The Role of Islamic Institutions in Identity Formation among Somali Adolescents in Columbus, Ohio

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis presents the role of the mosque in identity formation among Somali adolescents in Columbus, Ohio. I conducted my research in the Somali Mosque of Columbus, the largest ethnically Somali mosque in Columbus, utilizing the methods of participant observation and intensive interviews. I observed two movements among adolescents in their identity formation. First, a group of adolescents has developed Muslim identity from their Somali ethnic and American identities after they attended the mosque. The second group of adolescents in the mosque has experienced identity conflict between their Muslim, Somali, and American identities.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

After 9/11, many Muslim adolescents are facing a difficult decision to reject or accept and integrate into a Muslim identity. In the American dominant culture, there are social repercussions for being a Muslim. American government regulations have:

resulted both in a rise of anti-U.S. sentiment across the Islamic world and in the growing alienation of Muslim Americans inside the United States itself. The movement toward a new Muslim American identity will likely challenge not only U.S. foreign policies but also the Bush administration’s domestic agenda. Over the coming decade, Muslims will likely carve out a distinct identity that is decisively based on a perception of the “other.” In doing so, they will develop a third way, one that allows them to embrace their religion while integrating when necessary into American society (Abdo 2005:17).

This statement is the starting point for my research which seeks to explore the third way for Somali adolescents in Columbus, Ohio, which has become the second largest settlement for Somali Muslim refugees who have migrated to the United States after the Somalia civil war. The Somali adolescents in Columbus have to experience being Muslim post 9/11, as ethnically part of the Somali community (linked to clan pride) and also the new host land black racial identity.

Therefore, this thesis seeks to answer the following questions: What is the possible third way for Muslims, such as the Columbus Somali adolescents, while growing up and being educated in the United States? To what extent is Islam important for them while developing their identities in the United States? What is the role of mosque, the fundamental Islamic institution, for Somali adolescents when they are developing the third way? Do mosques construct religious identity or preserve the Somalis ethnic clan identity, or both? With this impact on identity formation, what kind of roles do mosques
play in adolescents’ interaction with the wider American society? Do they have a positive impact on adolescents in adapting to the American society and do they help adolescents negotiate wider American constructs of race and gender? Also, do they help adolescents maintain their ethnic identity as well as construct new racial and ethnic identities?

Having these research questions regarding the identity formation of Somali adolescents and the impacts of mosques in this formation, I would like to explore the third way and the role of Islam in this third way that Somali adolescents develop in Columbus. In doing so, I conducted a field research in the Somali Mosque of Columbus, the largest ethnic Somali mosque in Columbus, and interviewed Somali adolescents about identity and the role of the mosque in their lives.

Considering the fact that Somali adolescents have multiple identities, I base my thesis on the identity theory, developed by Sheldon Stryker (1968/2000), which focuses on the influence of social structures on individuals’ identities and their role behaviors in social life. Identity theory, thus, enable me to measure the impact of mosque in one’s identity salience within his/her multiple identities.

For this purpose, I divide my thesis into 5 chapters. After this brief introduction, in the second chapter I review the related literature on the Somali Diaspora and the challenges that they face in the United States, especially in Columbus. The third chapter presents identity theory on which I base my thesis, and why I use identity theory for my thesis. Also, I portray the functions of mosques in the United States in the third chapter since the role of mosques in Somali adolescents’ identity formation are the main focus of this thesis. The fourth chapter is data and methods section where I explain how I
collected my data and why I chose the Somali Mosque of Columbus as my research setting. The fifth chapter discusses findings and discussions of the findings where I attempt to state the roles of the mosque in identity formation among Somali adolescents in Columbus. Finally, the last chapter is the overall conclusion of the thesis and proposes some suggestions for further research.
CHAPTER 2 THE SOMALI DIASPORA

This chapter reviews literature on Somalia and the Somalia Diaspora. First, it briefly presents the civil war history of Somalia and its impacts on Somali society. Second, the literature moves to describe the Somali community migration and the demographic characteristics of the community in Columbus. Finally, I conclude this chapter by discussing the social, economic, cultural, and religious challenges of the Somali Diaspora in the United States.

Civil War History

The Republic of Somalia, established in 1960 under the British colonial administration (North) as well as Italy in the South, resulted in uniting the Northern and Southern Somalilands owned by the British and Italians. Somalia, with a population over six million, includes the region of the Awash Valley, to the periphery of Ethiopian highland, Gulf of Aden and Indian Ocean to Tana River in Northern Kenya (Lewis 2002).

