose a secretary who has never gone to school, I will see which type of report she will write’. Although Francine ended up writing a good report using the knowledge she had acquired from church meetings, her experience with that lady made her feel sad and it became a turning point in her life. She developed greater determination and made a resolution to always aim higher in education as long as an opportunity to study was available.

6.3.1.3 Centrelink sponsorship

An opportunity that became available through Centrelink was a turning point for her in Australia. Francine says, ‘in life if you don’t have money you are more stressed and traumatized’. She says this remembering the time she went to Centrelink crying and the case officer who received her was shocked by her statements. Francine went to Centrelink crying aloud that, ‘I don’t have anywhere to go, I don’t have anywhere to live, I don’t have knowledge, I don’t have education and I am desperate’. Francine confirms that this was truly how she was feeling about herself. As a result, Centrelink ended up paying for her certificate III and IV at TAFE in Aged Care. After that, she was able to find a job, work for money and now she is able to meet other associated costs of her schooling.

6.3.1.4 Award winner for NSW 2016

Recently, Francine developed an interest in business studies and has now completed a diploma in Business administration at the Bankstown TAFE. Francine became the Vocational Student of the Year 2016 and was the New South Wales award winner. At the time of the interview, she was on the list of national finalists for the Vocational Education Award Winner 2016. Although she did not make it as a finalist at national level, the fact that she was
on the list of competitors has become Francine’s motivation to pursue a University degree in the coming years. This experience became a turning point in her life because she has been able to think big and now she has started a charitable organisation to support people who are going through difficult times.

6.3.2. Education profile

6.3.2.1. Primary education

Francine had her first four years of primary education in Rwanda. She was motivated to be in school at that stage by her father who was a local leader and an advisor to the community. She admired her father and wanted to be like him. At the same time, she was following the Government of Rwanda’s curriculum that required her to be in school at a certain age. When the war and the genocide took place in Rwanda, Francine’s education was interrupted and she started her journey to Zambia through the Democratic Republic of Congo. In the refugee camps, Francine received an informal education facilitated by older people within the refugee camp who would create small study groups among children and teach them cultural values as well as the French language. At this point, Francine cared more for peace and security than education. She desired peace and healing from the traumatic experiences of losing her parents and the insecurity of life in the Great Lakes Region of Africa. However, in Zambia UNHCR had funded the government to build schools in the refugee camp and that is how Francine managed to finish her primary education.

6.3.2.2 Secondary education

In the refugee camp in Zambia, there were no secondary schools so Francine had to go to Lusaka, the capital city of Zambia, to start high school education. Francine managed to complete high school because of a friend who paid for her tuition fees. The medium of instruction in Zambian schools was English. Francine managed to remain in school because someone was financially supporting her but she also got moral support from other people. Francine’s pastor in Zambia was her motivation to remain in school because he acted as a counsellor to her and always advised her to study hard. She was able to finish secondary education as a result of the support she received from different people.

6.3.2.3 Tertiary education

After arriving in Australia, Francine went to TAFE first to do the 510 hours of English as
Second Language (ESL) to which she was entitled. Later her motivation to continue in tertiary education arose because she wanted to be employed and become financially independent from the support provided by Centrelink. Therefore, after a year of studying English, she enrolled for Certificate II in Information Technology (IT), which enabled her to use computer programmes like Microsoft Word and Excel. With her Certificate II in Information Technology, she was able to get a job in the meat factory as a records keeper. However, she did not want to settle for less than she thought she was capable of and when her friend advised her to go for an aged care course; she did Certificate III and IV in Aged Care sponsored by Centrelink.

Francine then developed the motivation to become a Registered Nurse. She enrolled in different institutions of learning including University of Wollongong and Career Australia – a private college. Nevertheless, due to several challenges associated with financial support, she stopped her studies in both institutions and instead opted for a nursing diploma with the Gold Coast Institute of TAFE in Queensland because the institute offered an online course. Her motivation to remain in school until today is because she wants to become a professional in a specific field. In 2005 she enrolled in TAFE for a diploma in Business Administration which she finished in 2016.

6.4. Participant Two: Noel

6.4.1. Critical Events

I will share with you more about my life in Australia. For security reasons I will not say much about Rwanda. By the time I got a chance to relocate to Australia, I was so desperate. I was wishing for where I could go and run away from the big loss that my family had in Rwanda. Some of the surviving members of my family were in Australia and therefore I joined them on a humanitarian family re-union visa. By the time I left Rwanda I was in my fourth year at University doing Bachelor of Laws degree. Unfortunately, when I came to Australia, the languages I was able to speak fluently were French, Kinyarwanda, Kirundi and Swahili therefore I had to do English as Second Language (ESL) for a period of six months. Thereafter, I enrolled in a Diploma in Community Services at South Western Sydney Institute (Granville TAFE). After the Diploma, I enrolled in a Bachelor Degree in International Social Development and Welfare at University of Western Sydney which I completed in 2011. I am now currently studying for a Master’s degree in Policy and Applied Social Research at Macquarie University.

Noel’s life history narrative is made up of four major critical events and these have defined his resilience and education. They include:

- Resettlement to Australia
- Going to South Africa
- Honouring his father’s advice
- Appointment as a leader of the NSW Rwandan community

6.4.1.1 Resettlement to Australia

Noel considers his resettlement to Australia as a turning point in his life given the fact that he needed a place to run away from what he had witnessed in Rwanda. Noel was only a child when the horrors of the Rwandan genocide unfolded around him in 1994. His parents, along with thousands of other Rwandans, were murdered and he ended up in a Catholic orphanage as a refugee where he received support to recover. ‘I saw a number of people killed in different ways that are horrendous and difficult to think about. I left Rwanda because I was looking for safety which was not available at that time and the place to recover from trauma and we were grateful for the chance to come to Australia.’

By the time of the interview, Noel had finished seven years of settlement in Australia. On his first arrival in Australia, he received a lot of support from the Australian Government like any other newcomer on a humanitarian visa. He says that ‘when you come to Australia on a humanitarian visa, you automatically have full access to services in Australia. There are even people waiting for you at the airport and you are able to receive translation and interpretation services for free.’ Noel believes that ‘we can’t be held back by the past to change the future’. Thus he has developed a lot of life changing aspirations as a result of being resettled in Australia.

6.4.1.2. Remembering his father’s advice

Noel’s memories of his short time with his father before he passed away have always provided a turning point in his life when things get tough. Noel credits his late parents with instilling in him the attitudes of working hard and making the most of any available opportunities. His parents encouraged him to be ambitious and to have clear and achievable life goals. He says, ‘Our parents encouraged us to be ambitious and to focus on goals that we wanted, provided that they were ethical and were of benefit to ourselves, family and community.’ As a result of this advice, Noel does not allow failure to define him; instead he always works hard to honour his parents. Noel is now a community worker and his hard work has paid off. At the time of the interview, he was enrolled in a Master’s degree at Macquarie University in policy and applied social research and he is now an author of a book which tells the story of the Rwandan genocide as seen through the eyes of a child. ‘It’s not easy but you
need to have courage and commitment and put others first and use your head, heart and hands’, Noel says.

6.4.1.3. Going to South Africa

Between the years 2010-2011 Noel was actively involved in participatory research in South Africa where he worked with Jesuit Refugee Service International and in partnership with other humanitarian agencies including United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). The project he was working for was supporting refugees, asylum seekers, and displaced people from countries throughout Africa. The experience he acquired in this project became a turning point in his life because he understood that he was not alone in the challenges of being a refugee. This is when he developed the desire to start writing about his experiences in Rwanda which has resulted in a co-authored book that has won him recognition in several arenas.

6.4.1.4. Appointment as leader of the NSW Rwandan community

At the time of the interview, Noel’s community work track record provided another turning point when he was trusted and appointed as a leader of the NSW Rwandan community. He said, ‘I am passionate about finding ways to assist and empower those suffering the effects of displacement, conflict and persecution. This position has built my self-esteem and confidence’. The appointment did not happen in a vacuum. It resulted from the fact that he had been at the forefront of a sustained campaign to raise awareness on issues affecting refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers. Noel has also conducted countless presentations at local primary schools, high schools and tertiary institutions as well as through forums and conferences.

6.4.2 Education profile

6.4.2.1. Primary education

Noel finished his primary education in Rwanda before the war broke out. He was at university by the time of migration to Australia. His motivation to be in school at this level was based on the Rwandan government’s school curriculum that mandated every child to be in school at a certain age. His family too, was very supportive and willing to see Noel and his siblings in school.
6.4.2.2 Secondary education

Noel finished his secondary education in Rwanda before the war broke out. His motivation to finish secondary school was to honour his parents who were still alive and had invested in his education, paying his tuition fees.

6.4.2.3 Tertiary education

Noel attributes his motivation to be in tertiary education to an enabling environment in Australia where most of the basic necessities are available. He points out that, ‘In Africa sometimes students don’t have access to what the Australian people take for granted; for example, the availability of textbooks, internet, exercise books, pens and pencils’. His motivation to keep in school is also rooted in his background. Back in Rwanda when Noel was young, his parents used to tell him that the master key to success in life is education. This advice motivated him right from his young age to love school. But also his other siblings have been his role models, given the fact that they have gone to school and excelled. For instance, one of his brothers has finished university in Canada and his sister has also finished a degree in Belgium. So, although Noel lost his parents at a tender age, he still remembers what his parents told him, that ‘If you study hard your dreams can come true and you will be able to change your life positively’.

6.5. Participant Three: Gamariel

I am originally from Rwanda and I was born in 1986. During the 1994 Rwanda genocide, I witnessed the arrest of my father, mother and my four siblings by the Rwandan genocide perpetrators. While I was in hiding at our neighbours’ house, I overheard my family crying out for help while they were being killed and I never got to see any of my family members again. The family that hid me fled to Bukavu in the Democratic Republic of Congo for fear of being implicated for having participated in the genocide by the ruling government. Life in Bukavu refugee camp was short-lived because it was a transit-centre hosting large numbers of refugee influx from Rwanda. We were therefore shifted to another camp away from the border of Rwanda where we stayed for two years. The 1996 intertribal wars in the DRC that targeted Banyamurenge (Kinyarwanda speaking tribe of DRC), affected the refugee camp we lived in and all refugees fled to different directions. I was separated from the family that had rescued me and I was picked up by a Congolese family. As the war in DRC intensified, we all fled running away to different directions and I found myself with a group that was continuing their journey to the border of Zambia via Lumumbashi, a city in the DRC. We trekked the journey for some months and reached the border of Zambia. We were stopped by the Zambian Government to enter into the country for lack of identity documents and UNHCR established a temporary refugee camp at the border where we stayed for three months until we were transferred to the bigger camp in the northern part of Zambia where we settled for over ten years.
6.5.1. Critical Events

Gamariel’s life history narrative has four major turning points. The four critical events in Gamariel’s life history narrative tell his whole story of displacement, refugee life and resettlement to Australia. They include:

- Hidden from murderers by neighbours
- Held by different groups of people
- Resettlement to Australia
- Getting married

6.5.1.1 Hidden from murderers by neighbours

Born to a family of five children, Gamariel still had both his parents (mother and father) before the 1994 Rwandan genocide. It was one evening in April 1994, when some of their neighbours stormed them in their house, got out his father, mother and four other siblings and started hacking them to death. By instinct, the eight year old Gamariel ran into the neighbourhood and one of the neighbours hid him. In the hiding place, Gamariel could hear his family crying out for help but no one was there for them. They were being killed by the very neighbours who should have rescued them instead. Gamariel never got to see his family again. He says:

> I grieved for my family for many years but over time I started thanking God for the gift of life, for I was supposed to be dead as well. The death of my family members has taught me to be responsible and take up big responsibilities. I lived in my own tent and fended for my own living within the refugee camps.

The family that had protected Gamariel fled to DRC for fear of being implicated in having participated in the genocide and like many other families who had fled from Rwanda to DRC, Gamariel’s new adopted family settled in a refugee camp in Bukavu/DRC close to the border with Rwanda. He says that, ‘The refugee camp in Bukavu was not safe for us because of the huge numbers of refugee influx; so the family that had taken me up shifted to another refugee camp that was far away from the border and we stayed there for two years’. Gamariel adds that, ‘I have survived death many times, first was when I was hidden from the genocide perpetrators, second was when I lost the family that had rescued me and third was when the Congolese family that had adopted me was displaced by war and I was left alone again. These times of survival have influenced my thinking and the way I look at life. I am a survivor who has overcome the hard times and I am hardly shaken by any life struggles.’
6.5.1.2 Held by different groups of people

In 1996, an intertribal war in DRC broke out targeting the Banyamulege who were considered to be spies or the enemies of the state. ‘During the fight among Congolese nationals, the refugee camp we lived in was attacked and all refugees dispersed to different directions. I ended up separating from the family that had adopted me. I was later taken up by a Congolese family who accepted me for a while but because they were also on the run, we separated and I joined with a group of people who were fleeing towards Zambia via Lubumbashi’. Gamariel never got to see the two families again (one that had rescued him from Rwanda and the other Congolese family that had helped him for a short time). Nevertheless, the adoption by different families gave him hope and taught him how to live with different people. ‘In Zambia I was harassed by some people who did not share the same ethnic group but even then I was used to such type of life. I tried to escape to Lusaka, the capital city of Zambia, but it did not work for me because we were meant to be confined in the refugee camp.’

6.5.1.3 Resettlement to Australia

In 2009, UNHCR started the process of resettling some of the most vulnerable refugees in the Zambian refugee camps and Gamariel was among those who were selected for resettlement. He went through all the UNHCR screenings and he was accepted by the Australian government. In March 2010 Gamariel started his journey to Australia. He was originally set to be resettled in Canberra but this was changed to Goulburn by the Australian immigration authorities for fear that given his age, Canberra would be too expensive for him to manage.

Gamariel could not believe himself that he had survived all the turmoil that he went through when he finally landed in Australia. He started refocusing on his dreams again when he found out that the Government was going to be supporting him. He was received at the airport by a case worker who took him to his accommodation, introduced him to services including Centrelink, banking, TAFE and set him off to start a new life.

Centrelink provided Gamariel with survival money equivalent to Australian $460 and an additional $60 for his housing assistance and in total he started running a budget of $520 fortnightly. He would pay $300 for rent and use the balance of $220 for his food, clothing, transport and electricity bills. The Government of Australia further paid for his education at TAFE, firstly for 510 hours for his English as a Second Language study. It was his first ever
experience of managing finances and his own life because in the refugee camp all they could
get was food supplies and other things were supplied collectively. Gamariel stresses how
much he appreciates the Government of Australia for all the support he has received ever
since he arrived and for saving his life from all the troubles in Africa.

6.5.1.4 Getting married

Another critical event in Gamariel’s life was reaching his dream of getting married. He had
originally found a girlfriend in Zambia in the refugee camp. However, the girl friend was
resettled in USA and when he tried using the Australian visa processes to bring her over, it
took too long and the girl gave up on him. Recently, in April 2016, Gamariel finally reached
his dream when he went to Africa, got married, and is now expecting his first baby.

I feel like I am a human being again, I lost my whole family to the genocide and now that I
am married it is like I have regained another family of my own. I am looking forward to
growing as a happy and united family to regain that love that I lost when my whole family
was killed.

He is currently focused on making big plans to support his family and live the dream of his
life.

6.5.2 Education profile

6.5.2.1 Primary education

In Rwanda, Gamariel left when he was in primary two. He did two additional years of
primary schooling while in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and finished his primary
school in Zambia in the refugee camp. His motivation to be in school in the refugee camp
cannot easily be defined for Gamariel because on two occasions he had to escape from the
camp. He went to Lusaka-Zambia to flee from being mistreated by those who knew him.
Those who were harassing him had connections with those who had killed his family and
therefore Gamariel did not feel safe being in the same refugee camp.

6.5.2.2 Secondary education

Through the support of different people Gamariel managed to finish high school in Zambia.
His narrative emphasises that Gamariel has had to become his own father and mother and that
he is self-driven in all he does. After spending two years at TAFE doing English as a second
language, he was determined to finish high school in Australia by doing mature entry year 11
and year 12 exams. After year 11, however, he was financially constrained and he started
searching for jobs. The job he found required him to work fulltime and that is why he stopped pursuing education at secondary level.

6.5.2.3 Tertiary education

The motivation for Gamariel to access tertiary education was purely to improve his qualifications and work opportunities. At the time of the interview, he had decided to resign from his work at the meat factory and had enrolled in Certificate III in Disability Care. Gamariel’s motivation to go back to school is his family. He is now married and is expecting a baby and so he wants to have full time employment in disability care so that he will be able to care for his wife and children. The meat factory job, according to Gamariel, is very exhausting and it is hard labour. He feels that he will not be able to give full attention to his family as he wishes if he continues with the same kind of job.

6.6. Participant Four: Ismael

I was born in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The 1996 civil war in Congo resulted in the death of many of my family members. My brother and I were helped by our house boy to escape to Rwanda. In Rwanda we were hosted by a Catholic organization and we were able to go to school paid for by the Fund for Neediest Survivors of Genocide in Rwanda (FARG). At my fourth year of secondary school, my brother and I did not feel safe in Rwanda anymore and we had to flee to Uganda. In the Ugandan refugee camp, we found many people who knew us and who saw some of our relatives being killed. We could not stay in that camp; instead we went to Kampala city and took refuge in a mosque. One of the people who came for prayers and heard our story advised us to proceed to Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya. He transported us in his goods-in-transit truck but towards reaching Kakuma refugee camp we were advised that it was not safe in the Kenyan camps either. The truck driver gave us some transport money and we took a bus to Ethiopia. Whereas we were intercepted at the border of Ethiopia, another Muslim brother from Somalia facilitated us to reach Addis-Ababa the capital city of Ethiopia. While in Addis Ababa we report to UNHCR and we were received in the urban refugee camp. However at some point UNHCR made a decision to dissolve the urban refugee camp and transfer the urban refugees to the remotest refugee camp on the eastern side of Ethiopia. My brother and I chose to stay in Addis Ababa. Although UNHCR threatened to withdraw some support from us, we still went ahead and decided to become independent but still under the cover of UNHCR. On 20th December 2010, my brother and I were resettled to Australia in Adelaide.

6.6.1 Critical Events

Ismael’s life history narrative has four critical events that summarise his life journey from home country through transit countries to resettlement in Australia.

- Help from houseboy
- Meeting with two truck drivers
• Acquiring refugee status in Addis-Ababa and meeting with the Early family
• Resettlement to Australia

6.6.1.1 Help from houseboy

Ismael’s great grandparents were originally from Rwanda, but his parents were born in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and that is why Ismael was also born in the Eastern part of the country at a place called Goma. In 1996, when the war broke out in Eastern Congo, the government targeted groups of Rwandan Tutsi who lived there and they were being killed due to the fact that they were considered to be traitors or spies. Ismael and his brother were saved by their family houseboy who helped them to cross the border to Rwanda. He said: ‘the situation in our village was unpredictable because we were being attacked at night. As my parents and other siblings went into hiding, our houseboy saved us by escorting us to the border with Rwanda’. In Rwanda the two boys were received by a Catholic organization that hosted them, treated the injuries they had sustained and later connected them to the Fund for Neediest Survivors of Genocide in Rwanda (FARG) which sponsored them to go to school. In Congo the situation normalized when Kabila took over power but in 2004 another war broke out in Congo and the two young boys decided to flee again. Ismael says, ‘We were staying near the border with DRC; our hope was to return home at some point. However, the situation instead worsened and the conflicts in DRC started affecting Rwanda. That is when my brother and I fled to Uganda.’

6.6.1.2 Meeting with truck drivers

Another turning point in the life of Ismael and his brother was when they met with two different truck drivers. The two boys reached the border of Uganda and Rwanda, presented themselves to the Ugandan immigration authorities and were taken to the refugee camp in mid-western Uganda. When they reached the camp, they discovered that there were people who knew them and they did not feel safe in the camp. They decided to go to Kampala, the capital city of Uganda. They followed the advice their father had always given them that ‘in case you go to a foreign country where you are not known to anyone, it is safe to take refuge in a mosque and people who came for prayers will always support you’. The two boys did as they had been advised and that is how they met a Muslim man who received them. Upon hearing their story, and because the man was a truck driver, he advised and supported them to go to Nairobi where they would present themselves as refugees. When they reached Nairobi, they were told that Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya was not safe because it contained mostly
refugees from Southern Sudan, and Hutus from Rwanda and Congo who were very difficult to live with and at that time the situation in the camp was not good because people were being killed. The truck driver gave them some money to take a bus to the border of Ethiopia to a place called Moyari so that they could figure out how to go to an Ethiopian refugee camp. Ismael recalls that it was very difficult to enter Ethiopia because they were intercepted.

Much as we were stopped from entering Ethiopia, we patiently waited for two weeks and we had nothing to lose at that point. Finally my brother and I met a Somalian truck driver who was a Muslim and when we shared with him what we had gone through, he ended up supporting us to cross over to Addis Ababa the capital city of Ethiopia. He also gave us some money to use within the country. This was the beginning of our rescue.

6.6.1.3 Acquiring refugee status in Addis-Ababa and meeting with the early family

Upon arrival in Addis Ababa, the two boys went to the immigration office and declared themselves as refugees. Ismael describes the process as ‘the immigration office of Ethiopia handed us over to UNHCR and we were registered as urban refugees. However, it took us one and a half years to get the refugee status.’ It took over five years for the two boys to get a resettlement country: Australia. This was because they were considered minors. Most countries try to avoid minors because they tend to reach the resettlement countries and then start applying for family re-union visas for their parents or relatives, which turns out to be an additional burden to the resettlement country. When Ismael, the younger brother, turned 18 years old they were granted resettlement. Acquiring refugee status became a turning point in the lives of Ismael and his brother because they were now able to work and earn some money. When they started teaching, they were able to pay rent for their house and buy food. They taught until they were resettled in Australia in 2010. This level of independence was a turning point in Ismael’s life because they were able to stay in the city rather than go to the refugee camp where every service is provided collectively and the possibilities of resettlement are minimal since the population in the refugee camp is big.

Ismael and his brother met with the Early family (Steve and Terry Early) from Adelaide, Australia, when they were in Ethiopia working with a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) called Serving in Mission (SIM). When they shared their life experiences as refugees with them, the family offered to pay for Ismael’s tuition fees and he enrolled in an English speaking school, the British International School in Addis-Ababa, Ethiopia. This was a critical event in his life because he had lost hope of ever going back to school since the language of instruction in schools in Ethiopia was different and because he was not able to pay for his education.
6.6.1.4 Resettlement to Australia

Resettlement was their biggest turning point because their life style changed. For instance, they were given a unit of two bedrooms and it was the first time Ismael had ever stayed in his own room. Back in Ethiopia, Ismael and his brother had one room and Ismael’s mattress was always on the floor so it was quite exciting for him to start an independent life. The Government of Australia paid their bills for six months and they also received support from Centrelink and Medicare. They received close to $400 each from Centrelink per fortnight to buy food and other needs but after two months Ismael started working and then Centrelink stopped the support.

6.6.2. Education profile

6.6.2.1. Primary education

Ismael did part of his primary education in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). His parents were very supportive and they motivated him to be in school. He says, ‘My family was such a good family, friendly and loving and whatever I do I want to honour my father and mother.’ His education in DRC was interrupted but he was able to resume schooling in Rwanda and completed his primary education.

6.6.2.2 Secondary education

Ismael and his brother arrived in Rwanda and an opportunity for schooling opened up. They started going to school immediately sponsored by The Fund for Neediest Survivors of Genocide in Rwanda (FARG). His education was again interrupted by his going to Ethiopia via Uganda and Kenya. In Ethiopia, the Early family offered to pay for Ismael’s tuition fees and that is how he enrolled in the British International School based in Addis-Ababa, Ethiopia. He finished high school in 2010.

I could not have managed to pay for my education in Ethiopia because I was considered international and international students in Ethiopia paid triple the amount paid by the native students. My fees were American $4000 per year.

