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Stolen Voices: Literacy, Identity, and Acculturation of Resettled Somali-Bantu Refugees

Amanda Rae Goldberg
Indiana University of Pennsylvania

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STOLEN VOICES: LITERACY, IDENTITY, AND ACCULTURATION
OF RESETTLED SOMALI-BANTU REFUGEES

A Dissertation

Submitted to

the School of Graduate Studies and Research

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Amanda Rae Goldberg

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

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Indiana University of Pennsylvania
The Graduate School and Research
Department of English

We hereby approve the dissertation of

Amanda Rae Goldberg

Candidate for the Doctor of Philosophy

Dr. Dan J. Tannacito, Ph.D.
Professor of English

Dr. Bennett A. Rafoth, Ed.D.
Professor of English

Dr. Nancy Hayward, Ph.D.
Professor of English

ACCEPTED

Timothy P. Mack, Ph.D
Dean
The School of Graduate Studies and Research

Title: Stolen Voices: Literacy, Identity, and Acculturation of Resettled Somali-Bantu Refugees

Author: Amanda Rae Goldberg

Dissertation Chair: Dr. Dan J. Tannacito

Dissertation Committee Members: Dr. Bennett A. Rafoth
Dr. Nancy Hayward

Literacy is always embedded in social practices, and the ways in which people approach it are grounded in their notion of knowledge, identity, and being. This study looks at literacy through a sociocultural lens to address my research questions:

How do Somali-Bantus develop literacy in the communicative and literate practices of the communities in the United States in which they participate? What impact does this have on their identities?

There were seven participants from four families who took part in my study. They ranged from 18-40 years of age and were resettled between 2004 and 2006. This study utilized ethnographic research tools and was based on qualitative group and individual interviews, observations, and document analysis. Through the interviews, I was able to collect information about the family units, as well as the participants' stories about life before resettlement, the resettlement process, and adapting to a new culture. I also collected data on literacy practices and their perceptions of self/family units to see how this has impacted the participants socially.

Additionally, I conducted a series of observations at the site in order to gain an understating about how the participants respond to various literacy events as well as how they interact with each other socially.

This study provides the Somali-Bantu community with a voice and a sense of empowerment. My research enabled the participants to tell their stories, represent their community, and work together to deal with some of the difficult issues they have faced and added to the body of literature in this field.