Keeping in school and finishing high school for Ismael was purely as a result of the supportive family that paid for his tuition fees.
6.6.2.3 Tertiary education

Upon arrival in Australia in 2010, Ismael did the examination for year 12 with the hope of passing and getting direct entry into university. Much as Ismael passed with good grades, he could not continue with his university education. Instead he chose to start working. Ismael had to do TAFE short courses instead of a full university degree because he wanted to secure jobs quickly as he planned to visit and find some of the surviving members of his family in Africa who he had not seen since 1996. He was not sure if his father, mother, aunts and other siblings were still alive. When Ismael and his brother went back to Africa to ascertain if there were family members still alive, to his surprise he found that his father and mother had also taken refuge in Uganda and some of his siblings, aunts and uncles were also still alive.

The other reason why Ismael did not prioritize university education for himself was that his big brother had enrolled at the University and was doing his Civil Engineering degree as a full time student. Ismael had to work hard in order to support the extended family in Africa until his big brother would able to finish his degree. His brother sacrificed for him when they were in Ethiopia by working and caring for him so that he could finish high school and in Australia Ismael is standing in the gap until his brother finishes university. They couldn’t both go to school at the same time in order to manage their financial responsibilities.

Ismael keeps up with his desire for higher education simply because he feels he has a lot of potential that he cannot prove unless he has the credentials to show this. He believes that when he acquires higher qualifications, then he will pursue better employment opportunities even beyond the borders of Australia. Ismael acknowledges that the only resource and chance African students with a refugee background have in Australia is quality education. Ismael did Certificate III in Retail Management at TAFE in Adelaide. He also did Certificate IV in Social Services at TAFE in Goulburn and Certificate IV in Business Management at Western Sydney TAFE.
6.7. Participant five: Zawadi

My family’s life history narrative story starts with our grandparents who fled from war in Rwanda in 1959 and settled in the Democratic Republic of Congo. As a result of our long stay in DRC, our family like many others from Rwanda and Burundi were granted citizenship in DRC. I was therefore born as a Congolese in the DRC. The civil war in Rwanda that ended with the 1994 Rwandan Genocide led to the genocide perpetrators (the Hutu extremists) fleeing to DRC for fear of revenge from the Tutsi government that had taken over power in Rwanda. In the process of settling in Congo, the Hutu rebels started killing the Tutsi who had settled in Congo for many years including some of my family members. As a result of the killings, some of the surviving members of my family fled to Rwanda. We did not go back to Rwanda as repatriated citizens instead as refugees and we were settled in Byumba refugee camp for 15 years until we were resettled in Australia in 2010.

6.7.1. Critical Events

Zawadi’s life history narrative has three critical events that tell about her life of displacement.

- Schooling opportunity in Rwanda
- Resettlement to Australia
- Employment at a Salvation Army aged care facility

6.7.1.1. Schooling opportunity in Rwanda

Settlement in the refugee camp in Rwanda was a turning point in Zawadi’s life because she was able to not only have access to education but also family life of being together. She says that ‘Following the war in Congo and the loss of some of our family members, the few surviving members of my family remained together and we comforted each other and managed challenges together.’ Rwanda also opened up education opportunities for refugees and that is how Zawadi was able to finish high school before coming to Australia. She said:

We spent fifteen years in the refugee camp in Rwanda, primary schooling was in the refugee camp and we were using DRC curriculum with a hope that we shall go back soon. By the time we finished primary school, I was lucky that Rwanda had allowed refugee children to have access to the Rwandan public schools and I was able to finish high school in Rwanda. The opportunity to flee to Rwanda kept our family together and my parents were very supportive and encouraged us to study hard and pursue education goals.

6.7.1.2. Resettlement to Australia

Zawadi’s immediate family (father, mother, and siblings), nine people in total, were resettled in Goulburn, Australia in October 2010. Zawadi says ‘I came to Australia when I was pregnant and did all my education while I was nursing a baby as well. The government of Australia supported me to pay for child care through Centrelink.’ Zawadi was lucky that she came with her family, most especially her mother who helped her to take care of the baby while she was going to TAFE.
The Australian government has done big things for my family and I will always be grateful. I have received Centrelink and Medicare support. My child has benefited so much from Medicare because he fell sick often but I was able to take him for treatment at no cost.

Zawadi sees her access to Australian education as another critical event that happened in her life as a result of resettlement. She stresses that ‘It does not matter at what age you are; you can go back to school and finish your studies.’ Zawadi was able to go back to school six months after giving birth to her baby and Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) took care of her education expenses.

6.7.1.3 Employment at Salvation Army aged care facility

When Zawadi arrived in Australia, she was obliged to support her boyfriend back in Africa and other extended family members. Securing employment with Salvation Army aged care facility was a turning point in her life. She was able to work and get money.

Starting to work and earn some money was one of my heart’s desires because I was tired of seeing some of my family members struggling financially and I had a moral obligation to support them. In addition to contributing to my family welfare, I was also able to support my partner’s visa applications and today I am so happy to see that I am with the father of my son.

Zawadi’s turning point has been having the father of her son come over to Australia to live with her and they are together as a family. This was made possible because she was working and able to pay for visa applications and ticket for her boyfriend who was still in the refugee camp in Africa.

6.7.2 Education profile

6.7.2.1 Primary education

Zawadi left DRC when she was still young and therefore went to school in Rwanda. She completed her primary education in Rwanda (six years of primary education). However, primary schooling for her was in a temporary school established by UNHCR within the refugee camp. Zawadi says that the education system in the refugee camp was tailored to DRC curriculum because there was hope that they could go back to DRC. This is in line with the UNHCR policy of providing education in the refugee camp that is tailored to the curriculum of the country of origin. At this level, education for most refugee background students is purely compulsory and facilitated by the host country funded by UNHCR.
6.7.2.2 Secondary education

Zawadi did three years of lower secondary and three years of upper secondary in Rwanda. The medium of instruction in her high school education was French. In order to continue her education as a refugee, she had to study in the Rwandan secondary schools outside the refugee camp. Given the fact that her foundational education in the refugee camp was not structured, when she joined secondary education, she repeated classes and lost three years trying to catch up with a different curriculum. Zawadi’s motivation to keep in school resulted from the fact that Rwanda opened doors for refugee background students to study in the Rwandan schools for free. Rwanda had nine years of free education until 2009 when the policy changed to twelve years. Refugee students in the camps within Rwanda can also have free access to the compulsory 12 years of education in Rwanda and that is how Zawadi managed to do six years of secondary.

6.7.2.3 Tertiary education

In Australia, Zawadi enrolled for English classes first at NSW TAFE in Goulburn where she graduated with level three certificates in 2011. After spending a year doing her English classes, Zawadi enrolled for Certificate III in Aged Care in 2012 and later upgraded to Certificate IV in Aged Care. Zawadi says, ‘I had good teachers and that is why I was able to catch up with English easily which facilitated my integration in the education system in Australia’. Today, she has enrolled for a diploma in Enrolled Nursing (EN) at Gold Coast TAFE in Canberra. Her hope is to continue her education until she will graduate as a Registered Nurse (RN). After completing Certificate IV in Aged Care, Zawadi was employed by a Salvation Army aged care facility where she has worked since 2013. Zawadi says that this is a low paying job and does not demand a lot of qualifications. Some employees who have never done Certificate III earn the same money as she does. This kind of employment is not motivating for further education. In this kind of job, she feels that experience is far more enabling than the level of education one has and that is why she chose to first work and care for her baby until 2015 when she enrolled in a diploma online.
6.8. Participant six: Juliet

I was born in the Democratic Republic of Congo at a place called Masisi, a town in the Northern Kivu province. My grandparents and my parents migrated from Rwanda in 1959 fleeing from the ethnic killings that were taking place at that time. My siblings and I knew DRC as our home and our place of birth until we started encountering the killings in 1996 that targeted Kinyarwanda speaking people and Tutsi in the northern Kivu province of DRC. My brother and I, after losing some of our family members, decided to flee and went through Rwanda to Uganda. When we arrived in Kampala, we declared ourselves as asylum seekers to the immigration office and we were taken to Nakivale refugee camp in south western part of Uganda. In the camp we found there a big group of refugees who had fled war in the eastern DRC but there was also a large community of Rwandans who were involved in the mass killings of the 1994 genocide. Because I had a baby, my brother and I were categorized as the most vulnerable and in 2008 we were lucky to be resettled in Australia.

6.8.1 Critical Events

Juliet’s life history narrative has three major critical events that tell about her life experiences.

- Reception at immigration office in Kampala
- Resettlement to Australia
- Care for her children

6.8.1.1. Reception at immigration office in Kampala

Juliet remembers when unknown people would come to their village and kill people at night and that is how the situation in DRC became a threat to their lives and they had to flee. Juliet, her newly born baby, and her brother took the risk of fleeing to Kampala and the reception they got from the immigration officials gave them an opportunity to achieve the life they enjoy today.

When we reached Kampala, we were received by the immigration officials, who processed our refugee status and sent us to Nakivale refugee camp where we settled for two years. Our documents for asylum were processed quickly and we were given refugee status.

The three (Juliet, her daughter, and brother) were considered among the most vulnerable refugees and fell into the category of unaccompanied children and this is why their selection for resettlement to a third country was quick. The reception at the Kampala immigration office therefore becomes a critical event in their life as it became the starting point for their journey to Australia.
6.8.1.2 Resettlement to Australia

UNHCR identified Juliet and her brother as among the most vulnerable in the refugee camp. They were orphans and above all Juliet was nursing a baby of three years without any defined support. Therefore, in 2008 they were resettled in Australia. The three became part of the 10 refugees who were chosen that year from Nakivale Refugee Settlement to be resettled in Australia. Upon arrival, they were received by a case worker and they were taken to a hotel where they stayed for a period of four months until a house was found for them. Coming to Australia was a turning point in Juliet’s life because she was motivated to go back to school with the hope that after school she would get a job and take care of her baby. At the same time she was able to get Centrelink support for her baby and herself. She was also able to get education at TAFE starting with English classes. Thus resettlement in Australia changed Juliet’s life, and the lives of her baby and brother.

6.8.1.3 Giving birth to the second child

Juliet came to Australia with a three year old daughter. In Australia she found a partner and they dated for three years but the relationship did not continue. Juliet however ended up becoming pregnant again and having another baby. The responsibility of caring for her children increased from one to two. Juliet’s desire to care for her children has been a hindrance for her furthering her education. She is however grateful that her resettlement to Australia is an added advantage because children are able to benefit from Centrelink and Medicare. She says:

Life in the refugee camp was very difficult because we did not have enough to eat, suffered a lot of diseases and people were dying. Children would go to school within the camp but schools had no trained teachers and they did not have teaching resources and facilities like a library. I am working hard to enable my children to have a chance of benefiting from quality education in Australia.

6.8.2 Education profile

6.8.2.1 Primary education

Juliet did her primary education prior to the war in Democratic Republic Congo (DRC). She finished year six according to the DRC curriculum. Juliet had a stable family and her parents were farmers raising cattle. Going to school was part of the government program of having every child at school at a given age.
6.8.2.2 Secondary education

Juliet did her secondary education in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) where she did her lower and upper secondary education for six years. However, growing up in a family of farmers raising cattle, Juliet had little motivation to be in school. The changing circumstance of war and conflicts caused Juliet and her brother to flee to Uganda to the Nakivale refugee camp. She did not go to school again until she was resettled in Australia. In Australia Juliet’s motivation for education emerged after she lost all she treasured to war including her nuclear and extended family.

6.8.2.3 Tertiary education

Juliet enrolled in English as a second language at Blacktown TAFE and in about a year she was able to complete the mandatory 510 hours. During her time in Uganda, she was able to develop some basic communication skills in English but even then, studying English in Australia was quite hard although she was determined to learn it. After achieving Certificate III in English Language, Juliet did Certificate III in Child Care at Blacktown TAFE and she was able to offer child care services at her house as an Australian qualified and registered Carer. When Juliet’s children and her neighbours’ children were growing up and starting school, she chose to do Certificate III in Aged Care which she completed successfully and by the time of the interview she had completed Certificate IV in Aged Care and enrolled for Certificate IV in Disability Care. Her dream profession is to become a counsellor and she regrets her low capacity in academic English. Juliet is optimistic that she will become a counsellor in her future.

6.9. Participant Seven: Anna

I was born in Tanzania to Burundi parents. We however went back to Burundi and in 1993, an ethnic civil war broke out in Burundi and we were displaced again into Tanzania. My mother and my siblings were all settled in Kanembwa refugee camp from 1994 to 2005. In 2005, we were transferred to Nduta refugee camp following the insecurity that had cropped up in Kanembwa refugee camp. We lived in Nduta refugee camp from 2005 to 2007. In total we lived in refugee camps for over 14 years (1993 to 2008). In 2008, we were resettled in Australia. When we came to Australia I was 18 years. I did English as Second Language for one and a half years, enrolled in high school for year 11 and 12, passed and entered University directly for a Bachelor of Social Sciences degree. However, I dropped out of University after one year, got married, had three children. In 2015, I enrolled into TAFE for Certificate IV in Community services which I finished in April 2016. My aspirations today are to enter university again and finish my degree in social work.
6.9.1. Critical Events

Anna’s life history narrative is composed of four major critical events that describe moments in her life that were transformative. Above all these critical events describe her life of displacement from Burundi through Tanzania to Australia.

- Resettlement to Australia
- Employment with Family and Community Services (FACs)
- Encounter with friendly peers and teachers at school
- Encounter with a boyfriend/husband

6.9.1.1 Resettlement to Australia

Anna’s family landed at Sydney International Airport from Tanzania. An interesting scenario took place when she was separated from her family; when the case worker received the family, Anna was nowhere to be found. With the help of police they were able to search for her only to find her standing still at a spot where she thought she was waiting for her family. When they got together as a family again, the case worker took them to the prepared accommodation at Mt. Druitt. They were oriented into how to use different equipment in the house because they had no idea how to use appliances like the heater, cooktop, oven or microwave. In addition the case worker had done a lot of shopping and they had plenty of food in the fridge. Although they were not familiar with the type of food, at the same time they were grateful. They were settled in a big house given the size of family at Mt. Druitt which they considered to be very expensive because they were paying Australian $900 per fortnight.

They had arrived early in the morning, so the case worker took them to Centrelink to register, to the bank to open accounts, and also to a few other places. Another interesting scenario happened at Mt. Druitt train station. Their mother was carrying a baby and because of the jetlag combined with fatigue, when the train arrived she stood up and entered the train, forgetting her handbag which contained the keys to the new house, $250 to use for their meals and transport and a voucher for credit to make calls to their family back in Africa. The case worker followed up at the station but the bag was reported to be missing and not in the lost property. The case worker made calls and further arrangements for a spare key to the house and they were able to get additional financial support. Anna considers resettlement to
Australia as a turning point because there were a lot of uncertainties in the refugee camps. She says:

Coming to Australia helped us as a family to be together. In the refugee camp, we did not have enough to eat…. I would go to school in one school uniform and I wasn’t sure if I would continue my education at all. We slept on the floor and we had no hope of a good life ahead of us. A lot of things that many Australians take for granted like having water to drink, electricity, access to education and security are a treasure back in Africa.

6.9.1.2 Employment with Family and Community Services (FACS)

Anna’s ability to speak and write Swahili and other languages from the Great Lakes Region of Africa has enabled her to secure a job as a translator. Anna works at Community Migrant Resource Centre as a support worker. She has worked with migrant families who are in contact with Family and Community Services (FACS) since 2013. She helps with language support to FACS case workers and also with families. She also helps FACS workers with cultural information. She acts like a bridge between FACS and Families because migrant families sometimes have negative attitudes towards FACS and Australian authorities. FACS is known only for removing children from families and this leaves families disgruntled. In her duties, Anna clarified the role of FACS because FACS does not remove children only but protects them from significant harm, like neglect, physical and psychological abuse. FACS also helps families before they get into trouble and risk having their children taken away by giving them information and linking them to other services like counselling.

My work with FACS has changed my attitude towards many things. I used to think that nothing good can come from a refugee background person. Seeing the impact of the work I do with immigrants gives me hope for a better life and also increases my self-esteem and confidence that I am part of the bigger community.

Anna has changed the way she used to see things as a result of her current job. Being employed by FACS has positively changed her perceptions about being a refugee and now she is proud of the fact that she is impacting the lives of many people who are of refugee backgrounds.

6.9.1.3. Encounter with friendly peers and teachers

At Evans High School and St. Mary’s Senior High School where Anna went to school, fellow students were helpful and friendly. Both schools had a program of extra classes for migrant students to enable them to catch up with English and other subjects and to support them in doing homework and assessments.

The friends I have met in Australia and the way they have treated me, has changed me for the better. I was motivated to be in school because of the friendly environment I found in the
schools I attended in Australia. They encouraged me as opposed to those I met while schooling in Tanzanian refugee camps. In the camps I was bullied by my fellow students at school because I was not good at speaking Kirundi and French but when I reached Australia things were completely different from what I was expecting.

Anna had a good relationship with her teachers, and one of the teachers is still her good friend. Evidently, Anna was able to finish high school because of the friendly and supportive school environment.

6.9.1.4. Encounter with a boyfriend/husband

In 2013, Anna was one year into her Bachelor of Social Sciences when she met her boyfriend; she ended up starting a family, got married and her education was disrupted. She dropped her degree and started having children. She tried to enrol into the university again in 2016 but had to change her course because she has just had a baby. Today, Anna has three children. Anna’s encounter with her husband becomes a turning point because she changed her original education plan.

6.9.2 Education profile

6.9.2.1 Primary education

Anna started her primary education in Tanzania. She was following the Tanzanian curriculum where the languages of instructions were English and Swahili. She was later transferred into the refugee camp where the languages of instruction were French and Kirundi. Anna was bullied by fellow refugee students since she couldn’t speak Kirundi and French. Anna repeated academic year four and five of her primary schooling and this affected her confidence and self-esteem. However, she was able to catch up very well and was promoted to year six. In year six she sat for the national exams and qualified to join year seven which is the first year of secondary education. Anna remained in school because it was the way of life in the camp that all children of her age were supposed to be in school.

6.9.2.2 Secondary education

When Anna was promoted to year eight, her education was interrupted because they were transferred to Nduta refugee camp from Kanembwa by UNHCR for their safety. At Nduta refugee camp the students she found were different and the environment was very friendly. Anna mixed with different students from different camps and their support was important in her pursuit of education. Anna’s education was again interrupted in 2007 when her family
was transferred to Kanembwa refugee transit centre where they were being prepared for resettlement to Australia. In the transit centre, Anna did not go to school and lost another year of her education. In 2008, they were finally resettled in Australia and she was able, together with her three younger sisters, to enrol at Evans High School where they studied English as a second language for one and a half years. In 2010 she went to St. Mary’s Senior High School where she completed years 11 and 12.

6.9.2.3 Tertiary education

In 2012, Anna enrolled at Western Sydney University for a degree in Social Sciences which she did not finish. She dropped out from University in 2013 and started a family and got married. Her education was interrupted from 2013 to 2014, and in 2015 she enrolled for Certificate IV in Community Services at Nirimba TAFE which she finished in April 2016. In July 2016, Anna resumed her degree at Western Sydney University and few months later dropped it again because she was having her third child. Anna thinks that Australia provides great opportunities for education and students with a refugee background have no excuse whatsoever for not finishing school. She is looking into finishing her degree in social work and in the mean time she is a case worker and supports refugee families who are still struggling in their integration into the Australian culture.

6.10. Participant Eight: Dan

I was born in Sierra Leone in 1973. I became a refugee following the eleven years of civil war in Sierra Leone (1991-2002). I lost my father in the war and the surviving members of my family fled to Guinea Conakry. In the course of war, in 1998, I took the risk of going back to Sierra Leone in order to finish my diploma in Civil Engineering. In 2000, right after finishing my diploma, the war in Sierra Leone intensified and the military carried out a coup and overthrew the ruling government. My girlfriend and I went back to Guinea and joined our other family members whom I had left there. In 2001, Australia opened doors for refugees in Sierra Leone and my whole family was resettled in Sydney at Liverpool.

6.10.1 Critical Events

Dan’s story has five major Critical Events (CEs) that highlight his experiences during the war and after resettlement in Australia.

- Captured and detained by rebels
- Escape from the rebels
- Entry into Guinea Conakry
- Family support in Guinea Conakry
Resettlement to Australia

6.10.1.1 Captured and detained by rebels

When we had finished the school term at our boarding school, the next day we packed up and had to go home for holidays. Upon reaching our village town, we found out that the whole village was taken over by the rebels and most of our family members had fled the village and relocated to another place which was under the government soldiers’ control.

The surprise of being captured by rebels happened in 1993. Dan’s family had fled the village for their lives to the Northern Province to a place called Makeni. At this point, all students who had come back to their village were captured and detained by rebels. Although a negative one, this was a turning point in Dan’s life because he started witnessing people being killed in his presence. The rebels killed people using machetes to cut off their heads.

He says that:

It was then that I discovered that I had to grow up and face reality. We saw a lot of inhuman acts done by rebels like killings and torture, at this time I made the decision to defend my life and that is when I risked escaping from the rebels. Such experience challenged my teenage life and I have developed a desire for studying law at the university to advocate for social justice.

6.10.1.2 Escape from the rebels

One night when the situation appeared to be favourable, as the rebels were busy organizing to transfer the captured people to their controlled territory/zones, Dan and his friends decided to escape. He said:

I ran into the jungle without knowing where I was going and by God’s grace, I found a safe direction that led me to join with other people who were also on the move to a safe haven. In the process of escaping, I separated from my friends and teamed up with other people whom I did not know. For three days in the bush, my colleagues and I fed on raw food from the neighbouring farms and everything we ate was unhygienic.

Dan sustained a lot of bruises and injuries from the bush and because he had started the journey suddenly, the clothes he was wearing were not suitable. On the fourth day, Dan and the entire group reached a safe part of the highway with just five more kilometres’ walk to reach the government protected military zone which was at the same time a collection point for those who managed to escape from the rebels. Lots of vehicles were coming and taking people to be re-united with their surviving family members in the Northern Province at Makeni which was about 90-100 miles from Kono where the rebels had held them. The entire journey in the jungle took five days until they were re-united with their families. Escaping
from the rebels became a turning point in Dan’s life because he was able to start life again when he managed to re-unite with some of the surviving members of his family.

My family could hardly recognize me, I looked awful and different. I had contracted an infection from eating all the dirty stuff in the jungle and had sustained a lot of bruises and had infection in my eyes. Today I must put on glasses to avoid pain from the sunshine.

This became a turning point in Dan’s life because he is still dealing with the same challenge and according to him, his eyes remind him of those days every day and how he has to work hard to overcome the trauma.

6.10.1.3 Entry into Guinea Conakry

Dan lost his father, uncle, and step sister in the war. In 1997, Dan and his surviving family members decided to leave the country and sought refuge in Guinea Conakry. Dan’s mother and other siblings left for Guinea by United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) while Dan was undergoing treatment for the injuries he had sustained in the bush. By the time his wounds had healed, the transport fee to Guinea was suddenly increased because of the prevailing circumstances. To Dan’s luck, one of his friends who now lives in England supported him with 10,000 Sierra Leone money (AUS $40). This paid for him and his seven year old sister to be transported by boat to Guinea Conakry. The transporters hid them in the engine section while setting off until they were off shore and then hid them again from the Guinea security check points, thereby facilitating them to enter into Guinea illegally. This practice had become common in Guinea because entering Guinea legally required many criteria. At that time the country was not welcoming of refugees for fear that members of the rebel group might disguise themselves as refugees. This occurrence becomes a turning point because Dan was able to re-join his family.

6.10.1.4 Family support in Guinea Conakry

From a historical perspective, Guinea is largely inhabited by people who originally migrated from Mali and Sierra Leone and what this meant for Dan was that he had relatives from his mother’s side in Guinea. Dan used to visit them during holidays before the war. Dan and his sister therefore were comforted and hosted by their extended family members and only went to the refugee camp to get official documents as refugees. They were lucky because life in the refugee camp was very difficult; people were being killed and abused and had lots of other challenges. Dan and his family were further threatened when the government of Guinea then started head hunting for refugees who were hidden at family level. In order to survive in
Guinea, Dan and his family had to change their identities in order to look like Guineans. In doing so, they tried to fit into the cultural context by dressing like them, behaving like them and trying to speak their local languages. They were favoured by the tribesmen of their mother who always advocated for them as a family and insisted that they would cause no harm to the Guinean community. Specifically however, one of the signs that identified rebels was the fact that most of them had tattoos—Dan had a tattoo. When one of village chiefs saw the tattoo on Dan while paying a visit to the family, he warned him that it should never be seen by anyone else. As a result of having a tattoo, Dan’s life was always threatened in Guinea. When the war ended in 1998 he chose to leave his family and went back to Sierra Leone where he spent two years finishing his diploma in Civil Engineering. After the 2000 coup, Dan fled back to Guinea and joined his family again. The encounter with the local leader became a warning to Dan and a turning point because he made a decision to go back to Sierra Leone to hide from being hunted but also to pursue his diploma.

6.10.1.5 Resettlement to Australia

The ultimate freedom was when Dan and his family came to Australia although they had hoped to be taken to USA. At that time the Australian government opened up for indigenous African refugees to be resettled in Australia and Dan and his family were among the first group of African refugees to come to Australia on humanitarian visas. Dan thinks it was a blessing in disguise to have missed going to USA because he has achieved his life aspirations in Australia. His mother was a widow with seven children and all were granted resettlement by the Australian government. When they arrived in Australia at the airport, they felt a big relief from all the troubles they had originally experienced. They knew that restoration had come and they would never face war and killings of the innocent again. In Australia, the whole family was received by a social worker and they were given an apartment of two bed rooms in Liverpool. Although the space was limited and small, they still felt life was by far better. The social worker came the following day, took them shopping and in the process of shopping the family filled up trolleys with food stuffs and that was in itself a big relief. Dan’s next desire was to be enrolled back into school but it was a holiday season and it took him a month to be back to school again.
6.10.2. Education profile

Dan’s educational career in Africa was a difficult one. Like many other children in the same context his education was interrupted for 6 years. When he arrived in Australia, his desire was to go back to school, finish and secure a job so that he may be able to support his family. Apart from working, Dan felt that finishing school and graduating would make his family proud of him.

6.10.2.1 Primary education

Dan had his primary education in Sierra Leone like every other pupil in his country and was able to finish and proceed to secondary education. His family was very supportive but also the government program of ensuring that all children at a given age should be in school kept Dan in school at this level. It is therefore imperative to remember that where governments are stable, children’s education becomes a normal way of life.

6.10.2.2 Secondary education

Dan went to secondary school in the city away from his home village. Most of Sierra Leone high school students travel away from their villages to where secondary schools are located in towns and cities. Towards the end of his high school, in the summer holidays, all students from his village who travelled back home for holidays fell into the hands of rebels and their secondary education ended at that point. Dan was able to escape from the rebels and finally was reunited with his family in another location away from his home village. He was able to finish high school in Sierra Leone when he went back but did not get the grades that would allow him to pursue his dream profession of becoming a medical doctor. His father on the other hand had motivated him to do a Diploma in Civil Engineering which he finished before coming to Australia.

6.10.2.3 Tertiary education

Initially, Dan left the rest of his family members in Guinea where they were refugees and went back to Sierra Leone by himself in 1998. He managed to finish high school and continued with a Diploma in Civil Engineering and he completed it in 2000. No sooner had he completed his diploma than another attack on the city by rebels caused a more devastating situation in the country of Sierra Leone. Dan was able to be in school again when he arrived in Australia in 2001. He did mature entry high school exams and when he passed he was able
to apply for University. Given his background, in Australia he also did Certificate IV and upgraded to a Diploma in Residential Building.

In Australia, adult migrants are given the option of doing the Special Tertiary Admission Test (STAT) and Dan did these tests equivalent to year 12 in Australia and passed them. Dan enrolled for a degree in medical sciences with the hope that in future he would find his way into the field of medicine. Dan ended up dropping his degree in his second year because of too much fatigue from combining working and studying. Dan could not be attentive in class but slept through classes. In order to catch up, he would record the lessons from the teacher and follow them later. Even then it did not work out according to him. Dan discovered that he was not able to enrol directly into medicine and his hopes and expectations were crushed and shattered.

Dan’s motivation to be in school today is based on his new desire of becoming a lawyer and an advocate for social justice. Because of his past and the life he has gone through, Dan is looking forward to defending people who are considered vulnerable and who are denied a chance of a fair trial. Dan does not want to fail in life for fear of being a disappointment to his family. He sees himself as part of a bigger society and not what he wants to be as an individual. Dan’s vision is to make a very good example in the society. Dan says that ‘a good example is not in what we see today but more on the track record of what has defined your life’. Dan’s drive is his family and his family is his engine and motivation in his life.

6.11. Participant Nine: Fatima

I was born in Ethiopia to Sudanese parents in 1988. My parents had migrated to Ethiopia following the civil war in the Sudan. In 1991 there was political instability in Ethiopia resulting from border conflicts between Eretria and Ethiopia. As a result, my family went back to Southern Sudan where we stayed for six years. My father joined the military and was serving in the Southern Sudan military. My father’s service in the army changed the trend of events because we never got to see him on a regular basis again. The civil war in Sudan intensified and so my mother, my sister and I had to flee to Kenya and we were settled in Kakuma refugee camp. After securing the refugee status, my mother moved us to Nairobi so that we can get a good education. We stayed in Kenya for eight years and we were resettled in Australia - Adelaide - in 2006.

6.11.1. Critical Events

Fatima and her family survived two civil wars; one in Ethiopia and another one in Southern Sudan. Fatima’s life history narrative is described by four critical events and while they survived by moving away from the war zone, they did not move as a whole family to Kenya because her father was involved in the military service and so it was difficult to be with him.
- Moving to Nairobi
- Resettlement to Australia
- Encounter with peers
- Encounter with church in Sydney

6.11.1.1 Moving to Nairobi

Fatima’s life history presents the first critical event as the courage her mother took first to move from Southern Sudan to Kenya and then from Kakuma refugee camp to Nairobi city.

It took big courage for my mother to make the decision to move from the camp where we were getting some of the services for free and take us to Nairobi which was a step of faith because she did not know anybody there nor was she assured of a job.

In Nairobi her mother also was able to start a sewing business so that they could have money for food and rent. After some time Fatima’s family start receiving support from their uncle in terms of meeting expenses for their education and the expenses of living in the city. They settled in Nairobi until they were granted a Visa to come to Australia in 2006.

6.11.1.2 Resettlement to Australia

Fatima says that her mother tried to apply for a resettlement visa to a third country through UNHCR, first to the USA where her younger sister had been living for many years and second to Australia where her brother was living but in both instances she was not successful.

At a later stage Fatima’s uncle who was in Australia sponsored them to come to Australia.

I take my mother as a heroine because, as children we never suffered the pain of being a refugee, even in the process of finding resettlement, we never knew the trouble she was going through. When we were resettled to Australia, we raised our hopes and felt that life was going to be better not only for us but even for our mother who had worked so hard to give us a good education.

Upon arriving in Australia at the airport, Fatima’s uncle who had sponsored them came to receive them in the company of a big community of Sudanese friends and relatives. Fatima, her mother and sister stayed at her uncle’s house for a month and they were later taken to another place in the city where they rented a house of their own. Fatima says that the house wasn’t so good but her mother was not comfortable staying in someone else’s house. Fatima says:

Coming to Australia changed my perspective and at first I thought I was going to excel in everything I did, however life turned in a different direction after year ten in school when I started getting distracted and that marked the beginning of my misery.
6.11.1.3 Encounter with peers

At school, Fatima had an encounter with friends who influenced her in a negative way. She says that: ‘A friend of mine who had a lot of family challenges distracted me from school and together we started dealing with emotional problems and making wrong choices. We started having boyfriends, going for parties, clubbing and drinking and I did not prioritise my education as I had original intended’.

Such behaviour affected her education and that is why she did not finish year twelve. Negative as it may have been, this was a moment of encounter for Fatima that change her way of life. From this encounter, Fatima lost interest in school and started dealing with conflicts between her and her mother. As a result, she moved from Adelaide to Sydney to start a new life.

6.11.1.4 Encounter with pastor at church in Sydney

In Adelaide, Fatima was living with shame for having failed to finish year 12 and was also in constant conflict with her mother who was disappointed in her. She therefore moved to Sydney as a way of running away from disappointments. In Sydney, she stayed with her uncle and the situation was not friendly there either. Fatima started living by herself, which gave her freedom to start going to church instead of going to a mosque like her uncle’s family. She then had an encounter with a Pastor at church that motivated her to start having a vision for her life. The pastor at church challenged her on how she should live and this became a turning point in her life as she started becoming focused. By the time of the interview, Fatima had started pursuing her dreams in education and was enrolled in a business course. Her future aspiration of helping other girls who might be experiencing what she went through is one reason she had gone back to school. Her motivation therefore according to her is the ‘next generation’. She thinks that if she has to encourage other girls experiencing what she went through then she has to also exhibit some level of resilience and show how she never succumbed to failure.

6.11.2 Education profile

6.11.2.1 Primary education

Given the fact that her mother had no job at first and was unable to pay for their education in Kenya, Fatima and her young sister were supported by Ebenezer ministries, a Faith Based
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) that allowed them to study in the school of the Ministry for free. They studied in that school for two years until her uncle, who was in Australia, started paying for their education at a Muslim school where she finished year eight of primary level education in Kenya. Before coming to Australia, Fatima was enrolled in high school. Her motivation to be in school was purely through the support of her mother and uncle but Fatima also was motivated to be in school because of her friends. She loved making friends and she also loved reading story books.

6.11.2.2 Secondary education

Fatima and her sister started an Intensive English course at a High School in Adelaide, South Australia. She says that students there were friendly and the school prepared her well for high school. After a year she finished with a Certificate III in English as a Second Language and was able to join year 10. At that time, Fatima was focused and she had great commitment to school, so much so that she passed her year 10 subjects successfully to the surprise of her teachers. When she was promoted to year 11, she became distracted and had a friend who misled her and that is when she started messing up her life. She responded to the demands of peer pressure and was always in conflict with her mother. As a result, she lost interest in school, started oversleeping and reporting late to school. She was very disoriented and lost focus. Because she had excelled in year 10 and had done more subjects at that level, in year 11 she was only doing three subjects but even then she did not pass them very well. Her performance deteriorated completely in year 12. She did not finish and did not want to continue with the option of year 13 to finish those subjects. Instead she dropped out of school.

6.11.2.3 Tertiary education

In Sydney, Fatima went to TAFE and did Certificate III in Aged Care and Certificate III in Disability Care. Fatima reinvigorated her courage to push on in education because she did not want to take it for granted anymore. Fatima experienced a turnaround in her education at tertiary level. By the time of interview she had enrolled for a degree in Business Studies. She is now determined to finish her degree and she is motivated because she wants to be a role model for those girls who might face challenges like hers. She is looking into being an inspiration to the young girls who need to finish their education. Her inspiration has also
resulted from other people she has met and she believes in surrounding herself with people who will positively influence her decisions. She says:

Experience has taught me that, when you surround yourself with good people, you have a choice to make; either you learn good things or bad things from them. Knowing God and learning from the past mistakes makes me a better person. Even if I don’t have a lot of things in terms of status I don’t mind as long as I am focused on what I want to be.

6.12. Participant Ten: Biruk

I was born in 1996 in Ethiopia. My mother was Eritrean and my father was Ethiopian. Because of my mother’s background, when the border conflicts between Ethiopia and Eritrea began in 1998, my family became divided. My mother together with my sister went to Eritrea and my father and I remained in Ethiopia. The two years border conflict that lasted from 1998 to 2000, claimed the lives of thousands both in Eritrea and in Ethiopia. My mother and sister fled from Eritrea to Kenya and my father and I were airlifted by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees to Kenya. My mother and sister were temporarily settled in Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya and when my father and I reached Kenya we stayed in the same camp for some time and later my father and I moved to Nairobi. In 2003, after a period of two years, my whole family of four was resettled in Australia.

6.12.1 Critical Events

Biruk’s life history narrative is made up of four critical events. These events tell more about his life of displacement from Ethiopia through Kenya to resettlement in Australia.

- Family re-union
- Overseas family support
- Resettlement to Australia
- Father’s education in Australia

6.12.1.1 Family re-union

Biruk and his father were airlifted out of Ethiopia by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) because the war had intensified and many people were being killed. They were taken to Kenya on fake Identity Cards (IDs) where they joined with other refugees in Kakuma refugee camp, including his mother and sister. This was a turning point in Biruk’s life because it restored hope of family re-union. He says that ‘after witnessing how many people were being killed, I had no hope that I would ever meet my mother and sister again, we were even not sure if they were still alive.’ In addition to family re-union, the circumstances that defined Biruk and his father’s departure from Ethiopia made it easy for them to get refugee status and this resulted in their quick resettlement to Australia.
6.12.1.2 Overseas family support

One of the major difficulties some refugee families face in the process of applying for resettlement is the associated costs. The support Biruk and his family got from their extended families who had been resettled in USA and Australia facilitated their process of applying for resettlement to the third country on a humanitarian visa.

Some of my family members had fled the war from Ethiopia through Sudan and had been resettled in USA and Australia. These family members supported us both financially and morally and because of their support we were able to start the visa processes when we reached Kenya in 2001. Finally we were accepted by the Australian government through their embassy in Nairobi. My family was resettled in Australia in 2003 and we have been here since then.

6.12.1.3 Resettlement to Australia

Resettlement in Australia became a turning point for Biruk’s family because they were able to stay together as a family again.

We were given accommodation together as opposed to the way we were living in Kenya because my father and I were in Nairobi while my mother and sister were in Kakuma refugee camp. Ever since we arrived here we have been bonded together as a family and this has laid the foundation for our vision. My sister and I were enrolled in school and we have been progressing very well. My father too went back to university and in 2012 he graduated with a degree in nursing. He is currently working as a Registered Nurse (RN), supporting us as a family and I am able to go to school because of his support but above all because of his motivation.

6.12.1.4 Father’s education in Australia

Biruk’s father was a school teacher back in Ethiopia. After resettlement in Australia in 2012 he graduated in Australia as a Registered Nurse (RN). Biruk takes his father’s achievement as a turning point in his life because it has influenced his desire to achieve a good education.

I am confident that I will finish my degree although I sometimes find it difficult. To be honest I have failed some papers but I keep repeating them until I pass them. To me because my Father was able to make it, then I have to as well. He is my example and he was almost the only person who managed to graduate in his cohort and age mates. My father has motivated many to go back to school including me.

6.12.2 Education profile

6.12.2.1 Primary education

Biruk did his kindergarten and primary education (year one and two) in Nairobi. His teacher was from Eritrea and had started a school in Kenya. Biruk came to Australia after year two of primary education. He says ‘It was easy for me to go to school in Kenya because of the relationship my mother had with the principal of the school. My mother was Eritrean and the
school in Kenya was owned by Eritreans’. Biruk’s motivation to be in school back in Kenya was because of the support he had from his parents. In Australia, Biruk attended English as Second Language classes in addition to school support programs including home-based support and afterschool care which helped him to catch up with the rest of the kids. Biruk went to Maryland East Public School and later to St. Mary Mother Primary School where he finished year six. The motivation to be in school at this level was based on Australian government policy which mandates all children to be in school at a given age.

6.12.2.2 Secondary education

After year six of primary school, Biruk went to Mt. Druiit Coptic College and then to St. Mary’s Senior High School where he finished year twelve. Biruk’s motivation to be in school and finish high school was based on a favourable school learning environment where he had good peer relationships and encouraging teachers. He had full support of his family to be in school.

6.12.2.3 Tertiary education

Biruk had one year off after high school and visited his surviving family members in Ethiopia. He came back and enrolled at Western Sydney University where he is now in his second year doing a Bachelor of Health Science. Biruk says this: ‘My heart’s desire is to help people and this degree equips me to help them overcome and prevent injuries and I am passionately looking forward to working and helping patients who sustain injuries and come to the hospitals for treatment’.

Biruk’s major goal is to work in Ethiopia. He is studying hard to be in a position to work with a well-known Australian doctor based in Ethiopia.

There is an Australian Doctor called Dr. Catherine [Hamlin] who supports women to have safe delivery of babies because they can’t produce normally. I would like to graduate as physiotherapist so that I can be able to work with Dr. Catherine to help those patients before or after delivery. I like helping people and I am doing a health science degree which will help me to fulfil my passion.

Biruk takes his father as a role model and a motivation for him to be in school. He is encouraged by the determination his father has put into his education and he is looking forward to achieving a master’s degree as an extra step that his father has not yet thought of doing.
6.13. Participant Eleven: Alhassan

I was born in Guinea Conakry in 1996 to a Guinea Conakry family. In the year 2007, my country Guinea Conakry started facing a lot of uncertainties resulting from the repatriation of Sierra Leonean refugees who had stayed in Guinea for many years. In 2002, Sierra Leone was declared a peaceful country by the international community and that is why refugees were being repatriated. In addition to the challenges associated with repatriating Sierra Leonean refugees, the political turmoil in Guinea also resulted from violent power struggles and there were nationwide strikes in the months of January and February 2007. Hundreds of people lost their lives and many more were displaced as result of strikes. My Uncle who was working with refugees, supported my family to take refuge among the Sierra Leonean refugees in the refugee camp and in 2009, together with Sierra Leoneans we were resettled in Australia.

6.13.1. Critical Events

Before highlighting critical events in Alhassan’s life history narratives, I will give the background information on the cessation of Sierra Leone refugees in Guinea Conakry. By 2008, a total of 6,379 Sierra Leonean refugees were registered in Guinea (UNHCR, 2008). The cessation that was passed stated in part that, ‘Sierra Leoneans who fled their country during civil war in the early 1990s will no longer be considered refugees since the root causes of the refugee problem in Sierra Leone no longer exist’ (UNHCR, 2008, p. 5). The decision was based on fundamental and positive durable changes in Sierra Leone since a peace agreement was declared in January 2002. Thus it was clear that, after 31 December 2008, Sierra Leoneans who were still in need of international protection would be able to remain in their current host country as refugees while those who did not qualify for asylum after 2008 but did not wish to return home because of family, social or economic links with the host country, would be expected to legalize their stay. Some Guinea Conakry families like Alhassan’s therefore became refugees as a result of the cessation policy. Alhassan’s life history narrative is composed of five major critical events and these give a detailed description of his life in the refugee camp in his own country and resettlement to Australia.

- Taking refuge in the refugee camp
- Resettlement to Australia
- Football United Australia
- Mother’s influence
- Award after English course
6.13.1.1 Taking refuge in the refugee camp

Given the fact that there was civil unrest, widespread unemployment and endemic poverty in the country, an uncle of Alhassan who was working with refugees through the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), welcomed Alhassan’s family in the refugee camp among Sierra Leonean refugees and that is how they secured a humanitarian visa to Australia in 2009. Alhassan was 13 years old and did not understand the whole process that his family went through to get the humanitarian visa but he was happy to come to Australia. Taking refuge in the Sierra Leonean refugee camp was a turning point because Alhassan’s family was within their country and were considered as internally displaced persons.

6.13.1.2 Resettlement to Australia

Resettlement to Australia was a turning point for Alhassan’s family. The whole family was grouped among Sierra Leonean refugees yet they were Guinea Conakry citizens. In other words they disguised themselves as Sierra Leoneans in order to secure a refugee status. For Alhassan he benefited a lot from the resettlement because on reaching Australia, he enrolled into an Intensive English as a Second Language program. Unlike Sierra Leone, Guinea Conakry was a French speaking country and all his education had been in the French language. When he mastered the language he was able to make good connections and started talking to people and watching news to perfect his communication. He considers resettlement to Australia as a channel that enabled him to acquire his education today and therefore a turning point in his life. ‘I was able to learn English and I am so happy today that I can fluently speak two international languages which have enabled me to get employed as a translator/social worker.’

6.13.1.3 Football United Australia

Football United Australia helped Alhassan settle and integrate into the Australian community. The association helps young people with a refugee background through their interactive programs and they connect them with the community which gives these students chance to have friends and establish peer relationships. Alhassan had this to say:

In 2011, I met with a social worker from an organisation called Football United Australia. The social worker told me about the programs of this organisation and how they bring together disadvantaged children and using activities like sports help them to socialise and learn different skills. I joined the organisation and from that time I have never regretted it.

Alhassan further says that:
As a result of working with Football United Australia, I have become a youth leader and now I am considered as a role model and always invited to speak to other students and tell them about my experiences. They become friendly to me and they tend to enjoy it because they know I have experienced what they are going through.

Connection with Football United Australia was a Critical Event (CE) in Alhassan’s life. While at school for his English classes, a group of people visited and talked to them on how they could be meeting for some activities after school. The group that met him were people representing the organisation called Football United Australia. Their programs included activities of bringing together young refugee background students into interactive sessions with their peers. Alhassan joined the group and he was able to build his confidence and commitment to his education. He is still working with the same organisation and has been considered a mentor and a role model for refugee background students.

6.13.1.4 Mother’s influence

Ever since I started going to school in Guinea Conakry, my mother was a single parent who always talked to us and encouraged us to always aim higher in education. As a result my sister worked hard and became a medical doctor. Through unpredictable circumstances my sister died and ever since we lost her, I have made a resolution in my heart that I will never disappoint the efforts of my mother.

Alhassan considers his mother’s hard work as a turning point in his life. She worked so hard for his family and always desired the best for them in terms of education. His sister worked hard in Africa to become a medical doctor. These two people have influenced his life and always become his reason to be focused in whatever he does. Alhassan says: ‘If my sister could make it to be a medical doctor in a patriarchal and harsh environment in Guinea Conakry, there is no excuse for me in Australia where there is a favourable environment not to aim high in my education.’ My mother has always reminded me that I have to work hard and she is a role model in my life. Alhassan’s turning point in his life is because he does not want to disappoint his mother’s efforts of working hard to give them a good life and above all education.

6.13.1.5 Award after English course

At the end of his English classes at the Intensive English Centre (IEC), Alhassan was given an award for the student who made most progress in the English language acquisition. His good progress in English language qualified him to go to high school in the middle of the year and although he had missed the first couple of months he was able to catch up. Being awarded for his great effort became a turning point and an encouragement to aim higher.
6.13.2 Education profile

6.13.2.1 Primary education

Alhassan did his primary school in Guinea Conakry in a school that was teaching Arabic and French. His fees were being paid by his family and his motivation to be in school was purely because of his age and the support he received. He came to Australia when he was in year nine of secondary school.

6.13.2.2 Secondary education

Alhassan went to Evans High School. He had to start in Year 9 and each class had different streams named Year 9A, Year 9B, Year 9C and Year 9D. Year 9A was considered to be for the brilliant students and Alhassan was put in the lowest class, that is Year 9D. He had to catch up with a lot of reading and subject content. At the end of the academic year, he sat for exams and his results came back with good grades and as result he was put into the second highest level stream. He kept working hard and progressing although it was difficult. He says:

I was scared and shy, not that I am a shy person but in class I could not read audibly. I used to get teased about my pronunciation and accent and I became timid whenever I compared my reading skills to other students. It took me a lot more effort to understand what the teachers were trying to say and this affected my performance in the tests and the exams. However, I had teachers who believed in me, who kept pushing me and motivated me and at the end of year ten, I emerged the best in some subjects like PDHPE and Sports Science.

He further says that ‘my good performance came as a surprise to many people and as a result I was able to join year 11 and 12 at St. Mary’s Senior High School where I graduated from high school in 2014’. Although language was always a barrier, finding good friends made it fun for Alhassan and he looked forward to going back to school every day. Evidently his personality, influence of teachers and peers motivated him to remain in school.

6.13.2.3 Tertiary education

As a result of hard work at high school, at the time of the interview Alhassan is completing his second year of a Bachelor of Health Sciences at the University of Sydney. Alhassan says ‘you cannot just be an average performer in a country like Australia, if you want to get somewhere, you have to aim higher’. He further adds that, ‘the only way I can get something out of this country is to get education and get a degree. I had to learn the language because to get something from anybody you have to communicate to them in the language they best
understand. This has been my motivation to be in school. My dream is basically to get a degree from here first and hopefully do a Masters degree in Physiotherapy’.

6.14. Conclusion

This chapter has presented the Life History Narratives of my research participants. The narratives in this chapter are compressed and distilled from long interviews. The distilled life history narratives of my participants are organized into three sections in order to show the complexities of their journeys, the obstacles they have overcome, the resources they have drawn upon and the particular educational trajectories they experienced through multiple languages, school systems, countries, curriculum and vocational and tertiary institutions. These show the varied and challenging journeys that each participant experienced which will be explored and analysed in the next chapter.
Chapter Seven: Discussion of Findings

7.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter (Chapter Six: Life History Narratives), I used Critical Events (CEs) to highlight concrete stories of moments in the participants’ narratives of displacement. I also presented participants’ education profiles covering three levels (primary, secondary and tertiary education). In this chapter, I discuss findings in three main phases: 1. displacement, in transit countries and resettlement in Australia; 2. tertiary education profiles of my research participants; 3. educational resilience and the researcher’s reflections on the findings.

7.2. Displacement, in transit countries and resettlement in Australia

I developed the three thematic areas in order to track the life history trajectories that my research participants have experienced. Further, they link to previous research findings in the field of refugee education. Displacement covers the reasons why participants left their home country, in transit covers the trail of experiences in transit and temporary settlement countries, and resettlement in Australia brings out the experiences that students with a refugee background encountered while in Australia, particularly focusing on their educational transition from primary through secondary to further education (TAFE and University). In order to understand participants’ experiences, I have explicitly used examples from their narratives including reasons for their displacement (civil wars and genocide), survival strategies (disguised identity) and reflected on some of the colonial legacies that continue to impact on their lives. While these aspects of their stories are evident in the distilled life history narratives in the previous chapter, I have also drawn upon further details from the extended narrative interviews where necessary.

7.2.1. Reasons for displacement

Research participants in this study were displaced from their home countries because of civil wars and genocide. Chapter two in this study highlights the major causes of forced displacement as: civil war, genocide, persecutions and human rights abuse. Research participants have explicitly highlighted how they were firmly displaced from their home countries as a result of these factors. Francine and Noel were displaced because of the 1990/1994 Rwandan civil war and genocide, Dan and Alhassan were displaced because of the
eleven years of the Sierra-Leone civil war (1991-2002), Juliet and Ismael were displaced because of the 1996 civil war in DRC, and Anna because of the 1993 civil war in Burundi. The border conflicts between Eritrea and Ethiopia caused the displacement of Biruk’s family. Fatima’s family was displaced because of both the war in Southern Sudan, and war in Ethiopia. In other words, the research participants in this study were exposed to civil wars and related atrocities including different forms of killings. Zawadi had this to say:

…my grandparents were displaced from Rwanda in 1959 because of ethnic conflicts between Hutu and Tutsi. They settled in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) until 1995, when we started experiencing other killings targeting Tutsi families that had settled in DRC. We fled back to Rwanda but not as repatriated Rwandans, rather as refugees.

Zawadi’s experience is reflected in the history that has defined conflicts in the Great Lakes Region of Africa (GLRA) (Rwanda, DRC, Burundi, Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda). The region has experienced a flow of refugees from these countries. Starting with the experiences of ethnic conflicts in Rwanda in late 1950s, there was a flow of refugees from Rwanda to DRC and from DRC to Rwanda. Burundians have also been displaced by ethnic conflicts in Burundi, many fleeing to Rwanda and DRC and then back to Burundi. The porous nature of borders in the GLRA and the colonial legacy of drawing boundaries separating people of the same ethnic group has been the source of many conflicts in the region. For instance, in the period of 36 years living in DRC (1959-1995), the immigrants to DRC from Rwanda and Burundi had been granted citizenship as early as 1972 (Emizet, 2000, p. 19) and some of my research participants (Zawadi, Ismael, and Juliet) were born as Congolese with a Rwandan origin.

The granting of citizenship, however, did not result in permanent residence. Following the 1994 Rwandan genocide, the perpetrators also took refuge in DRC and upon settling there, they continued their killings, this time targeting those considered Tutsi in DRC. Adelman and Suhrke (1999) explain that:

After the genocide was over in Rwanda, the killings did not stop. The locale merely shifted to Zaire. The genocidists who had fled to Zaire expanded their murderous mayhem targeting the Banyamulenge11 in Zaire, triggering the civil war in that country. (p. xviii)

11 ‘The Banyamulenge are Congolese of Tutsi origin who migrated to South Kivu several centuries ago. They were separated from Rwanda in 1910 when boundaries in the Great Lakes region were redrawn by the colonial powers’ (Emizet, 2000, p.19)
Because of the ethnic wars in Rwanda and Burundi, the Banyamulenge of DRC were later grouped together with other immigrants and thus north Kivu of DRC became like another region bringing together inhabitants mainly that were Kinyarwanda and Kirundi speaking people. As a result further killings of Tutsi in DRC were not selective and this led to another wave of displacements in the region. This is how some of my research participants (Zawadi, Ismael and Juliet) ended up fleeing to Rwanda as refugees, despite having Rwandan family backgrounds.

It is imperative to note that, in the Great Lakes Region of Africa, the colonial legacy of border drawing was the cause of forced displacement because some of the tribes/ethnic groups speaking the same language and with a shared culture were geographically separated by the colonialists. A typical example is described below:

[T]he Anglo-Belgian protocol of 14th Feb 1884, brought part of the Mufumbiro region and Kigezi district (Kabale) under British rule, so that the Bafumbira - a sub-group of the Banyarwanda - found themselves in Uganda, Rwanda and the DRC (Adelman & Suhrke, 1999, p. 4)

Therefore, some participants with a refugee background have become victims of the history of colonialism because it was the Belgians in Rwanda who sided with Hutus to overthrow the monarch and the Tutsi of Rwanda who began the wave of refugees in the Great Lakes Region of Africa. Thus began an endless cycle of refugee movements through the region.

Nevertheless, the crisscrossing of the borders and ethnicities sometimes became a survival strategy and could be advantageous at times for hiding one’s identity. For instance, for many years many Banyarwanda in Uganda like me were able to disguise their identities and pose as Ugandans by learning several local languages. When Ugandans started identifying Rwandans in Uganda by their names in order to deny them services (especially education), most families started giving their children Ugandan names. After the 1986 liberation war in Uganda, many Rwandan youth had joined the Ugandan army and Ugandans found it hard to distinguish between them. It is important to note that some Rwandans who were repatriated to Rwanda after the 1994 Rwandan Genocide had to change their names to suit their true identity as Banyarwanda because they were now in their own country without fears of being discriminated against on the basis of their names.

Another cause of forced displacement was evident from the life history narratives of Fatima, Biruk, Anna, Dan and Alhassan. Fatima was displaced from Ethiopia to Southern Sudan
because of the border conflicts between Ethiopians and Eritreans. She was further displaced from Southern Sudan to Kenya because of the war in Southern Sudan. Biruk was saved from the killings in Ethiopia and airlifted to Kenya because of the same border conflicts. Dan was displaced from Sierra Leone to Guinea Conakry because of the eleven years of civil war in his country and the impact of forced displacements from Sierra Leone also affected Alhassan in Guinea Conakry. Following these forced displacements, participants in this study had to deal with challenges like trying to fend for themselves in transit countries either within refugee camps or in cities of those countries.

7.2.2. In transit countries/temporary settlement

Temporary settlement or life in transit countries covers the period when research participants are displaced from their home countries and travel through countries that temporarily host them. Tracking the transient journeys of my participants helped me to understand their lives in the refugee camps where they spent many years before coming to Australia. Most of the participants transitioned through multiple countries, camps and spoke many languages in the course of their journeys. Francine’s transition began from Rwanda, through DRC to Zambia where she stayed for over 10 years. Zawadi’s transition was from DRC to Rwanda where she stayed in the camp for 15 years. Ismael’s transition was from DRC through Rwanda and then to Uganda and Kenya and finally he settled in Ethiopia where he stayed for more than five years. Each participant’s transient journey is unique and specific but there are common experiences that almost all of them have had. These include: risky experiences; exposure to losses, especially of family members, friends, credentials and identities; difficult living conditions in the refugee camps; exposure to violence in the refugee camps and living with uncertainties surrounding the length of stay in the refugee camps.

7.2.2.1 Risky experiences

During the war and transition to different refugee settlement camps, students with a refugee background became witnesses to numerous inhumane acts. Juliet recalls that unknown people would come to their village and kill people at night and that is how the situation in DRC became a threat to their lives, thus they had to flee to Uganda via Rwanda. Noel saw a number of people killed in different ways that were unbearable and difficult to think about. He left Rwanda because he was looking for safety and a place to recover from trauma. When Dan was captured by rebels he witnessed face-to-face killings and saw many dead bodies. He
also took a risk by escaping from the rebels, despite warnings, and had tough experiences that affected his health, which he still deals with today. Fatima used to experience nightmares of people running after her and wanting to kill her. She says that she remembers how people were running away from gunshots and how on the run they saw many dead bodies. All these experiences need to be foregrounded while dealing with discourses of underachievement in education for refugee background students in Australia. Such risky experiences have had a tremendous impact on their social and emotional lives. Some students have turned out to be violent and end up facing additional challenges in their host communities and in schools. For instance, Alhassan could not hold back from fighting when he was faced with students who tried to bully him. ‘I felt like some students were taking their jokes too far, and I had to fight back.’ The media have also reported on youth from African refugee backgrounds forming gangs and being involved in socially unacceptable activities. In order to address the challenges faced by these students therefore it is imperative to understand their past and direct support towards solving specific problems they have encountered in their life journeys to Australia. Appropriate support will have a positive impact on their educational experiences in Australian schools and tertiary institutions.

7.2.2.2 Exposure to losses (family members, friends, credentials and identity)

During forced displacement, refugees lose almost everything including their identity documents and academic credentials. This is in addition to losing some of their family members and friends. Gamariel’s whole family was killed and he heard them cry out for help. He lost the two families who tried to adopt him: the one that fled with him from Rwanda to DRC and the one that had adopted him in DRC. When Gamariel reached the Zambian border in 1998 together with many other people, they were intercepted by the Zambian migration department for lack of identity documents. Having trekked all the way from Rwanda to Zambia via DRC, none of them had documentation that identified who they were and where they were coming from. As a result, the UNHCR had to intervene and establish a temporary refugee camp at a place called Murungu where they were resettled for three months while their refugee status was being processed. Another example is that of Biruk and his father who were airlifted and smuggled out of Ethiopia to Kenya on fake identity cards. Dan lost his academic credentials and had to start from scratch when he arrived in Australia. For students with a refugee background, all these prior life experiences have an impact on their educational trajectories in Australia.
African students with a refugee background deal with the loss of family differently. Some accept the loss and move on, others work hard to go back to Africa and find out if there are other surviving members of their families. Biruk, for example, took a year off after high school during which he went back to Ethiopia to visit some of the surviving members of his family. For Ismael, he had this to say:

Upon arriving in Australia, my brother and I had to put to a standstill our educational goals and instead started working in order to raise transport and support money for us to go back to Africa and search for some of the surviving members of our family. It is difficult to accept that your relatives and friends died when you did not bury them. It is rather better to see where they were buried and deal with the loss than remain in a dilemma.

Boss (2006, p. 554) has defined experiences such as those of Ismael and Biruk as ambiguous loss. This is ‘a situation of unclear loss resulting from not knowing whether a loved one is dead or alive, absent or present.’ According to Boss (2006), ambiguous loss is particularly stressful because of the uncertainty surrounding the loss, and it has resulted in depression, hopelessness, and immobilization in some individuals (p. 203). Understanding such background information therefore enables researchers, educators and other people interested in the experiences of refugee background students to comprehend the challenges that refugee background students face in trying to achieve their educational goals. After being resettled in Australia, many of these students overcome the ordeals and the challenges of adversity in their lives with the appropriate support and excel in their education, as they go on to complete tertiary education.

7.2.2.3 Difficult living conditions in the refugee camps

The refugee camps where students with a refugee background lived temporarily before coming to Australia are in a poor state thus exposing these students to difficult living conditions. The camps did not have running water, road networks, means of transport, adequate shelter and basic necessities. Gamariel says:

In the refugee camp we were totally dependent on the UNHCR food ration and every service in the camp was provided collectively. Children who were total orphans like me without an older person to support them would sometimes end up missing out on some of the supplies within the refugee camp because it was like survival for the fittest.

Anna confesses that ‘sometimes we went hungry and not once and not twice. Being in a refugee camp is like being in a limbo, you are not sure of tomorrow’. Juliet recalls that, ‘life in the refugee camps was very difficult because we did not have enough to eat, suffered a lot of diseases and people were dying, children would go to school within the camp but schools
had no trained teachers and they did not have teaching resources and facilities like a library’. Some scholars have confirmed these experiences describing camps as having:

...inadequate food rations and other necessities, poor sanitation, epidemics and limited medical care, and violence.... Getting an education was viewed as a way to help themselves, their families (if they were ever reunited), and their country once the war ended and the rebuilding process began. (Luster et al., 2009, p. 209)

As a result of the difficult living conditions in the refugee camps, some displaced families of my research participants only appeared in the camp to register for refugee status and then moved on to the cities of those particular countries to start finding a better quality of life through education and employment. For instance, Ismael and his brother refused to go to the camp in Ethiopia and ended up remaining in Addis Ababa at the risk of UNHCR withdrawing support from them as refugees. They remained in the city, worked hard and took care of themselves because they feared that no one else would do so. Another example is that of Fatima’s mother, who made a conscious decision to take her two daughters to Nairobi despite not having a job, rather than stay in a refugee camp, because she wanted her girls to have a good education. She chose to start a sewing business, begged for money to pay for her children's tuition from Christian missions, and went to the camp only to make her presence evident for UNHCR’s records. Dan’s family only registered at the refugee camp in order to gain refugee status, but did not stay in the camp at all. Instead they went to stay in the communities where there were people considered to be his mother’s relatives. Biruk and his father remained in Nairobi while his mother and sister went to Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya. What is important to note in relation to this study is that refugee camps in African countries operate on a limited budget so children are denied education, proper food and other basic needs. There is a lack of qualified teachers in UNHCR supported primary schools in the refugee camps and a lack of secondary schools because UNHCR supports only basic primary education. Some families who were able to do so had to take the risk of foregoing free primary education in the camps, and went out of the camps to search for a good education for their children. All these experiences have a major influence on the education of refugee background students when they are resettled in Australia.

7.2.2.4 Exposure to further violence in the camps

The participants highlighted continued exposure to violence in the refugee camps as a serious problem. For example, Ismael and his brother could not settle in the camps in Uganda and Kenya. In Uganda, the two boys found people who had killed their families and relatives and
it was not safe to stay there. In Kenya they had news that people were dying from internal conflicts in the camp and so they decided to go to Addis Ababa instead to check if the camps in Ethiopia were any better. They were lucky to be resettled in the urban camp where conditions were a bit more favourable. Similarly, Gamariel left the camp in Zambia on two occasions because he did not feel safe. However, he was brought back to the camp without his consent until he ended up in the prison for his own safety as he had been constantly disappearing. He had this to say:

I was living in my own tent in the refugee camp in Zambia. On many occasions I was threatened by some of the refugees who knew me and who were responsible for the death of my family. I did not feel safe in the camp because of them. I therefore decided to move to Lusaka town and secured a job as a shopkeeper. I was however brought back two times and on the third time I was put in prison for failure to remain in the camp. No one was there to understand why I was running away from the camp.

Similarly, Anna and her family changed camps in Tanzania on many occasions because of violence. The refugee camps in Africa have become hostile because they host refugees from different countries and backgrounds. For example, until 1995 my family and Rwandan refugees were staying in Kyangwali refugee camp in Uganda, where we were homogeneous in the sense that all of us originated from Rwanda and therefore shared a common identity. My perspective of homogeneity in Kyangwali refugee camp might have been that of a child who enjoyed the company of peers irrespective of their ethnic identity, but we grew up without knowing the difference between Hutu and Tutsi until we reached Rwanda in the post 1994 genocide. The most recent perspective is developed from my participants’ narratives. According to the life history narratives of Biruk, Anna, Ismael and Juliet, most of the refugee camps in Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania host people from many different countries including Sudan, Rwanda, Burundi, Ethiopia, Somalia, Eritrea and DRC. Bringing together people from different backgrounds requires more resources and proper management. In this context, clustering people from different backgrounds and histories is not a good solution to the problem as the refugee camps in the Great Lakes region of Africa and surrounding countries have become hostile and difficult places for refugees.

7.2.2.5 Exposure to uncertainties of duration and location of their exile

Although refugees may end up accepting the temporary fate of being in camps within the transit countries, the most disturbing experience is lack of knowledge about the length of their stay which makes it difficult to plan futures and make homes. Even though they may stay longer than they anticipate, the volatile situation can also mean that they sometimes
leave abruptly. Francine lived in Ruvunage Camp in the DRC from 1994-1996, then moved to the Zambian border for two years from 1998-2000 and Meheba refugee camp in Zambia for 10 years from 2000 to 2010 before she was resettled to Australia. Anna and her family were often moved between the Kanembwa and Nduta camps in Tanzania, depending on the prevailing security in either camp. Zawadi was in Byumba refugee camp in Rwanda for 15 years before resettlement in Australia. Juliet stayed in Nakivale refugee camp in Uganda for two years. Biruk, like Fatima, did not stay in the refugee camp but they were still both eventually given humanitarian refugee status. The years in transition are usually unpredictable and this helps to explain why upon resettlement in Australia people from refugee backgrounds start their lives afresh and with hope for tomorrow.

Such uncertainties affect their educational progression. Olliff & Couch (2005) further indicate that many of the school age arrivals to Australia - especially those from Africa - had no formal education, or severely interrupted education backgrounds due to extended time periods spent in settlement camps and the transient nature of their existence. This is a reality that needs the attention of Australian education authorities and host communities.

7.2.3 Resettlement in Australia

All my research participants were resettled in Australia on a humanitarian visa. Fatima and Biruk were sponsored by their relatives. This section presents findings about the processes of selection for resettlement, experiences upon arrival in Australia, integration and acculturation into the host communities and finally on participants’ perceptions of the government of Australia.

7.2.3.1 Selection for resettlement

When it comes to resettlement processes for students with a refugee background, many of their experiences are beyond their control, including the very decision to come to Australia. For instance, the chance of being selected for resettlement to Australia came as a surprise for Francine and her young sister:

The process of applying for resettlement was tedious and it involved submitting application forms, followed by oral interviews with a three month interval of waiting for a response and finally a confirmation letter highlighting which country has accepted us for resettlement. The questions in both the application form and oral interviews sought to find out why we were in Zambia, the means we used to come to Zambia, when we left Rwanda and whether we had siblings, husbands or any other relatives like aunties or uncles. We responded to the questions as much as we knew but we did not know which country would accept us.
Similarly, Ismael thought that he and his brother were going to be resettled in the United States of America (USA) until the final announcement was made that Australia had accepted them. Common to all my participants’ stories is the fact that the selection process and resettlement was out of their control. The International Office of Migration (IOM), an agency of the United Nations, however, is responsible for the ticketing and booking for these refugees being resettled in the third country. They facilitate their airport transfers and ensure that they arrive safely in the resettlement country. However, the fact remains that resettled refugees come to countries they know little about and this limits their opportunities to prepare prior to their arrival.

7.2.3.2 Arrival in Australia

Upon their arrival at the airport, refugees are received by a case worker provided by the host country; in this case, Australia. The case worker takes them to pre-arranged accommodation, introduces them to basic services in Australia—including Centrelink, banking, the transport system, schools or TAFE for education—and then sets them off to start a new life. Gamariel, for example, was provided with $460 Australian dollars and additional $60 for his housing assistance and in total he started running a budget of $520 fortnightly. He would pay $300 for rent and use the balance of $220 for his food, clothing, transport and electricity bills. The Government of Australia further paid for his education at TAFE, first for 510 hours for his English as a Second Language course and for other courses he did later. It is important to note that when he arrived in Australia, it was Gamariel’s first experience of managing his finances and being responsible for his own life because prior to his arrival, all services were managed collectively except for the food supplies in the refugee camp. Acquiring a background knowledge of refugee background students is important for educators because refugee background students are exposed to two parallel and contrasting experiences: experiences in the refugee camps where they have almost nothing and very little control over their lives, and experiences in the resettlement country where they are challenged with managing all their basic needs in a society that can be bewilderingly complex.

Other experiences upon arrival show that refugee background students learn everything by doing and by practice. The majority of my participants have highlighted that they didn’t receive enough orientation when they arrived in Australia. The first two days were ok because the case workers were guiding them, but thereafter they were left to deal with life as it unfolded. For example Ismael says that:
When we reached here, notwithstanding the interesting experience of travel by air that might have been our first time, we also experienced for the first time travel in the train, bought travel tickets for the first time, had constant running water, electricity, and above all slept in a bed as opposed to a mat on the floor. We need to be understood very well in terms of our past and what we have gone through.

Anna reported that life was very challenging in the refugee transit centre and no social services were available. ‘We were eating the same type of food, sleeping on the floor and did not have enough water. Everything was difficult. Things we see here in Australia and we sometimes take for granted were difficult to have in the transit camps.’ Anna recalls that when they reached the airport she was mesmerized by what she saw. At Sydney International Airport she was left behind by her family because she was still lost in what she was seeing. When they finally found her, the case worker took them to the prepared accommodation at Mt. Druitt. Another shock was when they were being oriented on how to use different equipment in the house because they had no idea how to operate any of the electrical appliances like the heater, the cooktop, the oven, the microwave and the fridge.

It should be noted that in Africa, the majority of families harvest food for cooking directly from their gardens. In the refugee camps the type of food provided to refugees is mainly dry beans, and maize flour although they are also encouraged to have what they call kitchen gardens for vegetables. On reaching Australia, refugees are exposed to a new experience of buying food from grocery stores and to frozen foods. When Francine and her family were taken to the pre-arranged accommodation, the case worker teased them by putting on the smoke detector alarm. The whole family was terrorized by the alarm and in the process they were educated on how to switch off the alarm in case it went off. The shock of a change in their lifestyle is extended to education institutions where teachers and other staff are not familiar with how to help some refugee background students who arrive as adults because they are mature in terms of age and size. Generally the prior life experiences of refugee background students are complex and need to be better understood by educators in order to give adequate support to these students.

### 7.2.3.3 Integration and acculturation

In this study, integration and acculturation for African students with a refugee background in Australia revolves around exposure to education and employment. Employment takes precedence over education because of the huge financial responsibilities that these students have upon arrival in the host country.
Some refugee background students become sponsors for their extended families in Africa even when they are still depending on Centrelink support. Although Centrelink does not realise or endorse this, people are living on less than what has been identified as a minimum living allowance in Australia. The newly resettled refugees start paying for the education and living allowances of their families in the troubled regions of Africa as well as their own expenses in Australia. The rationale for this is based on the fact that some of the resettled refugees were originally supported by their relatives overseas while still living in the camps and therefore upon arrival in Australia they take it upon themselves to support those they have left behind.

As a result, their desire to be financially stable in order to give adequate support limits their educational goals. For instance, Dan could not further his education after his diploma in construction and building management despite a desire to finish university. Instead he started working immediately in order to cover his own expenses as well as supporting his extended family. A different set of constraints are evident in the case of Zawadi, who came to Australia when she was two months pregnant. While she was unable to come with her boyfriend because they were not officially married, Zawadi continued to support her boyfriend in Africa in addition to other extended family members. That is why, according to her, she could not afford to waste time. Instead she immediately enrolled in an aged care course so that she could work and get money to support her family back in Africa. Zawadi enjoyed the support of her mother and child care services for her baby as she resumed work six months after giving birth.

Acculturation and integration are interrupted when refugee background students start taking up responsibilities that distract them from furthering their education. Apart from language barriers and culture shock, they work hard to compensate for the lost time in their lives. Some get married, have children, buy a property and as a result they start carrying a huge financial burden. For example, Dan came with a wife and a child and so had to work hard to make ends meet, Anna got married and dropped out of school, Francine divorced and started managing her own life, Gamariel is now married and expecting a baby, Ismael is supporting his extended family as he waits for his elder brother to finish university, Noel is married with two children. In comparison, Biruk and Alhassan are exceptions to this pattern because they came when they were still young and with their parents who have been very supportive in their education. They therefore have had some consistency in their lives.
With all their financial responsibilities, some students with a refugee background start combining work with school, while others concentrate on working to have enough money. Only those who have fewer family burdens decide to stay in school and remain focused on their educational goals. Proper integration in school life requires these students to reduce their other responsibilities and prioritise their education. Ismael acknowledges the value of education but currently he is waiting for his brother to finish university so that he can start his degree. Ismael says that the only resource African students with a refugee background have is their education and there is no excuse not to take it up to tertiary level. He says that:

we have no inheritance from either our grandparents or our parents, when we arrive in Australia. We start from nothing and build upon what we are offered. Therefore the big gift and inheritance we have from the Government of Australia is education and it is through education that we shall fully integrate into the Australian community and get to appreciate their culture.

He however believes that, if one does not want to focus on formal university education it is also possible to consider technical education and that people should do what their heart desires, including vocational courses like carpentry, farming and even music and sports. Most of my research participants were of the same view that education should not be compromised and they have kept trying even in hard times. Biruk kept repeating some course units even when he failed, Anna argued that many people have made it and so all refugee background students should keep trying, Fatima looked back and regretted having taken education for granted and Noel worked on the principle that ‘education is the key to success’ and today he holds a Master’s degree.

7.2.3.4 Participants’ perceptions of Australian Government

Many of the participants applauded the support offered by the Australian government to refugee background students in regards to access to education, and they expressed a sense of gratitude and a desire to repay this contribution. For instance, Biruk said he was looking forward to giving back to the Australian community. He says ‘without the opportunity the government of Australia has given me, I wouldn’t be where I am today’. Alhassan shared this sentiment, foregrounding his perceived great fortune to have been resettled in Australia: ‘we are very lucky to be here. Australia is one of the best countries. The way other countries treat refugees is appalling and what we have here in Australia is just gold’. Noel explains that:

When you come to Australia on a humanitarian visa, you automatically have full access to services in Australia more like a native student. There are even people waiting for you at the airport to resettle you in a pre-arranged accommodation with all necessary facilities. The student is able to receive translation and interpretation services and these services are free.
Similarly, Zawadi said she was proud of the Government of Australia because of the provision of free education, irrespective of age. Given their gratitude to the Australian government for the educational services they were able to access, the failure to be in school was associated with their individual circumstances rather than the failure of the government. Their educational experiences in Australia contrasted starkly with their previous education in Africa, where students often don’t have access to what Australian people take for granted such as textbooks, the internet, exercise books, and pens and pencils. Thus, although the participants had to deal with other problems including cultural shock, language barriers, race and racism, on the whole they were surprised that they were offered services in addition to free public education which otherwise would have not been possible for them. Indeed, Noel attributed his motivation to be in school to an enabling environment where most of the basic necessities are available. Looking at his own experience, Gamariel thought that his real life began when he arrived in Australia. The journey of his displacement produced many uncertainties so that he only planned one day at a time and wasn’t sure of tomorrow.

Following the gratitude for Australian government support expressed by research participants, some have become advocates for their fellow refugees and other vulnerable groups. Noel is one of the social workers working for the plight of refugees in Australia. He is currently the chairperson and leader of the New South Wales Rwandan community engaged in restoring hope among refugee background people from Rwanda and other countries. Another example is that of Fatima who has developed a courageous spirit in pursuing her dreams in education because of her aspiration to help other girls who might be facing the same challenges she had. Her motivation therefore according to her is the ‘next generation.’ She wants to become a role model for other girls by completing her education and this way she will be able to challenge them into realising their educational goals.

7.2.3.5 Associated challenges to resettlement processes

The long trail of resettlement for refugee background students is tagged with a couple of challenges that are associated with discrimination based on race and racism. Students with a refugee background are often ‘othered’ in their lives; firstly they are discriminated against during displacement from their home country, secondly they experience discrimination during temporary resettlement in the first country of arrival and then they experience
discrimination after resettlement in the third country, in this case Australia. This is reflected in Biruk’s statement:

Upon arriving in Kenya, I was lucky to get placement in an Eriterian managed school because my mother was known to the principal. In Australia I encountered racism when I was asked to tell my story as a refugee and I wondered why in a multitude I was the only one selected to tell my sad story and therefore I refused… much as I took it easy, I found it difficult to accept how I was singled out.

Generally, Africans who move to Australia can never become native Australians and they cannot easily go back to Africa because of the threat to their security. Africans in Australia find themselves in an ambivalent situation as African-Australians because they are not fully accepted into Australia and are subjected to different forms of racism and discrimination. Thus students of refugee background tend to remain in a state of ambivalence while trying to integrate into the host communities. In school for example, they try to imitate the western ways of life in order to fit in and be successful in school; when they do acculturate, they then clash with their caregivers/parents who believe they are going astray by ‘becoming too Australian’. As a result African students are left in an ‘in-between’ position where they are neither African in their outlook nor Australian. According to Fatima, the conflicts she had with her mother were based on her mother’s African beliefs. She was seeing her daughter becoming too Australian and independent minded and thus they were always in conflict which resulted into her moving from Adelaide to Sydney to her uncle’s house. Nevertheless, her uncle had the same mindset of control and finally she chose to stay by herself until she later came to her senses that she will never be fully accepted as Australian and neither can she be fully accepted back in South Sudan. Fatima says:

I have lived more years in Australia than anywhere else and I have learnt to accept Australia as my home. The challenges I had before were based on the fact that I felt my life in Kenya was far better than life anywhere and I always desired to go back which affected my focus on my education in Australia.

Therefore, tracking life history narratives of refugee background students from their home country through transit countries to resettlement in Australia tells a lot about who these students are and the difficulties involved in their access and participation in Australian tertiary education system.

7.3 Tertiary Education for refugee background students
Most newly arrived students with refugee backgrounds in Australia spend approximately a year in English Language schools or centres, where ‘they are assisted with their language skills and prepared for mainstream schools and later guided to mainstream schools if their age is still appropriate’ (Abkhezr et al., 2015, p. 72). The majority of my research participants came from Francophone countries (Burundi, Rwanda, Guinea Conakry and Democratic Republic of Congo), where the language of instruction in schools was French, although Rwanda changed to English in 2009. This means that Noel, Francine, Gamariel, Zawadi and Alhassan had been educated in French before coming to Australia.

Irrespective of the country of origin, however, students with a refugee background generally face specific school literacy learning needs and priorities. However, over time some students do not succumb to failure and drop out of school, instead they catch up with the language and content in a specific discipline and may end up reaching their educational goals and finish either TAFE qualifications or a university degree. Alhassan and Biruk are good examples of resilient students because, amidst integration and acculturation challenges, they kept a positive spirit and today they are looking forward to graduating from university. Noel has completed his Master’s degree, Dan has finished two degrees and by the time of the interview Fatima was close to finishing her undergraduate degree.

Tertiary education is a vital pathway for establishing the future of refugee background students in Australia (Lawson, 2014, p. 56). In 2013 at TAFE and universities in Australia, African students recorded 52% growth in student numbers, equating to 8,665 students (Australian Council for Educational Research ACER, 2017). However, education for African students with a refugee background in Australian tertiary institutions presents complex challenges associated with prior life experiences.

Despite the challenges, resettlement in Australia has changed the trend of events for students with a refugee background although experiences of formal schooling in Australia differ from one participant to another. Francine’s educational dreams were fulfilled in Australia as reflected in her statement that:

Throughout my refugee journey, my education was hampered and I never was in school full time until I reached Australia. Upon arrival, I was introduced to several services in the country and after a week I was taken to TAFE to start 510 hours of English classes. In the following months, I was going to school - an experience that was exciting and fulfilling for me.
Anna, in her story, illustrates the many bottlenecks she faced in her education and schooling in camps where the teaching and learning environment was not favourable:

A couple of years ago, I could never be sure if I would go to school, spend the whole day in class and come back home. When I did, I wasn’t sure if I would find what to eat at home. With one uniform, I was supposed to be careful not to make it dirty for the next day of school or else I would miss out on school the following day. With one exercise book, of 24 pages at best, and one pen given to me at a time, I made sure all academic subjects had a space and one book was portioned into different compartments to contain the four major disciplines: Mathematics, English, Social Studies and Science. Today I am able to go to school anytime and at whatever age and not be worried about washing and drying the only one pair of uniform overnight.

Alhassan, Fatima and Anna attended high school when they arrived in Australia before going to TAFE and University. Their experiences were different because they got a lot of support from their school teachers and peers, and were acculturated to Australian educational expectations prior to university. Biruk started at primary two (year 2). Most of my other research participants did English as a second language, and went straight to TAFE for vocational courses.

However, formal schooling in Australia does not happen without challenges. After resettlement in Australia, when refugee background students enter schools or other educational facilities, they must adjust, perhaps for the first time, to a systematic form of schooling (Olliff L. & Couch J., 2005). The Australian primary and secondary education system which leads to either tertiary education, technical and vocational options (TAFE) or entry to the workforce relies heavily on an uninterrupted linear progression (Sidhu & Taylor, 2007) which is not the experience of students with refugee backgrounds (Cassity & Gow, 2005).

Resettlement countries therefore need to provide an enabling environment for students with a refugee background. Educational aspirations for these students are developed as a result of major factors such as: access to social services like student study loans, peace and freedom from war and other social challenges. Although free access to education becomes a motivational factor for students with a refugee background, host countries need to work in partnership with other agencies and institutions to facilitate their successful transitioning in education. Naidoo (2011) advocated for this partnership because she considers the school system to be complex with multiple activities and therefore requires additional support for students with a refugee background.
7.3.1 Meandering around institutions and in different courses

The chance to go to university should provide ‘an opportunity for African refugee students to build their capacity to participate in Australian society, to improve their standard of living and, in a sense, to gain control over [their] own destinies’ (Nakata, 2007, p. 6). However, these students face a twofold challenge of completing their studies and finding work upon completion. In this study, participants’ life history narratives indicate that students with a refugee background who enrol through TAFE take up whatever course or career that is available at the time. Dan says ‘refugee background students study courses that will allow them to get quick jobs and get employed and not because it was their original desire’. This results from the fact that, in order to get employed, the Australian training system conditions students with a refugee background to do a minimum level of qualifications. For instance, to work in aged care, Certificate III or IV is needed in addition to a first aid Certificate. Refugee background students therefore start meandering through institutions of higher learning, mostly at TAFE and often by doing several courses. Most of them do short courses which are oriented towards getting quick employment, driven by the desire for financial stability. When they don’t secure a job after a given course, they enrol for another course with a different focus and, because of the difficulty of locating employment opportunities, most of my research participants ended up doing a minimum of three TAFE courses before considering a university degree. For example, Dan did two TAFE Courses and two university degrees, Francine did four TAFE courses and dropped one university degree.

These protracted journeys made by students as they seek to balance the twin needs of employment and education are directly related to the provision of services provided to support refugees with their settlement. There is a critical lack of specialist employment services targeting students with a refugee background, and this explains why there is a discrepancy between acquiring low level vocational qualifications (such as a Certificate III in Aged Care) and getting job placements, and why students with a refugee background keep going back to TAFE for multiple courses without necessarily improving their employment prospects. At the time of data collection, there was no prior planning available for students with a refugee background for acquiring a qualification corresponding to the available employment opportunities.

In different work places, there are controlled measures, such as online applications for jobs and the discretion of employment rests with the organizational management. Therefore, there
is no guarantee that doing several courses will grant refugee background students the chance of getting a job. The consequence of doing several courses is that these students accumulate a lot of education debt and although the Australian government has set a threshold of the amount of money one has to earn before starting to pay back their education loan, it is unlikely that many refugee background students will enter professional careers or earn sufficient money to repay their debts. Moreover, in the case where some do, the heavy burden of the debt could be detrimental to their future planning. In the cases where they will not be in a position to pay back their loans, the government does not gain either and future generations might not be supported by the same funds.

Some of the participants originally had dreams to enter professions as lawyers, medical doctors and teachers, which they gave up in the process of resettlement because they thought that it was too late. Dan’s dream profession was to become a medical doctor but his father influenced him to go into civil engineering. When he arrived in Australia, he continued in this field with building and construction. When he lost his job because the building company he was working for went bankrupt, he thought of changing his career and wanted to pursue his original passion. He did year 12 exams to get good grades for direct entry into university. He passed but could not get direct entry into medicine. Instead he started his degree in medical sciences. Unfortunately, Dan could not proceed with his education in medical sciences because of the financial burden on his family. The mortgage was expensive to pay without an additional income so it was difficult to be without a job. He found that evening classes were becoming problematic because he could not focus and concentrate, as he was always very tired from his day job. Like Dan, Alhassan’s original dream was becoming a medical doctor, but in the process he discovered that it was not going to be possible. That is how he opted instead for a health sciences degree and he is looking forward to doing a Masters in Physiotherapy. Evidently the research question that sought to ask how refugee background students have coped with their resettlement in the Australian community is answered by describing the meandering experiences of my participants.

7.3.2 Misrecognitions (Culture, identities and qualifications)

Several of my research participants came with some level of education and qualifications from their home country. However, recognition of overseas qualifications is one of the major challenges to gaining employment for students with a refugee background. Three of my research participants had diplomas from their home countries - Dan came with a Diploma in
Civil Engineering, Noel came with four years of university education in Law, and Zawadi came with a high school diploma, however none was able to get recognition for them in Australia. These examples indicate that there is a big gap between the education systems of Australia and some African countries, and therefore skills acquired in those countries are sometimes not acknowledged. The main option that these students have is enrolling in TAFE so that they can get some credentials, however even then scholars Onsando and Billett (2009) highlight that:

…the pedagogical practices at TAFE institutes may not always promote optimal learning for students from diverse cultural backgrounds and life experiences. Those students who have lived a number of years in refugee camps are likely to have significant challenges when engaging with the Australian TAFE learning curricula and therefore require particular interventions to assist with their engagement and outcomes. (p. 81)

Clearly it can be a matter of debate that education for refugee background students starts upon arrival in Australia because whatever certificates or credentials these students receive locally are valued more than the qualifications they might have brought along with them. Today several initiatives are being put in place to find out how foreign qualifications can be recognised in Australia. Zawadi had this to say:

I wonder why the education we acquired in Africa becomes meaningless when we arrive in Australia. My elder sister came when she had completed a degree in Accounting from Rwanda but she had to start afresh at university and did another three years of undergraduate degree in the same discipline.

Similarly to Zawadi’s sister, Biruk’s father also had professional qualifications that were not recognised. He had been a graduate teacher back in Ethiopia and when he arrived in Australia he had to do a degree as a Registered Nurse (RN) to be able to fit into the Australian job market. All these experiences relate to the obstacles encountered during the process of acculturation and integration into the Australian community.

7.3.3 Tuition fees and other related costs

Tuition fees for tertiary students in Australian can be deferred using the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS). Other accrued expenses covering living allowances are given by Centrelink in the form of cash transfers to an individual student account where applicable. However, additional costs for schooling make Centrelink support inadequate for students in tertiary education. Like many students, refugee background students need to secure additional funding for expenses like transport, the Student Services and Amenities Fee (SSAF) at
university, textbooks, printing services, internet services and all these put pressure on them to work as well as study. Francine thinks that without additional financial support it is not easy to continue with education because there are so many other costs associated with schooling. Although one may not defer the payment of tuition fees, other personal expenses are also massive. Francine has received Centrelink payments ever since she arrived in Australia but that money is only enough for rent and food. On the other hand, students with parents who can support them largely do not experience these challenges that result from additional costs because they can live at home and their parents may support them financially. For example, Biruk and Alhassan are not on Centrelink payments because their parents are working and still taking care of them. Refugee background students who have no families in Australia end up covering those other extra costs on their own in order to be in school and this hinders them from prioritizing their education, making integration and settlement rather difficult.

7.3.4 Managing personal expectations

Upon resettlement in Australia, refugee background students raise their expectations and move from basic living to imagining greater goals for their lives. However, by setting unrealistic goals, they also become stressed. Irrespective of the favourable environment in Australia where social services are in place, some students are emotionally unstable and struggle to settle, often resulting in depression and anxiety. Some desire to go back to Africa when they reach a critical point of unhappiness. For example, Fatima reported not liking her life in Australia, and missing her childhood friends in Kenya so that all she wanted to do was to go back. The perceived good life in Australia was meaningless for her at that point, when the feelings of homesickness overwhelmed her. However, over time she overcame this depression and now she is proud and happy to be in Australia and to use her experience to support new arrivals, especially students with a refugee background.

Students with a refugee background have a life that they have been denied in the past because of forced migration/displacement. When they come to Australia, they settle with an assumption that they are going to be restored to their original life style by returning to school, finding a home, belonging to a community and even regaining a sense of belonging to a family. When this does not appear or turn out as expected, they tend to be distressed and feel lonely.
However, one comforting factor from the findings indicates that when these refugees find others like themselves originally from their home country and participate in what has been referred to as ‘emerging communities’ (Office of Widening Participation Western Sydney University, 2016), then they appear to become strategically more focused on their education. By sharing experiences with new arrivals and thus re-orienting them to possible doors of opportunities within Australia, a change of attitude occurs. Managing expectations therefore, helps research participants to come to terms with their expectations.

7.3.5 Need for mentorship, career guidance and counselling

The challenges faced by students with a refugee background in their process of integration in Australia in terms of their education and career development suggest ‘the need for relevant and useful career counselling approaches’ (Abkhezr et al., 2015, pp. 71-72). The participants in this study identified the need to be encouraged and supported in their endeavours, with a preference for support from older people or teachers to guide them with their academic, emotional and financial decisions. The greater the awareness adults have of what individual students with a refugee background are trying to achieve, the more effective they may be in identifying ways to support them.

Inevitably, therefore, mentorship and career guidance for refugee background students is paramount. Ismael says that, ‘we as students with a refugee background need mentors who understand our background and who will guide and support us in our life decisions’. Career guidance like mentorship will challenge refugee background students to focus on a goal related to what they want to be and how they want to get there. Fatima thinks that ‘the worst thing in a person’s life is when you don't have a dream. It does not matter what you have in this life because when you miss your dream then you are as good as dead, you never feel fulfilled no matter what’. For young people she thought the worst comes when you do not have a role model in life, someone to look up to, and that even a counsellor might end up becoming meaningless if someone lacks a goal or a role model. At the time of the interview, Francine said, ‘I would have achieved more in the last six years I have been in Australia if I had someone to challenge me along on my career path’. Similarly, Gamariel thought that the Australian government takes the maturity and independence of students with a refugee background for granted, so they end up charging them with the huge responsibility of taking care of themselves; however, in many ways they need more orientation than they are usually
given. Gamariel describes the expectations Australians have about the possibilities of assimilation for refugee background students:

African students with a refugee background are presumed to be like any other native children who have grown up in the Australian culture and who have been raised by responsible parents and given some life guiding principles. Some of us have had no one in our lives but us and whatever we do, we learn it from mainly our peers or from other life experiences.

Some of these refugee background students have been their own mothers and fathers and have not had any mentor in their lives. Fatima laments some of the advice she received from her teachers in Australia because they were biased. Most of her teachers thought that because of her background she could not do accounting and be successful in that discipline, yet it was one of the subjects in which she best performed. In brief, newcomers (especially refugee background students) to Australia live a life of confusion because they lack proper guidance, have no mentors who understand their background and their individualized personal desires and people take them for granted thinking that because they are in Australia and are provided with everything material then they are happy.

7.3.6 Culture shock

In education, students with a refugee background who are resettled in Australia find themselves caught up in two cultures, one from their country of origin and the other from the host communities. However, the African and Australian cultural contexts differ in many ways, in terms of understandings and enactments of social life, education, community and family life. Therefore, understanding the cultural difference that students with a refugee background bring with them to Australia and in schools is of paramount importance because it translates into their academic performance. A common identifier amongst many African socio-cultural values and practices is the emphasis and promotion of community, rather than individual lifestyles (Nsubuga-Kyobe & Hazelman, 2007). The African community way of life is also a means of sharing knowledge and information. For example, where transfer of knowledge is concerned, as in the teaching-learning nexus, the socio-cultural practices are likely to extend to one’s epistemological beliefs (Hofer, 2006). Although refugee background students adapt to the Australian culture over time, the participants revealed some cultural shocks that come along with the process of resettlement. Students with a refugee background start from the beginning to understand not only the education system, but also managing their new way of life according to Australian cultural norms. For instance, when refugee
background students arrive in Australia, they struggle to understand the cultural action of planning for the future. Ismael had this to say:

In the refugee camp, you are not sure of tomorrow and so you live a day at a time. You thank God when you get food or water for a day and when you manage to go to school today there is no guarantee that you will even go there tomorrow. It was a new experience for me when I reached Australia and saw how people plan for their lives many years ahead. Students are assured of education without being sent home for school fees and the social service system is effective because people are treated when they are sick and water and electricity is in constant supply.

It should be understood from this study that to support refugee background students effectively, there is a need to consider their real life experiences. Cultural shock for them does not stop with what they experience while pursuing their education but also occurs in the way of life they experience while in Australia. This includes the food they eat, the neighbourhood they live in, the social system in general and the organised systematic way of life. Noel was shocked at unfamiliar work practices including the night shift. Fatima could not understand the maturity exhibited among local students and the way they are trained to manage their life independently. Anna as a social worker at Family and Community Services (FACS), is still witnessing the way some African parents end up in trouble when they treat children like they did in Africa by charging them with responsibilities to take care of their siblings. On the other hand, cultural shock also manifests in the shift of responsibilities where children take up the role of translating for their parents at the hospital, bank, Centrelink and with other service providers. Furthermore, cultural shock does not stop with refugee background students but is also experienced by teachers and education institutions. While this study was not focused on the role of teachers, students often made reference to their teachers as either a motivational factor or as some of those people in their lives that discouraged their efforts to achieve. Fatima regrets the advice she received from her teachers that she could not excel in accounting because it would be difficult for her to get a job. Thus scholars (Hatoss et al., 2012; Miller, 2007; Naidoo et al., 2015) highlight that teachers constantly misunderstand academic underachievement for students with a refugee background. The understanding and interpretation made by teachers on the underachievement of refugee background students is biased because they use limited capacity in language as a measure of excellence and therefore refugee background students’ inability to understand English is directly translated to mean that they can’t achieve much in their education.
7.3.7 Critical lack of information between services

In this study, research findings reveal that the relationships between acculturation, self-concept/ self-esteem, and school achievements are realities that need consideration. Many of my research participants are still perfecting their English and they simply do not know about the range of services that can provide them with assistance, such as refugee support networks, Centrelink assistance, and other basic government services that aren’t available in their countries of origin. When leaving high school and considering tertiary education, students with a refugee background often simply choose a TAFE degree or university course they believe will get them a good job, but find it challenging to find employment once they graduate. It is evident that although there are a couple of possible services in Australia that can benefit refugee background students, my participants lack confidence to search for them and are sometimes ignorant about them. The culture of respect and humility that prohibits young people from asking older people for assistance is also a cultural challenge for it has a negative effect on their confidence and self-esteem. In building self-esteem and confidence, Biruk foregrounds the need for collaborative learning, saying that:

Confidence and self-esteem will be built on collaborative learning. Refugee background people need to build strong communities, establish strong bonds within their community and that is one thing that will build on your confidence. Collaboration reduces the spirit of competition among people which has characterised a majority of immigrants.

Building strong alliances and communities will increase information flows and students with a refugee background will be in a better position to get information on different support systems. The next section discusses findings on educational resilience as evidenced from participants’ life history narratives.

7.4 Educational Resilience

Educational resilience is a subject of contention because of the dimensions that it takes. First it is premised on the fact that there is a prevalence of war and many displaced people especially students are denied an education yet education is the only resource for them to have a bright future. Refugee background students’ ability to continue their education is a result of their inner strength to manage adversity but also a result of support from people, organisations and governments. Therefore, there is a continued need to research not only the challenges this category of the population is facing but also their strengths and what keeps them going amidst adversity.
In this study I was not looking for the magic ingredients of resilience, but rather for the kinds of strategies students with a refugee background have employed that have assisted them to remain educationally resilient. The framework in which the concept of resilience is defined is presented in chapter three (Literature Review). In this chapter, I discuss the findings on how participants have exhibited educational resilience despite adversity. The categorisation of resilience below reveals the ability of students with a refugee background to respond to adversity in productive and life-affirming ways, thus responding to the research question:

- What makes students with a refugee background educationally resilient in the face of adversity?

7.4.1 Family influence on educational resilience

In this study, the factor of family (nuclear and extended) and of particular family members (father and mother figures and siblings) significantly contribute towards the development of educational resilience among students with a refugee background. Deveson (2003) argues that:

> Resilient children are said to be securely attached children, whose most important need is to grow up with one or more adults who are there for the long haul. These children need people who love and believe in them. They need consistent emotional support and ideally, parents play this role, but good relationship with other relatives or close family friends can also make a big difference in a child’s life. (p. 78)

Life history narratives from my research participants have revealed that family members have built educational resilience among them. Luster et al. (2009, p. 203), holds the view that ‘maintaining attachment with caring and supportive people, such as family members, mentors, neighbours and people in the community helps refugee background students to cope successfully’. Even when participants had lost their immediate family members, they remained strong in their minds. A typical example is that of Noel, who credits his late parents for instilling in him the attitudes of working hard and making the most of any available opportunities. His parents encouraged him to be ambitious and to focus on his desired goals, as long as they were feasible and were of benefit to him, his family and his community. As Noel said,

> My motivation was my background; back in Rwanda when I was young, my parents used to tell me that the main key to success is education and therefore I had to work hard in school in order to be successful. In addition to that, all my siblings have influenced my resilience given the fact that they have gone to school and have been successful. My sister finished her degree in Canada and my other brother in Belgium.
Ismael too, regards his father as a role model because his father left home at 16 years and survived a lot of hardship, but became successful and gave his family a good life. Dan, on the other hand, has been resilient in his pursuit of education for different reasons related to family, including his desire to act as a role model within his own family, and to secure a good job that will allow him to work and support his family.

Francine recalls the statements of her father encouraging her to always be in school, study hard and finish well. She recalls her father’s advice that ‘if you want to buy shoes for yourself, then you should go to school and study hard’ and ‘if you go to school, you will know how to speak with people, respect them, and above all respect yourself’. The institution of the family, therefore, is a significant influence on the resilience exhibited by refugee background students. Above all else, the experiences of family members - that is, parents or relatives who have been in school and acquired education to tertiary level - constitute encouragement to refugee background students. Even in times of failure at school they still believe they can make it, by keeping these people in their minds to inspire them to persist. Biruk had this to say:

My father has been a role model for many. He came to Australia when he was a secondary school teacher. When his qualifications were not recognised, he enrolled for a nursing degree which he finished in 2012. I sometimes find university difficult but I keep working hard following the courage I get from my father. To be honest I have failed some units but I have had to keep working so hard. In Australia, it is more like the survival for the fittest and so you have to keep working hard.

As for Anna, her mother protected and cared for them as children. She was a leader in the refugee camp and always urged them to study hard. Anna failed some classes at school but kept repeating them so as to not disappoint her hard-working mother and consequently she has made it to university. Anna made it to university education and dropped out first time because of marriage. She re-enrolled again in 2016 and although she again withdrew, her intentions are to return to university as soon as she is able, and to finish her degree in social work.

Findings further reveal that family can negatively impact on an individual’s educational resilience. For instance, whereas Ismael had a great desire to be at the university, he is still waiting patiently for his brother to finish his degree and they want to study in turn in order to remain financially supportive to their extended family members. Evidently, educational resilience is reduced when students with a refugee background start taking up other responsibilities like getting married and having to work in order to provide for their families.
For example, Gamariel, Juliet and Dan at one point in their lives had to discontinue their education for some time in order to work and care for their families. These students have however resumed their education, although they have had to change their former aspirations and intended career. Dan gave up medicine and chose law instead; Juliet gave up child care and counselling and chose aged care and now disability care. Educational resilience therefore is derived from family influence and family can have both positive and negative impact on their resilience.

7.4.2 Community influences on educational resilience

Communities where refugee background students live - be they in transit countries, or in resettlement countries - influence their resilience. These communities have institutions like churches where specific individuals like pastors, priests and other leaders within the community play an influential role in the form of mentorship for students with a refugee background. For instance, Francine was influenced by her pastor in the Zambian refugee camp to remain in school and that is how she managed to finish her primary school in Zambia. Ismael was supported by a Catholic organisation in Rwanda that connected him to the Fund for the Neediest Survivors of Genocide (FARG) which was the community organisation that sponsored his education in Rwanda. Upon resettlement in Australia, some of the research participants identified with community organisations that bring people together from their home countries. For example, Noel is the current chair of the Rwandan community in New South Wales and one of their major goals is to encourage refugee background students to stay in school while also providing them with a sense of belonging.

Individuals and organisational influences have also surfaced in the stories of my research participants as factors that promote educational resilience. For instance, when Anna arrived in Australia, she attended a program at school for migrants offering extra classes to catch up in English and other subjects including help with doing her homework and assessments, and this motivated her performance and ability to remain in school. In Ismael’s case, he was supported by the non-government organisation (NGO) Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS). The Early family were also an important support. Ismael and his brother met with Steve and Terry Early when they were in Ethiopia working with an NGO called Serving in Mission (SIM) and when the boys shared with them their life experiences as refugees, the family offered to pay for Ismael’s tuition fees at the British International School in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Alhassan has received help from Football United Australia, an organisation that supports
students with a refugee background to gain networks of people and peers through recreation activities. The support of NGOs and other people is a subject of critique as to what is the role played by governments and NGOs in terms of supporting refugees, and how they select who to support. For instance, why Ismael and not someone else? This can be understood as a story about the importance of serendipitous meetings and also of strategic opportunities in the support of refugees’ education.

7.4.3 Teachers’ influence on educational resilience

Teachers in the school community have been identified in this study as promoters of educational resilience among students with a refugee background. For instance, Anna’s good relationship with her fellow students and teachers gave her a reason to continue her education in Australia, and one of her teachers remains a good friend. Alhassan says:

I had teachers who believed in me, who kept pushing me and motivating me and at the end of year ten, I emerged the best in some subjects like PDHPE and Sports Science. My good performance came as a surprise to many people.

Juliet credits her success to the teachers she met at TAFE because they were very supportive and willing to give her extra attention where she needed it. She was able to do all her courses and finish them because of the influence of those teachers.

Arguably, schooling in resettlement countries for African students with a refugee background helps them to ‘cope with, and transcend the negative effects of conflict and disaster’ (Mundy & Dryden-Peterson, 2011, p. 102). However, teachers play a crucial role in ensuring that students with a refugee background find meaning and reasons to be in school or in tertiary institutions. It is also argued by politicians, researchers and educationalists that schools help to develop an appropriate attitude for refugee background students to work and obtain citizenship. However, schooling puts a huge responsibility on students with a refugee background. Refugee background students in Australian tertiary and secondary education are required to manage and familiarise themselves with the school culture, both formal and informal curriculum and above all develop relevant social networks in an unfamiliar environment (Ferfolja et al., 2011).
7.4.4 Peer influence on educational resilience

Within the communities where students with a refugee background are resettled, peer influence also plays a big role in their lives. From Anna’s story, it is evident that a welcoming environment at school including friendly students influenced her love for school. On the other hand, the desire to live an exemplary life among peers influences educational resilience. Gamariel and Dan have been always determined to overcome all the challenges that life puts before them, despite finding school hard. Their desire to be exemplary to their peers has kept them in school even though they have had to combine school with work in order to be financially independent.

The negative influence from peers sometimes may both undermine and promote educational resilience. This is witnessed in Fatima’s example. She had friends in Australia who influenced her in a negative way and distracted her from her education. She stresses that she never succumbed to bad habits although she enjoyed the company of those who engaged in questionable and detrimental behaviours. On the other hand, Fatima did not care for whatever material provisions there were in Australia but rather she felt a gap in her parallel experiences. She loved her life in Australia but also missed her friends in Kenya where she spent her formative years as a refugee. Her peers in Australia tried to comfort her but she still missed her first peers in Kenya and the way of life she had before coming to Australia. She believes that when you surround yourself with people who have good dreams, their experiences will influence you positively. Over time Fatima realised that she had messed up in terms of education and her resilience was apparent when she went back to school in order to become a role model for those girls she considered to be facing emotional challenges.

7.4.5 The influence of faith and religion on resilience

A common statement in the research data is, ‘By God’s grace, I was able to …’, which supports Gartland’s (2009) assertion that religion is a contributing factor to the development of resilience of refugee background students, and can be categorized as an external interacting factor in students’ resilience. The belief in a supernatural creator by the research participants is clearly indicative of the fact that religion is a highly significant contributing factor in explaining resilience among refugee background students. Alhassan’s advice to students from a refugee background who find it difficult to progress in their education is that ‘Above all else keep faith in God and hope for the best’. Edward (2007) also foregrounds the
context of religion as giving assurance of hope in the experiences of refugee students. Faith and hope become coping mechanisms in times of challenging circumstances, often bringing about a sense of calm and peace of mind. However, this belief system is sometimes taken as being superstitious. For Ismael, faith was about security in both spiritual and physical senses. He recalled the advice from his father to ‘take refuge in a mosque when in an unfamiliar place’. Taking refuge in a mosque assumes that people who come for their prayers will be willing to support others in need. Indeed, Ismael and his brother did as they were advised by their father, and that is how they met a Muslim man in Kampala. He transported them to Kenya and organised transport for them to Ethiopia. Moreover, when they were intercepted at the border of Ethiopia, the two boys met a Somali truck driver who was also a Muslim and supported them to cross over the border to get to Addis Ababa. He also gave them some money to use in that country. Belief in God helps people to regain control and meaning in their lives (Hutchinson & Dorsett, 2012). Another study found that faith could be a negative force when refugee people gave up to the situation, and believed fate was out of their hands and in God’s hands (Khawaja et al., 2008). Spirituality gave other refugee people strength: whether it was a belief in a ‘higher power, calling on dead relatives or something deep inside, spirituality assisted refugee people to cope through hard times’ (Sossou, Craig, Ogren, & Schnak, 2008, p. 378). Thus faith in God has been one of the motivational factors for refugee background students to remain in school.

7.4.6 Risk taking factor to educational resilience

The experience of forced displacement is also highly salient when seeking to understand how students with a refugee background build and maintain educational resilience. Data in this study reveals that refugee background students are survivors, where survival has resulted from them taking risks, following their instincts and being determined to hold firm to their goals. Many refugee background students are ‘risk takers’, with their resilience resulting from their ability to dare to take a risk in the face of adversity. Dan had to instinctively take a risk in running away from rebels who had threatened to kill anyone who would escape or join himself to government soldiers. In pursuit of education, he went back to Sierra Leone to finish his higher Diploma in Civil Engineering amidst a civil war and rebellions. Similarly, Gamariel left his adopted family in DRC and joined a group of refugees who were on the way to Zambia via Lumumbashi. He also took a personal risk to leave the refugee camp and stay in Lusaka, Zambia in order to have access to education but also run away from the troubles in
the refugee camp. Ismael remained at the border of Ethiopia for two weeks when he was intercepted and later manoeuvred his way into Ethiopia, remaining in the city as an urban refugee even when UNHCR were threatening to withdraw their services from him and his brother. Cumulatively, refugee background students take risky decisions in their lives and keep daring to take an extra step. These sets of experiences and dispositions built from the hardship of forced migration and living in highly dangerous and precarious situations play out in the educational resilience that they demonstrate when they settle in a new safe country.

7.4.7 Self-determination and behaviour factors to educational resilience

Resilience in students with a refugee background results from individual student goals and dreams and, because refugees cannot take anything for granted, they tend to be highly resourceful and adaptive. Mundy and Dryden-Peterson (2011) attribute this kind of persistence-resilience to the value of schooling in the lives of refugee background students:

Schooling in the context of African students with a refugee background provides children with goals for their lives and tangible ways in which their actions can, they believe, improve their future and by adopting ways to hope for a better future, children are able to cope with and transcend the negative effects of conflict and disaster (Mundy & Dryden-Peterson, 2011, p. 102).

Indeed, refugee background students have been tested through adversity. As a result, they have developed an inherent resilience and are able to develop strategies to help them deal with educational challenges. Education for them is the ultimate goal that they value most. Juliet thinks that ‘a good quality education will make one forget the troubles of having been a refugee since education is one way to acquire skills to problem solving and life is full of challenges and problems that need to be understood with a critical mind’.

The fact that many refugees have been given a second chance in life makes them determined to convert their visions into realities. Some students with a refugee background have succeeded by seizing every opportunity that comes their way. For example, Francine attended ‘every free course that was offered and every workshop that was open’ whether it was relevant to her areas of study or not in order to catch up on her education. Resilience for Biruk manifested in working hard, self-determination and personal zeal. He considers resilience as an inner spirit that contributes to a sense of determination. He says that ‘Refugee background students should keep up the fight, because nothing comes easy, a degree is not meant to be handed over to you, you are meant to work hard for it’. Dan is determined not to settle for less and he looks forward to qualifying as a defence lawyer in order to defend and
advocate for those he considers vulnerable. Noel’s own personal responsibility for ensuring that he performs well enabled him to conclude his Masters’ degree. Alhassan is determined to achieve the best results he can. He says that ‘I want to reach the top of my career and I want to challenge those who often doubt my capacity’. Alhassan says, ‘You can’t just be average in a country like Australia, if you want to get somewhere, you have to aim higher and work hard’.

The secret to resilience according to Biruk is simply ‘to get out of negative attitudes, develop a personality that is confident and always endeavour to be real, honest and friendly to people’. Confidence, self-esteem and working in collaboration with others have been revealed as some of the factors enabling educational resilience. Biruk says that, ‘collaboration reduces the spirit of competition and yet competition has characterised a majority of immigrants’. Eades (2013) argues in favour of collaboration that, ‘the self is vulnerable to be affected by violence but resilient to be reconstructed through the help of others’ (p. 3). Thus the emphasis is on the collective strength of individuals within social networks and the importance of social support in the process of recovery from adversity for vulnerable individuals. Irrespective of the fact that Juliet came to Australia with low levels of education, she has been able to accomplish a lot in the past seven years. She thinks that she was able to do so because of her personal determination to achieve. She believes that life as refugee was much more difficult to live as opposed to a life of going back to school where one is able to gain life skills and become productive in the society.

7.4.8 Responsibility factor in educational resilience

Several of my research participants have been resilient in pursuing their education because of the desire to secure decent employment and position them to meet the demands of different obligations. These demands make them responsible and thus more focused on their education. Zawadi first concentrated on ensuring that the father of her son (partner) was able to come to Australia and she achieved that. By the time of the interview, she envisioned finishing her education as a Registered Nurse (RN) in order to manage the responsibility of taking care of her new family. Juliet was still determined to continue with her educational goals so that she may be able to manage the responsibility of taking care of her children. Gamariel has reached the major goal of his life of starting a family and he has resumed his desires to go back to school with the hope of getting a better job that will enable him to support his family. Therefore, responsibility and determination bring resilience among students with a refugee
background who are otherwise totally on their own. In contrast, Ismael thinks that because he is still alive while some of his family members are not, this gives him the responsibility to aim higher in his life. He says, ‘I saw many people die and the mere fact that I am still alive gives me an assurance that I am going to make it in life. I have decided to change all the negative attitudes I used to have into positive ones and education for me is the key to a better future’.

7.5. Gender issues; schooling in Australia; impact of race and racism

7.5.1 Gender dimension

Ironically, some research findings that emerged are unique and worth mentioning. Most of my female research participants demonstrated some characteristics in their educational resilience that differed from those of male participants. Most of the challenges limiting female students’ education were related to family, intimate relationships, and responsibilities for children (Hatoss & Huijser, 2010). Examples in my research findings begin with Francine who came with a husband and upon reaching Australia she couldn’t cope with the way he was treating her. ‘My husband became abusive and started having other women besides me. I could not cope with it and so I filed for a divorce. After divorcing him, I started living by myself and this increased the financial burden on me because I had to find new accommodation.’ Anna was at university when she met her partner and when she became pregnant, she deferred her degree hoping to resume studies sometime soon. In 2016 when she re-enrolled she had to defer again because that is when she had her third child. Child bearing has kept her out of school. Juliet came with a three year old baby and could not pursue her desired career because she had to take care of her. In the process, she met a man and they planned to get married. She became pregnant to him, and the man left her. By the time of the interview, she was a single parent taking care of two children. Although she has done TAFE courses, if she had the liberty to pursue education at a higher level she would be studying for a university degree. Zawadi came when she was pregnant and when she reached Australia she started working in order to support her partner to come over and they got married. She gave birth to a baby boy and through struggle she had to combine work with caring for her baby and studying. While Zawadi had the support of her mother in taking care of her baby, she also had a big responsibility put on her. It is clear therefore that women may be differently impacted and doubly disadvantaged in their pursuit of education (Greenman & Xie, 2008; Li & Zhao, 2017). The way forward to addressing such gender challenges require policies of
positive discrimination involving a redistribution of educational resources. Rawls (cited in Marjoribanks, 1979, p. 13) asserts that ‘the principle holds that in order to treat all persons equally, to provide genuine equality of opportunity, society must give more attention to those with fewer native assets and those born into the less favourable social positions’. More recently, Höffe also draws on Rawls to elaborate a theory of justice. From his perspective, positive discrimination or giving advantages to those with fewer assets is directly linked to the ‘just savings principle’ or ‘the difference principle’ (Höffe, 2013, p. 8). Such policies of could be extended to the support of female refugee background students. Women are disadvantaged educationally because of additional responsibilities due to natural and societal demands, and this calls for appropriate interventions that allow them access to opportunities that otherwise they would have lost.

7.5.2 Schooling in Australia

Two categories of student were involved in this research study. These are those who arrived when they were under 18 years, enrolled and progressed through the Australian education system to tertiary level (participants 7-11 in chapter six) and those who arrived in Australia over 18 years and began their educational pathways by doing Vocation Education and Training (VET) programs at Technical and Further Education (TAFE) and later progressed to university education (participants 1-6). Upon arrival in Australia, two categories of programs are offered: enrolling children (under 18) in schools or Intensive English Centres (IECs) and enrolling adults (above 18 years) in the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP).

Furthermore, the Australian government provides new arrivals with a wide range of options for entry into tertiary education depending on their age. The first option is applying for tertiary education through the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank - ATAR – which depends on the rank in score after year 12 examinations (Australian Government, 2017). Adult migrants are given the option of doing the Special Tertiary Admission Test (STAT), a series of tests that are designed to assess a range of competencies considered important for success in tertiary study (UAC, 2017). The third option is through TAFE where there are numerous certified courses as pathways to diplomas and then to university degrees.

The life history narratives of my research participants reveal that refugee background students who start their schooling in Australia, either at primary or secondary school level, have a relatively smooth transition to tertiary education while those who enter tertiary
education—especially through TAFE pathways—meet more challenges. Examples from my research participants include Biruk who started schooling in Australia from primary two and now has progressed to university through an ATAR pathway, and Anna and Alhassan who both started in year 9 and were able to progress to university through an ATAR pathway. Dan, Fatima and Noel used TAFE as pathways and finally made it to university through STAT. Francine, Juliet and Ismael are still using TAFE pathways as they are aiming towards a university degree. There is a discrepancy in the quality of education students receive in temporary resettlement countries and the education they receive in Australia and this explains the underachievement in education for those refugee background students who have had protracted stays in refugee camps before resettlement to Australia.

7.5.3 Encounter with racism

Still more findings have been directed to understanding the impact of race and racism on refugee background students both in transit and resettlement countries. Taylor et al., (2009, p. 9) assert that ‘to carry out racial analysis can be used to deepen understanding of the educational barriers for people of colour, as well as exploring how these barriers are resisted and overcome’. When it comes to refugee background students, dealing with racism, inequality, and isolation is a common experience and this is evidenced in their respective stories, starting from their home countries through to settlement in Australia. Some have been displaced from their home countries simply because of who they are and others have been rejected and discriminated against without clear reasons.

For my participants, racism has been evident in the difficulty in attaining employment. For example, Francine faced racism at her workplace when she was given a heavy workload in the aged care facility. Francine says:

Whereas Australia provides a good platform to acquire education, life becomes difficult when seeking for a decent employment. Even when you get placement into a given job it can sometimes turn out to be very stressing due to the issues of racism and segregation.

Juliet also encountered racism during her work placement. She said:

When I was doing my work placement my fellow students were given all the support they needed to perform their duties and I was always ignored. Nurses who were our supervisors ignored me and supported students of their nationality to an extent of securing a job for them within the same organization.

Alhassan experienced racism at school when he was always singled out as an African. He said:
As long as anything came up related to Africa, good or bad, for example in movies, students were quick to point at me, identifying me with what was happening and I reacted in retaliation, although my reactions led to more bad comments from my peers.

Similarly, Biruk experienced racism at school when he would be bullied and teased over his pronunciation and accent. He indicated that it was very disturbing and discouraging for him. Noel highlights how racialisation sometimes is about perceptions and attitudes that people have held for a long time.

Born in Africa, familiar with black skin colour, when you come here in a whole multitude of people where you are the only one who is dark skinned, you tend to become the odd-man-out and sometimes the centre of focus among the dominant white race.

For instance, some people have approached Noel telling him that he has a soft skin and they wanted to touch and feel it. Noel thinks that Australians sometimes may not be directly racist but you will feel it in some way. In his work as a social worker, most of Noel’s clients have confessed to him that they have faced racism on many occasions. Noel thinks that racism is something one may face or feel and one might even hear about from other people who have experienced it. He says however that:

It is important to remember that racism is not only in Australia but even in Africa. In most countries in Africa there are segregations. For example Tutsi in Rwanda were denied education by Hutu government for many years and some schools in Kenya cannot admit students from a refugee background.

Drawing from the experiences of my participants and that of my own, in Africa for example, people are discriminated against based on their tribe, religion, and place of origin. Furthermore, discrimination in Africa often results from competition for limited resources. Many African governments have been the source of trouble because leaders in power have tended to accumulate wealth at the expense of their citizens and thus corruption has been rife.

Speaking on behalf of refugee background students, Gamariel further reiterates the point of attitudes towards African students with a refugee background. He recalls that in Africa, a white skinned person is perceived to be superior and a problem solver. When refugee background students come to Australia, and when they face discrimination from white skinned persons, at first they think it is a way of life until they get to learn that they have a right not to be bullied or discriminated against.

Racism in the work place is also revealed by Ismael. He was doubted in terms of his capacity to serve at the front desk in a restaurant. He was instead kept in the kitchen for a long while.
to wash dishes without being put at the front to serve customers because of his skin colour. When he was given one chance to serve customers, the management was surprised and thanked him for the great work and henceforth he was left to work anywhere in the same restaurant. This has made Ismael confident and convinced him that he is a people’s person. He thinks that some Australians take Africans for granted by thinking that Africans are not skilled because they are black. Some Australians assume that Africans do not have certain skills because the assumptions are based on the few Africans they have met.

Some refugee background students start experiencing discrimination when they start pursuing their education at tertiary level. For example, upon arriving in Australia, Gamariel was reminded that he is still a refugee when he started taking his English course at TAFE. Excited to get back to school, he thought he was going to invest a lot of energy into his education and achieve his dreams. While at TAFE, in his class, students were divided into two different groups including those who were self-paying (on international student visas) and those who were being paid for by the Australian government (refugees). After being divided, students with a refugee background were given two days and international students were given three days. The level of care in terms of response to their needs was completely different from that of international students since that group were paying more money at TAFE. Narratives of my research participants also revealed that the education system in Australia sometimes might seem as if it racializes people for instance Noel says ‘about 80% of students in mainstream high school have English as their first language and about 50% of students in TAFE have English as their second language’. Analysis of the educational profiles of my research participants suggests that the majority of second language migrants end up in TAFE instead of mainstream classrooms.

7.5.4 Individual responses to racism and segregation

Responses and reactions to racism and racialisation of students with a refugee background are varied and depend on an individual student’s experience. Ismael has learnt to ignore people who discriminate against him. He says that ‘silence sometimes is the best answer to managing racism’. For Alhassan, the solution to managing challenges and adversity faced by refugee background students is to work hard and achieve higher goals, most especially educational goals. This is also echoed by Biruk who says that ‘when you are different from majority races, you have to work really hard and excel at what you do, that way you will command some level of respect’. The other way to fight racism, according to Biruk, is by
‘being positive and refraining from wanting to prove them wrong but rather identify with good people and positively present yourself in a modest way and behave politely and courageously’.

By contrast, Ismael has outgrown the impact of racism because he believes that someone who will hate him and not kill or slap him does not worry him at all. Ismael is aware that he escaped many deaths that could have taken his life but the very fact that he is still alive, makes him believe that life ahead of him is full of opportunities. Anna says that: ‘students with a refugee background need to have positive attitudes and behaviour. Although it might seem different for them, they have to know that many other people made it and they too can’. Anna continues to say that ‘when faced with a negative, unwelcoming environment or any other drawbacks, be encouraged and keep pushing to achieve the ultimate goal which is your education’.

Fatima has a very positive response to racism and rejection. She has learnt to accept all that she is. At first she did not like being an Australian. But today, when she looks back, she realises that she has stayed in Australia more than anywhere else. She is more Australian than she is Sudanese and has learned that ‘everywhere you go you will experience some level of rejection’. She says that ‘even if I went back to Southern Sudan I will still not be fully accepted’. Fatima has learnt that racism and discrimination are always there but she has chosen to look at challenges positively and with the right attitude.

Dan concludes that

it is important to learn from others and make sure you don’t lose sight of where you came from. It is enough opportunity to come to this country and it is important that we make good use of that opportunity no matter how challenging it may turn out to be.

He believes that students with a refugee background should never lose their focus on education because it is the only resource they have.

7.5.5 Impact of racism and racialisation

Stereotypes and assumptions about refugee background students are sometimes generalised as if the entire group is homogeneous yet these students are from diverse backgrounds and have gone through quite different life experiences. Therefore, there is need for constant advocacy and information sharing in order for host communities to understand the nature of
refugee background people they are living with. This reflection is also highlighted by the critical race scholars Delgado and Stefancic (2012) who say that:

Unlike some academic discipline critical race theory contains an activist dimension. It tries not only to understand our social situation but to change it; it sets out not only to ascertain how society organises itself along racial lines and hierarchies but to transform it for the better. (p. 7)

It is clear from the findings that refugee background students have faced verbal abuse while participating in school activities and these abuses can significantly affect their engagement in education and later employment. In this section, I have highlighted the effects of racism and discrimination on refugee background students. Assumptions and stereotypes that have been held about Africa and Africans from pre-colonial and colonial days are still impacting on African students with a refugee background who are resettled in Australia. It has been revealed from the findings that the fear of stigma and discrimination often keeps refugee-background students from accessing support. Further, in education and general social life, some refugee background students have shown a limited understanding of the terminologies and the cultural practices for stating needs and requesting help. Refugee background students often lack both peers with university experience and adult role models. Therefore, it is clear that racism occurs not only through express verbal attacks but also through systemic and inherent structures of inequality for example during employment and work placement, at TAFE during the English as Second Language classes among other contexts. The submission by Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) to the Attorney General Department in Australia makes the relevant conclusion that ‘while laws cannot address what is a historical and social problem in society, they can at least set a very minimum standard of decency that should be bestowed to all members of the public’ (Refugee Council of Australia), 2016, p. 7).

7.6. Conclusion

In this research study, data shows that resilience results from individual capacities, people and institutional influences. Participants’ lived experiences revealed common motivating factors as to how they have been educationally resilient pointing to the importance of intrinsic determination to meet personal goals and the role of family support. It has also been revealed that some of the students with a refugee background have responded to adversity in a resilient manner, while others collapsed at some point and rejuvenated at another, leading to the argument that collapse and breakdown are also built-in phases in the development of resilience and necessary for renewal and ongoing growth. This chapter discussed the transient
journeys of my research participants and what it meant for them to move from their home country through transit countries to resettlement in Australia. I have also discussed access and retention at tertiary education and the associated enabling and disenabling factors. I have argued that educational resilience is a concept that needs to be defined in a more multi-dimensional way depending on the intrinsic and extrinsic factors: family, peers, teachers, communities, belief systems and above all inner abilities. Evidently experiences of African students with a refugee background are diverse and complex and cannot be put in one basket or homogenized. The next chapter presents critical reflections on these findings, draws conclusions and recommendations.
Chapter Eight: Summary, Reflections, and Conclusion

8.1. Introduction

Over the course of my research, I have tried to develop a deeper understanding of the factors that hinder and enable transitions for students with a refugee background to tertiary education. In this study, the enabling factors in transition to tertiary education have been associated with ‘educational resilience’ and positively branded as ‘a strength-based approach’ to studying students with a refugee background. In contrast, the focus on disabling factors in the transition to tertiary education has been described as ‘a deficit approach’ which concentrates on negative perceptions, stereotypes, assumptions and difficult life circumstances encountered by students with a refugee background. This study has analysed both enabling and disabling factors in order to draw conclusions and offer a call to action in support of this very unique cohort of students. This study has also been written from an insider’s view, with the researcher being a student of refugee background. The researcher’s life history narrative is presented in chapter one, although not analysed as deeply as the participants’ narratives. The key objectives of this research were: a) to highlight the educational and lived experiences of refugee background students prior to displacement and resettlement in Australia; b) to identify factors that enable or hinder transition to tertiary education for African students with a refugee background; and c) to examine the impact of resettlement in Australia on education pathways for African students with a refugee background. In this chapter I have summarised findings and provided a reflection as a contribution to the body of knowledge in this area of educational research. Based on the findings, I make a call to action to assist with the educational transition of students with a refugee background.

8.2. Summary of findings

This study has focused on the lived experiences of African students with a refugee background covering the long trail of their life journeys from their home country through transit countries to resettlement in Australia. Using an insider’s view, chapter one highlights how students with a refugee background have been exposed to difficult living conditions resulting in interrupted schooling. These life challenges have impacted on their transition to tertiary education in the resettlement country – Australia. Chapter one made reference to the
writings of various scholars in order to challenge the way African students with a refugee background have been treated as an homogeneous group, thereby overlooking their specific history and situations. It has been argued that students with a refugee background are different in their culture, background and identity (Naidoo et al., 2015; Uptin, et al., 2016). Addressing the specific needs of this cohort of students calls for a change from a focus on ‘a lack model’ to a ‘strength based model’ (Terry et al., 2016). Moreover, this study shows that education and training for students with a refugee background becomes a means to develop self-esteem and confidence and increases opportunities for employment and better standards of living (Ager & Strang, 2008; Onsando and Billett, 2009).

Lived experiences for students with a refugee background are better understood from their point of reference. In this study, examining experiences of African students with a refugee background has followed a three phase approach: forced displacement, transit countries and resettlement. Chapter two addresses these phases detailing the causes and effects of forced displacement and its impact on transition to tertiary education for refugee background students. In this chapter it is revealed that overseas resettlement for African refugees in general and students in particular is a recent occurrence because the preferred UNHCR solution within Africa was repatriation (Lischer, 2014). The cohort of African students with a refugee background in this study represents the shift in the resettlement patterns across the globe. In Australia, for example, African refugees were only accepted for resettlement as humanitarian refugees since early 2000 (Hugo, 2009). This historical background explains why there are gaps in the literature on African students with a refugee background in Australian tertiary institutions. My research participants in this study all arrived in Australia after 2000, starting with Dan who arrived in 2001, Biruk in 2003, Fatima in 2006, Dan, Anna, Juliet and Noel arrived in 2008 and Gamariel, Zawadi, Ismael, and Francine arrived in 2010.

The main objective for this study was to identify factors that have enabled students with a refugee background to be educationally resilient amidst life challenging circumstances. Chapter three covers issues addressing the distinct realities encountered by refugee background students in their pursuit of tertiary education. The chapter highlights the impact of prior life and post resettlement experiences and discusses educational resilience as a strength based model that reveals the enabling factors to accessing and finishing tertiary education. The main contributions from this chapter highlight that: students with a refugee background cannot be easily subsumed under the term ‘refugee’ that bundles all communities
and individuals into a monolithic group (Terry et al., 2016). They do not have the same concerns, capabilities and hopes for their future life (Naidoo et al., 2015). In other words these students have complex and multi-faceted needs requiring specific support. Therefore Ben-Moshe et al. (2008) calls for integrated approaches which recognise the diversity of these students as well as the relationships between their broader needs. A primary need in the life of students with a refugee background is access to tertiary education because it has potential transformative effects in the students’ lives (Onsando & Billett, 2009). Education is one of the few resources and inheritances that these students start with in their host communities. In the literature reviewed, it is clear that educational resilience is not static but dynamic (Gartland, 2009). The factors that have enabled students with a refugee background to remain educationally resilient include, but are not limited to: the role of family, friends, professionals and individual activities (Brough et al., 2003), the influence of religious beliefs, inner resources (Khawaja et al., 2008) and maintaining attachments with caring and supportive people, such as mentors, neighbours, and people in the community (Luster et al., 2009).

The major emphasis of the study has been acknowledging the diversity that exists among African students with a refugee background. Different historical, political, social and cultural factors determine the pull factors to tertiary education. Thus listening to the participants’ life history narratives reveals the historical, cultural and political challenges and by using the lens of post-colonial, critical race and critical event theories we are able to elucidate the root causes of those challenges. Chapter four examined the educational disadvantages for students with a refugee background based on the key tenets of the theoretical frameworks. Post-colonial theory is particularly useful in understanding the binary divisions operating within societal assumptions, particularly to do with attitudes of citizen-subjects to the 'refugee stranger' in transit and resettlement countries. It is evident that the large-scale historical forces discussed in Chapter 2, including colonial relations, have been responsible for the hostile reception of refugees in other places and times. Furthermore, the postcolonial theory framework reveals contradictions around hybrid cultural identity. For example, students with a refugee background are neither maintaining their ethnic identity nor are they fully adapting to Australian cultural identity. In the face of discrimination, acculturation and integration into Australian society becomes challenging for refugee background students. In other words, students with a refugee background have been caught up in the ‘complicated process of establishing an identity that is both different from, yet influenced by host communities’
(Parsons & Harding, 2011, p. 4) and they occupy what Bhabha (1994, p. 34) calls ‘the third space of enunciation’. It is hoped that host countries will reach a mutual acknowledgement of the plight of refugees and find a shared understanding of humanity irrespective of their past, present and future. My contribution to the body of knowledge in this study has been writing about my participant stories, and using this study as a platform to provide counter-narratives from students with a refugee background.

While the wider historical events and pressures that shape participants’ life history narratives are generalised in chapter two, chapter five presents individual historical contexts by highlighting each participant’s life trajectories. Chapter five therefore presents life history narratives of students with a refugee background following their historical experiences from home country through temporary settlement in transit countries to resettlement in Australia. Using their life history narratives, I have addressed the research objective that sought to highlight the educational lived experiences of refugee background students from the time of forced displacement to the time of resettlement in Australia. I therefore provided an educational profile for each of the research participants covering three major stages in their educational journeys from primary schooling through secondary to tertiary education level. As a research methodology, life history narrative enables analysis at multiple levels and recognises that the individual story is always intertwined with larger stories (Sikes & Goodson, 2017). My study provides a platform for refugee background students’ voices to be heard on issues that affect their lives (Delgado 1989; Zamudio et al., 2011). In other words, we need to strengthen the capacity of students with a refugee background ‘to exercise “voice,” to debate, contest, and oppose vital directions for collective social life as they wish’ (Appadurai, 2004, p. 66). This is crucial for African refugee background students because most governments/political leaders in African countries restricted the voice of the masses, denying them a basic human right, that of freedom of expression.

Chapter six presents life history narratives of each individual participant during forced displacement, and critical events in their life histories followed by a presentation of their education profiles. A particular issue that was addressed in the participants’ education profile was the motivation that kept these students in school right from primary through secondary to tertiary amidst challenging life circumstances. The compiled stories of the research participants act as a source of reference for the findings in chapter seven. The stories also contribute a body of knowledge for other researchers and practitioners who can now have
access to such stories as a point of reference in deciding the nature of academic support to give to this unique cohort of students.

In this study, the major discussions and contributions to the body of knowledge are presented in chapter seven. The findings have been grouped into four areas: 1. lived experiences for students with a refugee background during forced displacement, in transit countries and resettlement in Australia; 2. tertiary education experiences for students with a refugee background; 3. enabling and disabling factors in transition to tertiary education; and 4. impact of race and gender on education for students with a refugee background. These findings have informed the many conclusions drawn in the sub-sections in the conclusion chapter.

8.3. Reflections on the empirical evidence

8.3.1 Displacement

The trends of events in Africa, and in the great lakes region of Africa in particular, reveal salient features: that there are continued ethnic conflicts, civil wars, human rights abuses and the abuse of national constitution (democracy). This results in forced displacement of people across borders which has become prevalent in the region. The continued in-flow of refugees into the weak and declining economies of host countries like Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania causes great concerns for the refugee students who are being denied the right to quality education. It is evident in the literature that the current system and initiative towards addressing the global refugee crisis has failed. The failure results from the inability of the international and local communities to address the root causes of conflicts (Harild, 2016; Stein, 1986). There is also a high level of uncertainty around continued international commitment to assisting refugees in Africa and Great Lakes region of Africa in particular (Troeller, 2003).

8.3.2 Resettlement

African students with a refugee background in Australia have been defined by the problems they have faced while trying to integrate into the school system. The perception about refugees in the West has been negative and students with a refugee background have been so labelled and stigmatised that many do not want to be identified as being of refugee background even for legitimate purposes. The negative perceptions have drained refugee background students’ natural resilience ensuring that they are always on guard to defend
themselves in the event they are discriminated against. As a result, refugee background students have been denied an identity and these experiences have either hindered or interfered with their education and vocational outcomes (Abkhezr et al., 2015). Today, instead of protecting refugees and asylum seekers, host countries are instead increasing border protection to defend their countries and citizens from refugees. These policy decisions by Western host countries impact on students with a refugee background and limit their opportunities to access and transition to tertiary education.

Nevertheless, there are different initiatives in place today that encourage refugee background students to speak out, for example in conferences organised by Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) and emerging communities fora organised through widening participation programs by different Australian universities. It is important to mention however that some students with a refugee background do not use these opportunities to be heard due to a lack of confidence and limited awareness of the value of such opportunities for policy makers.

**8.3.3 Tertiary education experiences**

This study aimed to examine the impact of resettlement in Australia on education pathways for African students with a refugee background. The personal histories of my participants (Chapter 6) indicate that there are differences in educational provision in countries of transition and in the resettlement countries. In Australian schools and tertiary institutions students have their first contact with the host culture but the challenges they meet in their education at classroom/lecture room level are completely different from other social challenges. In the first instance, their inability to communicate well in English is interpreted by educators as a sign of their inability to cope with academic demands. Ignorance by the educators about the diverse cultures among African students with a refugee background results in prejudice and discrimination (Naidoo et al., 2015). Refugee background students are alienated from their own cultures and backgrounds. They enter schools where their own language, culture and norms are not reflected in the school curriculum and in their day to day school life. They become complete foreigners in their new environment.

Nevertheless, my research findings show that access to, and retention in the Australian education system makes it easier for refugee background students because they are able to create social networks in schools. In this case educational resilience is strengthened because of the influence and support of peers. It is important however for schools to acknowledge the
social and cultural capital that these students bring with them to host countries (Terry et al., 2016). Further contributions in this study are directed towards host communities and particularly policy makers. It is important that host communities understand that once they have accepted humanitarian refugees then this acceptance demands that they get out of their comfort zones and accommodate refugees and particularly students with a refugee background with diverse cultures and backgrounds.

In addition to the general support directed towards refugees, several programs have been implemented to support students with a refugee background to integrate into mainstream schooling in Australia. However, many programs have fallen short of giving the right support to students with a refugee background for different reasons: 1) some implementers of these programs were ignorant of the diversity in needs among refugee background students; 2) more often than not refugee background students were identified as a homogeneous group yet they are of different cultural backgrounds; 3) lack of adequate understanding of African cultures by service providers to support tailored support programs.

The fact that the majority of my research participants have had to deal with the challenge of cultural shock - for example the type of food, unfamiliar social life, technology, change of life style, and cooler weather—especially for those who come from tropical Africa—has influenced educational outcomes. Recognizing students with a refugee background as a group requiring some level of support in their educational aspirations is fundamental to achieving equity for these students who have been exposed to numerous human rights abuses in their transient journeys to resettlement in Australia.

8.3.4 Race, racism and gender and its impact on education

In this research study, participants were both male and female. Five of the participants were female and six were male. All my participants have had an encounter with race and racism although over time they have learned to overcome its effect on their education. Some were reactive to the discrimination that they experienced while others were stigmatised and chose to withdraw from social activities; still others chose silence by ignoring those who discriminated against them. While gender was not the focus of this study, findings revealed some specific challenges that female students faced in addition to those experienced by their male counterparts. Female students stopped pursuing their educational aspirations not because of language or any other school based challenges but because of the additional
responsibility of taking care of their children. Social life also challenged female students with a refugee background more than it did male students. Some of the female students did not know how to handle emotions in their adolescence and teenage life and as a result some became pregnant while others dropped out of school to start working. Two of my research participants were single mothers and they had to take responsibility of child care but also had to provide financial support to their partners to join them in Australia. The challenge with child care is that it is long term and by the time some students considered going back to university they found themselves having a second child or even a third. One of my research participants dropped a university degree on two occasions following the birth of three children.

8.3.5 Educational resilience

One of the objectives of this study was to identify factors that enable or hinder transition to tertiary education for African students with a refugee background. Enabling factors have been attributed to educational resilience.

In this study, findings show that educational resilience results from multidimensional support from family, community, organizations, teachers and peers. In addition to external support, students with a refugee background draw their strength from faith and religion, risk-taking traits and self-determination. Both external and internal factors are further complicated by students of refugee background taking up financial responsibility in support of both the nuclear and extended family. It is also evident from the participants’ narratives that they were particularly focused on education because of the value attached to it and the prospects education gives them for the future. Educational resilience exists to varying degrees among students with a refugee background; that is why some have succumbed to challenges and dropped out of school but in this study, the focus was on those who have demonstrated education resilience by staying in school and finishing TAFE or University education.

The findings in this study therefore recommend implementation of effective programs and strategies to support current and future cohorts of refugee background students.
8.4 Conclusions

Using an insider’s view, I have argued that students with a refugee background are strong, are dynamic to situations and circumstance, have a high capacity of adaptability and cannot be reduced to their past.

They therefore need acknowledgement and recognition of their efforts to raise their level of self-esteem and confidence. There is a need to look at students with a refugee background not in isolation but in terms of their holistic life experiences. The knowledge and attributes of students with a refugee background should be included in the school curriculum of host communities and overall institutional policy framework principles should celebrate the diversity of refugees, develop links and communications between refugee support services and refugee community members and the institutions.

Labelling students with a refugee background as ‘refugees’ re-traumatises and stigmatizes them, giving license to further discrimination based on race, colour, language and background. These challenges can be addressed by increasing awareness among host communities that the label of a ‘refugee’ is for legitimate purposes but refugees are human beings like any other with a set of challenges that have resulted from differences in political, economic, social and cultural perspectives. This awareness can be raised by the media and by governments through publications.

African students with a refugee background, like anybody else who has been forcibly displaced, are experiencing a shift in life orientations and focus, and have been left with little choice but to transform and redefine their aspirations. Through this process of adjustment, the factors and experiences that have helped them to remain resilient can best be understood through their stories.

This research therefore offers a robust approach to studying students with a refugee background in further education. The starting point has been to find out what strengths these students might have, areas that need to be improved and the nature of support needed in terms of funding and other resources.

Drawing from my findings, it is evident that education is a highly important factor in the life of refugee background students. Therefore it is important to identify gaps in the nature and type of education that is being offered to refugee background students and to establish how
best to address the critical needs in their lives. In order to successfully address the educational needs of refugee background students, there is a need to consider the role of other stakeholders including parents, schools, policy makers and other partners who have the education of refugee background students in their interest.

Last but not least, the plight of refugees is as a result of political conflicts and addressing them needs political solutions. It is a responsibility of the global community including coalitions and consortiums like the United Nations, Africa Union, East African Community, World Bank, International Monetary Fund and all donor countries to address the challenges of forced displacement in countries of origin but also to contain the challenges faced by students with a refugee background in both developed and developing host countries.

8.5. Limitations of the Study

8.5.1 Scope

This study did not interview university academics and university support staff to get another point of view because its focus was on the stories of the students through their whole transient journeys from home countries to resettlement. The study did not cover students who are seeking asylum and living in the community in Australia because their application for refugee status are pending resolution subject to their protection claim. The scope of this study was limited to students of refugee background holding a special humanitarian visa and that have acquired naturalised citizenship or are permanent residents in Australia which status grants them full rights to access and participation in tertiary education.

In this research study, I focused mainly on life history narratives and drew general conclusions from that. I did not do a deeper investigation into media articles and policy documents but rather took life history narratives as the main source of information. This study used the approach of ‘knowledge production through the recalling and recounting of lived experience’ (Aldridge, 2016, p. 18).

My motivation for using life history narrative was based on the fact that I wanted to bring an insider’s view into a research study. I used my own life history narrative as a benchmark for studying the lived experiences of my research participants. As an African who has experienced the life of being a refugee, I have the privilege of being situated inside the narratives of my research participants because at one time I too was marginalized in the
larger societal context as ‘other.’ At the same time, however, while I share African identity with the research participants I do not have the same cultural identity or humanitarian refugee status and therefore I was sometimes considered as the ‘other’ to my research participants. There is no doubt that the participants’ view of me as an insider influenced their willingness to participate, and shaped both their expectations and responses. Conscious of ethical demands, I maintained the participants’ respect, autonomy and independent mind. Anonymity and confidentiality governed the publication of the research findings.

8.5.2 Recruitment of participants

I used existing platforms like the Great Lakes Agency for Peace and Development International (GLAPD) and Salvation Army with the hope of identifying the research participants easily; however, these avenues did not yield many results. On the contrary, networking was much more helpful, whereby one identified participant made reference to another. Those known to the first participants were very willing to participate in the research and in that way I was able to reach more participants in the process. Creating a team of participants who were students with a refugee background required building trust and that small team brought many more on board.

8.5.3 Suspicion and fear of the researcher

It was discovered that some potential interview subjects did not want to participate for fear of telling their stories to the researcher. In particular, those from my country Rwanda thought that I was spying on their current status and therefore had concerns regarding my intentions as a researcher in the study and my relationships with the current governance system in Rwanda or the previous governments that had brought about the catastrophes that befell their families. This was not true for participants from other countries like Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Guinea Conakry, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia and Southern Sudan. Over time, however, trust was built even among those from Rwanda. Students with a refugee background take time to trust and when they do, it is for the researcher to be mindful of not creating any mistrust. The refugee background students are a vulnerable group so working with them calls for extra caution and care.
8.5.4 Structure of the methodology used

Narratives and life histories of my participants were mainly focused on the overcoming of adversity and each participant had a different way of telling and directing their stories. In doing so, the main challenge was in identifying common themes emerging from all the data collected. I was particular about choosing the form of the story as a methodology because it colours readers/hearers’ reception and interpretation of the content as well as setting up expectations about outcomes which can then either be challenged or confirmed (Sikes & Gale, 2006). Sometimes, because of exposure to different experiences and contexts, participants’ stories kept changing. Some events in their life were best left forgotten. This constraint affected the researcher who needed to create a structure to interpret the data. The solution to this challenge was to use critical event theory as a way to tap into participants’ memory by referring to a specific critical event as a turning point in their life journey.

8.6 Call to action

The call to action addresses two levels of interventions: 1) addressing challenges causing forced displacement in Africa; and 2) creating a welcoming environment among host communities, schools and institutions in Australia.

At the Africa level, there is a need to stop civils wars, promote state sovereignty, democracy and respect for human rights. This is a responsibility of both international and local communities. The international community - United Nations, donor countries, International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank (WB), and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) - has a stake in the decision-making processes in most African countries (these decisions have to do with the development and implementation of national level policies) and so they have a role to play in stemming the atrocities that are committed against humanity. Local African communities (politicians, policy makers, local leaders and the general population) have the primary responsibility of protecting citizens and stopping forced displacement and its causes. Therefore, this study is a call for further research into the role that international and local communities can play in preventing the causes of displacement and forced migration rather than continually trying to treat the symptoms of the problem. Students with a refugee background are denied access to basic human rights (life, education, health and belonging) as a result of civil war and conflicts. Until the causes of civil wars and conflicts are addressed, we shall continue to have refugee crises.
In Australia, transition to tertiary education for refugee background students is a huge issue and calls for different and targeted strategies for transition to be successful. This is because the chances of students with a refugee background having access to tertiary education in transit/temporary settlement countries are slim. It is only when they reach the host country, in this case Australia, that they aspire to tertiary education. Upon reaching Australia, refugee background students’ willingness to be in school is high but once they encounter the challenges involved, like difficulties with language and different curriculum and pedagogy, some drop out of school while others move on to post-school options. For those who remain in school, each challenge they face becomes an action point for policy makers.

Additionally, there is need for an inclusive curriculum that uses the prior life experiences of refugee background students and knowledge from culture and history. Naidoo et al. (2015, p. 136) believes that ‘it is important for universities to recognise the strength, resources, and support systems that refugee background students bring or possess and build on’.

There is also need to use every opportunity to tackle racism and gender discrimination in schools using different channels of communication. These two challenges of racism and gender discrimination have been highlighted in this study as affecting both the academic and social life of refugee background students.

Finally, there is a need to monitor and evaluate the impacts resulting from different widening participation and engagement projects implemented by different institutions across Australia. For example, the engagement agenda of universities ‘making students our partners’ engenders a sense of belonging as a new way of practising higher education (Naidoo et al., 2015; Terry et al., 2016).

8.7. Recommendations for further research

From the findings of this research study, I recommend the use of comprehensive guidelines within universities for the support of refugee student access, retention and success in tertiary education, such as those developed and published by Naidoo et al. (2014) at Western Sydney University. Such a guide is valuable to policymakers, administrators in education and academics in tertiary and further education.

Furthermore, there is need for further investigations on the perceptions and resilience of teachers who work with refugee background students in their classrooms and courses.
Given the relevance of the life history narrative methodology and the usefulness of post-colonial, critical race and critical event theories, I see potential value in applying the same theoretical and methodological framework to studying other student groups, for example international students and Indigenous students.

While the current study cautions on interpreting deficit discourses about refugee underachievement in school, at the same time there is still a need for further research to explore ways to assist African students with a refugee background on how to deal with the demands of their new experiences in the western education context. This is more pressing given the high aspirations and demonstrated educational resilience among African students with a refugee background.

8.8 Final Statement

Stories in this study suggest alternative ways of imagining and enacting resilience in students with an African refugee background as opposed to a focus on the constraints related to language, literacy and cultural barriers. The stories have also exposed the realities of education in refugee camps in Africa. It is clear that students with a refugee background possess multiple forms of social, linguistic and cultural capital that can be developed to support their integration into the host communities and transition to tertiary education. Hoddinott (2011, p. v) says: ‘one of the measures of a just society is the way in which it deals with its most vulnerable people’. The lessons learnt in this study will evidently be used for those encountering different adversities and they will understand that they are not alone in their life struggles. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights says that higher education ‘shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit’ (United Nations General Assembly, 1948 Art. 26). Therefore, all stakeholders in education should work in partnership with education providers, non-government agencies and local refugee communities to ensure that refugee background students share the right to higher education through a transition process that engenders a sense of belonging to the university community in particular.
References


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Appendices
## Appendix one: Historical information in the study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Description of events in the GLRA</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Tutsi exiles, many of whom fled during the crisis in Rwanda leading up to its independence in 1962, form the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) and attack Rwanda. Civil war ensues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Hutus and Tutsi in Rwanda sign power sharing agreement in Arusha. UN forces (UNAMIR) are deployed to oversee the agreement. Assassination of Hutu president of Burundi in October prompts revenge killings in Rwanda, and refugee exodus begins.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>In the absence of deployment of international troops to separate the former soldiers, Zairean security forces are deployed to refugee camps in Zaire. Security council adopts a resolution to investigate reports of military training and arms support to the former Rwandese armed forces (FAR) in Zaire.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Security deteriorates in Masisi region, and thousands of Tutsi flee toward Goma. Refugees on the move, from Uvira to Bukavu and from Kibumba to Mugunga, fleeing attacks on camps. Security council approves dispatch of multinational forces to eastern Zaire. Corridor opens during fighting in Goma, allowing 450,000 refugees to return to Rwanda while others flee southwest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Zaire rebel forces (AFDL) take Kinsansa. Mumbutu Sese Seko overthrown. Humanitarian agencies pursue fleeing refugees into the Zaire rain forests. Refugees airlifted home from Tingi Tingi and other settlements.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**a) Great Lakes Region of Africa and major conflicts leading forced displacements**

Source: (Ogata, 2005, pp. 1-12)
b) African Map: Showing the Great Lakes Region of Africa
### c) Chronology for African countries showing conflicts/civil wars and forced displacement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Algeria</td>
<td>1956</td>
<td>An independence war in Algeria triggers an outward flow into Tunisia and Morocco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1957</td>
<td>UNHCR intervenes to assist Algerian refugees in Morocco and Tunisia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rwanda and Sudan</td>
<td>1958</td>
<td>Additional refugees flows take place in Africa with Uganda receiving people from Sudan and Rwanda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1959</td>
<td>World refugee year is celebrated throughout the world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rwanda</td>
<td>1962</td>
<td>Burundi witnesses a mass influx of ethnic Tutsi from Rwanda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The international Council of Voluntary Agency (ICVA) is created as the umbrella organization agencies working for refugees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Algeria</td>
<td></td>
<td>UNHCR helps to repatriate 260,000 Algerians from Morocco and Tunisia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burundi</td>
<td>1962</td>
<td>Ethnic Hut of Burundi migrates to Rwanda. This will occur again twice in 1994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mozambique</td>
<td>1965</td>
<td>Refugees from Mozambique, fighting for independence, migrate to neighboring countries. Many were repatriated in 1967</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1967</td>
<td>The Protocol to the 1951 Convention relating to the status of refugees is adopted in New York</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>United Nations makes its Declaration on Territorial Asylum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>1969</td>
<td>On September 10th, the Organisation of African Unity Convention governing the specific aspects of refugee problems in Africa is adopted in Addis Ababa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1972</td>
<td>UNHCR launches special operations to repatriate and reintegrate over 200,000 refugees in southern Sudan as well as assist hundreds of thousands of displaced persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uganda</td>
<td>1972</td>
<td>Thousands of Asians expelled from Uganda are resettled abroad within a very short time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burundi</td>
<td>1972</td>
<td>Ethnic Hutus of Burundi migrate to Rwanda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guinea Bissau, Mozambique and Angola</td>
<td>1974</td>
<td>Between 1974-1976, independence in Guinea-Bisau, Mozambique, and Angola allows repatriation of hundreds of thousands of refugees from neighboring countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zaire</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>Angola receives 200,000 Zairians from the province of Katanga (now called Shaba)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equatorial Guinea</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>An outward flow of refugees from Equatorial Guinea move to Cameroon and Gabon. These were repatriated after a change of regime in their country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zaire</td>
<td>1978</td>
<td>Zairians, who in previous years sought refuge in neighboring countries, start returning to their home country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1978</td>
<td>UNHCR launches an assistance program in the Horn of Africa for hundreds of thousands of Ethiopians refugees in the Sudan, Somalia, and Djibouti, as well as 500,000 internally displaced people in Ogaden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uganda</td>
<td>1978</td>
<td>An Exodus of Ugandan refugees move into Sudan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanzania</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>The Pan-African refugee conference meets in Arusha, Tanzania, to determine ways to better assist and protect refugees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zimbabwe, Zaire and Angola</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>In reparation efforts in Africa, 200,000 refugees return to Zambabwe following independence, 190,000 to Zaire, and 50,000 to Angola</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudan, Ethiopia</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>A mass influx from Southern Sudan into Ethiopia begins: by 1990, the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Event Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>The Sudan is in Crisis as it receives an influx of tens of thousands of Ethiopians whose lives are menaced by war and famine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uganda</td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>Between 1986-1989, approximately 320,000 Ugandans repatriated from the Sudan and Zaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mozambique</td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>A mass exodus from Mozambique into neighboring countries begin. More than 900,000 of the one million refugees seek asylum in Malawi, an amount equaling 10 percent of its population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burundi</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>About 60,000 Burundi Nationals take refuge in Rwanda and were repatriated a few months later</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Ethiopia receives a mass influx of Somali refugees following conflict in Northwestern Somalia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>The international Conference on the plight of Refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Southern Africa meets in Oslo to effectuate a plan of action for the region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberia</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>Following incidents in border areas, 75,000 refugees and displaced persons arrive in Senegal and Mauritania from Liberia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>As a consequence of civil war in Somalia, the numbers of Somali refugees in Ethiopia reached 375,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberia</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Due to civil war, 750,000 Liberians (32% of the entire population) take refuge in Guinea, Cote d’Ivoire, and Sierra Leone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam is adopted in August at the nineteenth Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers in Cairo. It is generally seen as an Islamic response to the United Nations 1948 universal Declaration of Human Rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>President Siad Barre of Somalia is ousted from office, and fighting breaks out between rival clans. Increasing number of Somalis flee into Kenya, Ethiopia, or the interior of Somalia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Kenya is struck by one of the world’s fastest-growing refugee emergencies, with an average of 900 refugees mostly Somalia, entering the country each day. By the end of the year, more than 400,000 refugees are in Kenya. In September, UNHCR launches a cross-border operation with the aim of stabilizing population movements inside Somalia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>At the end of the year, the first of 28,000 U.S. troops arrive in Somalia in Operation restore Hope to establish a more secure environment for humanitarian relief operations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Togo</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>In Togo, political unrest and government repression force more than 200,000 Togolese into Ghana and Benin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rwanda</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>In Rwanda, peace negotiations between rebels and the government fail, leading to renewed fighting that displaces about 600,000 persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zaire</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>In Zaire, an outbreak of politically instigated ethnic violence forces an estimated 300,000 people from their homes by mid-year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mozambique</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>In Mozambique, UNHCR begins a three year repatriation program for about 1.5 million Mozambican refugees. The repatriation is the largest in the history of Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burundi</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>In Burundi, 800,000 people are displaced as a result of an attempted coup d’etat in October</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rwanda</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>After a massive bloodletting in Rwanda, over 250,000 Rwandese,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
mostly Tutsis, flee to Tanzania in a 24 hour period in April

As the Tutsi-led Rwanda Patriotic Front sweeps to victory in Rwanda, over one million Rwandese, mostly Hutus, take refuge in neighboring Zaire over a 48-hour period in July, causing a humanitarian crisis.

In November, the Security Council of the United Nations creates the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) to investigate and prosecute persons responsible for the genocide committed during the year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rwanda</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Between 330 and 8,000 individuals are massacred by the Rwandan Patriotic Front Army at the Kibeho camp for refugees and internally displaced Rwandans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zaire</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>As fighting between Zairian rebels and government forces increases, 100,000 Rwandan Hutu refugees flee their UN camps for the jungles of Eastern Zaire.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rwanda</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>In December, over 200 Tutsi Tutsi refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo are massacred by Hutu rebels at the Mudende refugee camp.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sierra Leone</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>A military coup in Sierra Leone ousts the first democratically elected government after its being in office only one year. This event comes after a six year civil war, which has resulted in at least 10,000 dead, 1 million refugees, and another million individuals internally displaced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopian and Eritrea</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>The border war between Ethiopia and Eritrea continues. A two weeks bombing campaign by Ethiopians, displaces hundreds of thousands of Eritreans, with tens of thousands crossing borders into neighboring countries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cote d'Ivoire and Liberia</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Renewed civil wars in Cote d'Ivoire and Liberia have forced over one million West Africans to leave their home countries in search safety since 2002.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberia</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>In Liberia, fighting between rebels forces attempting to over-throw President Charles Taylor and government troops intensify. Most of the country’s 3.3 million people are either sick or starving and a third is internally displaced, with 50,000-600,000 living in one camp outside of Monrovia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uganda</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>In February, the northern Uganda based rebel group called the Lord’s Resistance Army enters the Barlonyo camp for displaced persons in Uganda and massacres over 300 individuals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burundi</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>In August, armed combatants, many of whom are members of the Hutu rebels movement Forces for National Liberation, massacre atleast 156 refugees at Gatumba camp in Burundi.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>In March, the ICC issues a warrant for the arrest of individuals accused of committing crimes against humanity in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uganda</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>In July, the ICC issues arrest warrant for the leaders of the Lord’s Resistance Army, a rebel group based in Uganda.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>The crisis in Darfur, in which more than 200,000 civilians have been</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
killed, spread across the border into Chad, internally displacing 200,000 Chadians. There are currently 200,000 Sudanese refugees in Chad

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>The continuing civil war in Somalia has led over half a million to flee to Mogadishu in three months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>In July, the prosecutor of the ICC files formal charges against Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir of genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes. In 2009, the ICC issued a warrant for his arrest. He is the first sitting head of state indicated by the ICC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Since the beginning of armed conflicts in 2006, thousands of refugees have fled to Kenya from Somalia every month, with Dadaab in eastern Kenya hosting 280,000 refugees, triple its capacity.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Gibney, 2010

d) Specialised programs for students with a refugee background in Australia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Name</th>
<th>Project Description</th>
<th>State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Schooling, Globalization and Refugees</td>
<td>Sought to investigate how State high schools, local communities and State and Federal policies met the educational needs of refugee students.</td>
<td>Queensland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Refugee Action Support Program (RAS). This is conducted by the Western Sydney University, the Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation (ALNF) and the NSW Department of Education and Training.</td>
<td>In this project, pre-service teachers from the University of Western Sydney, Charles Sturt University and the University of Sydney participate in tutoring of refugee students in schools in greater South Western Sydney and the NSW Riverina region.</td>
<td>NSW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Connect</td>
<td>Adult volunteer tutors provide support for refugee students in the school setting for one day per week, working one-on-one with students or with a small group of students.</td>
<td>Victoria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homework clubs</td>
<td>Homework clubs have also been advocated to provide targeted support for student learning and help with assignments and homework.</td>
<td>Victoria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Beyond the Bell</td>
<td>Learning Beyond the Bell is a system of Victorian homework clubs funded by the Victorian Department of education and Early</td>
<td>Victoria</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Childhood Development. These Out of School Hours Learning Support programs are provided by schools and community groups around Victoria in order to increase the connectedness of refugee and migrant young people to school and to the community.

Source: (Weekes, et al., 2011, p. 313)
Appendix Two: HREC approval

Locked Bag 1797 Penrith NSW 2751 Australia Office of Research Services

ORS Reference: H10814

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

26 November 2014

Associate Professor Loshini Naidoo School of Education

Dear Loshini,

I wish to formally advise you that the Human Research Ethics Committee has approved your research proposal H10814 “Narratives of displacement, resilience and education: A case study of African students with a refugee background in Higher Education in Australia.”, until 1 September 2017 with the provision of a progress report annually if over 12 months and a final report on completion.

Conditions of Approval

1. A progress report will be due annually on the anniversary of the approval date.

2. A final report will be due at the expiration of the approval period.

3. Any amendments to the project must be approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee prior to being implemented. Amendments must be requested using the HREC Amendment Request Form: http://www.uws.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0018/491130/HREC_Amendment_Request_Form.pdf

4. Any serious or unexpected adverse events on participants must be reported to the Human Ethics Committee via the Human Ethics Officer as a matter of priority.

5. Any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should also be reported to the Committee as a matter of priority

6. Consent forms are to be retained within the archives of the School or Research Institute and made available to the Committee upon request.

Please quote the registration number and title as indicated above in the subject line on all future correspondence related to this project. All correspondence should be sent to the email address humanethics@uws.edu.au.

This protocol covers the following researchers: Loshini Naidoo, Susanne Gannon, Alfred Mupenzi

Yours sincerely

Professor Elizabeth Deane Presiding Member, Human Researcher Ethics Committee
Appendix three: Participant Information Sheet

Participant consent form

Participant profile and interview guide

Participant Information Sheet

Project Title: NARRATIVES OF DISPLACEMENT, RESILIENCE AND EDUCATION: EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN STUDENTS WITH A REFUGEE BACKGROUND IN AUSTRALIAN TERTIARY EDUCATION

Project Summary:

You are invited to participate in a research study being conducted by Alfred Mupenzi, PHD Candidate, University of Western Sydney, School of Education under the supervision of Associate Professor Loshini Naidoo and Associate Professor Susanne Gannon.

The research objective is to identify elements/aspects of resilience in African refugee students in higher learning institutions in Sydney and to identify how these students have managed to aim for higher educational goals amidst constraints related to their life histories. Life history interviews will focus on the educational and migration experiences of students from a refugee background. It is hoped that by investigating the factors that promote or facilitate resilience in African refugee students, we would become aware of the institutional support that students of African refugee background require. The stories that will be provided through interviews will enable the researcher to construct detailed narrative case studies of particular individual students.

How is the study being paid for?

The research candidature is sponsored by the Government of Rwanda.

What will I be asked to do?

You will be asked to narrate your educational experiences/ life story while you were a refugee and afterwards.

How much of my time will I need to give?

School of Education
University of Western Sydney
Locked Bag 1797
Penrith NSW 2751
Australia
Telephone:
Email:
The initial interview will be approximately one hour long, with a follow up interview of approximately thirty minutes where required to review and add detail to the developing narrative case study of each participant.

**What specific benefits will I receive for participating?**

Specific benefits to participants include the opportunity to share and reflect upon their experiences. The researcher will reimburse participants for transport/travel expenses (per km mileage, parking fees and public transport).

**Will the study involve any discomfort for me? If so, what will you do to rectify it?**

There is a likelihood of discomfort because in the process of re-telling the past experience, some experiences may be associated with bad memories that may cause you discomfort. If that happens, we can pause the interview for a while or stop and postpone parts of the interview for another time. You might also want to contact UWS campus-counselling services (9852 5199) or STARRTS- (Society for the treatment and rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma services - 9794 1900) if you would like to talk more about any issues that arise for you.

**How do you intend to publish the results?**

The findings of the research will be published in a Thesis for the award of Doctoral of Philosophy and in academic journals. *Please note that the minimum retention period for data collection is five years.*

**Can I withdraw from the study?**

Participation is entirely voluntary and you are not obliged to be involved. If you do participate, you can withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

If you do choose to withdraw, any information that you have supplied both audio and paper will be destroyed.

**Can I tell other people about the study?**

Yes, you can tell other people about the study by providing them with the chief investigator’s contact details. They can contact the chief investigator to discuss their participation in the research project and obtain an information sheet.

**What if I require further information?**

Please contact the researcher should you wish to discuss the research further before deciding whether or not to participate on the following:

Alfred Mupenzi
PHD Candidate

University of Western Sydney

School of Education

Locked Bag 1797

Penrith NSW 2751

Tel: 97726561

E-mail: 17380182@uws.edu.au

What if I have a complaint?

This study has been approved by the University of Western Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee. The Approval number is H10814

If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Office of Research Services on Tel +61 2 4736 0229 Fax +61 2 4736 0013 or email humanethics@uws.edu.au.

Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

If you agree to participate in this study, you may be asked to sign the Participant Consent Form.
Human Research Ethics Committee

Office of Research Services

Participant Consent Form

Project Title: NARRATIVES OF DISPLACEMENT, RESILIENCE AND EDUCATION: EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN STUDENTS WITH A REFUGEE BACKGROUND IN AUSTRALIAN TERTIARY EDUCATION

I, ____________________________ consent to participate in the research project titled Narratives of displacement, resilience and education: A case study of African students with a refugee background in higher education in Australia.

I acknowledge that:

I have read the participant information sheet and have been given the opportunity to discuss the information and my involvement in the project with the researcher.

The procedures required for the project and the time involved have been explained to me, and any questions I have about the project have been answered to my satisfaction.

I consent to the interview and audio taping while providing my life story highlighting my educational experiences up to higher education.

I understand that my involvement is confidential and that the information gained during the study may be published but no information about me will be used in any way that reveals my identity.

I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time, without affecting my relationship with the researcher now or in the future.

Signed:
Name: 

Date: 

Return Address: 

Alfred Mupenzi
PHD Candidate
University of Western Sydney
School of Education
Locked Bag 1797
Penrith NSW 2751
Tel: 97726561
E-mail: 17380182@uws.edu.au

This study has been approved by the University of Western Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee. The Approval number is: H10814

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Fax +61 2 4736 0013 or email humanethics@uws.edu.au. Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
1. Research participant’s profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profiling</th>
<th>Corresponding Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name (s)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity Code by the researcher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Languages spoken</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country of Origin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date of arrival in Australia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation (Job, something they do for a living)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current affiliated Academic Institution</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year of study</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialisation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venue for the meeting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time of the meeting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education level before coming to Australia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Suburb of residence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. Interview Guide

a) Open questions

**Question one:** Thank you (Participant name) for accepting to participate in my interview, I will share with you a little bit about myself (Researcher takes 5 minutes to tell his story). I know that talking about personal experiences while you were a refugee sometimes is not very easy but this is an interview to guide me in my research study on students who were formerly refugees and I am aware that you are not anymore a refugee but a citizen of Australia. So, I would like to work with you to tell a story of your life regarding your refugee background and if it is ok with you please talk to me through your life story as you see it and as you know it. Feel free, relax and you may stop whenever you feel like.

b) Focus on arrival to Australia

- Under what circumstances did you leave your home country to Australia?
- **N.B.** The researcher will explore the trajectory of displacement through transit countries and available support (i.e. educational, welfare and health) to Australia.
- In what way did you arrive in Australia?
- How were you received?
- Could you describe your personal experiences with regard to your settlement in your first three years?
- In terms of where you live now could you tell me a little bit about how long you’ve lived there and how you came to choose the location?
- **N.B.** The researcher will explore the extent to which the research participants received settlement support from different actors like:
  I. Family support
  II. Government support
  III. Charity support

c) Educational experiences

- Please share with me your educational experiences since you started school?
- Did you encounter any educational challenges since you arrived in Australia?
  - Yes
  - No
- If Yes can you highlight some of these challenges in terms of:
I. Literacy
II. Money and funding
III. Cultural changes
IV. Family support

- Were you able to resolve these challenges?
  - Yes
  - No
- If Yes which of them and in what ways have you been able to resolve them?
- Did you receive external support in resolving these challenges/problems?
  - Yes
  - No
- If Yes from whom and in what form?
- In your view what do you think will be the best strategies to support refugee students coming to Australia to transition to higher education?
- How would you describe your educational experience in Australian with regard to?
  I. Knowledge
  II. Skills/employment opportunities
  III. Behaviour and attitude

**N.B.** Explore this with regard to strength and weaknesses of the education system

d) Future aspirations
- What are your future plans and how do you see your 5 years from today?
e) Race and racism
- How have you dealt with discrimination from your home country, in transit countries and in Australia?
- On what basis were you discriminated (colour, race, accent, or background)

f) With this platform, what message would tell your government and the Australian the Australian government in terms of educational challenges students with a refugee background face?

Thank you