The main political figure of the independent era of Somalia was President General Said Barre, who was democratically elected in 1969 and the president of Somalia until 1991, when he was forced to leave the country because of the civil war. President Barre, Socialist, established an alliance with the Soviet Union in the name of “pan-Somalism” but this alliance ruptured when Barre went to war with Ethiopia in 1977—the Ogaden War--. During the war, the Soviet Union supported the Marxist regime in Ethiopia. Somalia lost the war, not only causing massive and negative socio-economic effects on people, but also left the country isolated internationally. Therefore, Barre enhanced his oppressive dictatorial rule, provoking one clan against another in order to set them as
rivals in Somalia. Doing so caused him to draw public attention away from himself and his failing government. Ultimately, his clan policies led Somalia into an endless civil war.

Due to this civil war, the world observed a massive wave of refugees from Somalia at the end of the 20th century. According to UNHCR, more than 200,000 Somali refugees in Kenya, 400,000 Somali refugees in Ethiopia, and 600,000 Somali refugees occupied refugee camps in Somalia (Fitzgerald 2002). Moreover, a considerable amount of Somali refugees have resettled in countries such as Egypt, and Yemen, Finland, Sweden, Great Britain, and the Netherlands, and North America, particularly Canada and the United States (Fitzgerald 2002). For instance, 2005 UNHCR Statistical Yearbook estimates that the Somali refugee population in the United States is 34,207. Overall, according to the UNHCR statistics as at January 2009, the total number of refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displace persons residing in Somalia and originating from Somalia is 3,148,661.

The Somali Community of Columbus

The history of Somali resettlement in the United States is not yet clear, but an urgent item in scholarly agenda (Kapteijns and Arman 2008). Somali refugees have resettled in different cities in the United States including Minneapolis, Atlanta, Kansas City, and Columbus (Langellier 2010, Kusow 2006). Columbus hosts the second largest Somali resettlement in the United States following Minneapolis, Minnesota (Kusow 2006). The Federal Office of Refugee Resettlement also validates the consensus among scholars on Columbus being the second largest Somali resettlement in Columbus (CRP DATA BYTE 2009).
Somalis in Columbus are estimated to be around 10,000 to 80,000 after 2000 based on different estimates from federal and local officials as well as different Somali organizations. According to the US Census 2000 and American Community Survey 2001-2007, the Somali population in Columbus is 10,000 (CRP DATA BYTE 2009). The estimate of Community Research Partners on Somalis in Franklin County is 15,000 in 2007 (CRP DATA BYTE 2009). According to the Somali Community Association, the Somali population in central Ohio is more than 45,000, whereas the estimate of the Somali American Chamber of Commerce on the Somali population in Columbus is more than 75,000. Based on Columbus and Franklin local officials, the Somali population in central Ohio ranges from 35,000 to 80,000 (Kirwan Institute 2010). The Somali community represents a significant percentage of the Franklin County and Columbus population, ranging from 3% to 7% of a population estimate for Franklin County, Ohio of 1,150,122 (US Census Bureau 2009).

Among the reasons of why Somalis choose Columbus as a new settlement are community services, the low cost of living, and the large Somali community (CRP DATA BYTE 2009). Moreover, the location of Columbus enables the Somali community to have an easy access to Minneapolis and Toronto, where other significant Somali communities are concentrated (Carlson 2004). Most of adolescents whom I interviewed were not sure of the reasons for why their families migrated to Columbus, but informed me that they had relatives before coming to Columbus. As I noted above, the history of Somali migration to the United States still remains unclear; however, the earlier Somali immigrants and refugees after 1990 have had a very strong impact on the Somali
migration to Columbus. The presence of earlier Somali immigrants “tends to offer new arrivals an option to dead-end jobs on the low-paid or secondary labor market and better opportunities for economic ascent than those available to immigrants of comparable human capital who join working-class communities” (Portes & Zhou 1992:7).

Challenges of the Somali Community in Columbus

Even though the history of Somali migration to the United States, the exact population of the Somali community in Columbus, and why the Somali community chose Columbus as a destination remain unclear, scholars on Somalis and immigration have little doubt about problems of the Somali community in the United States. Kapteijns and Arman (2008), in their study on the Somali community in the United States, indicate that most of the Somali refugees experienced the most losses such as their family, their wealth, their houses and so on in the war in Somalia. Hostilities in Somalia caused many to flee and immigrate to other nations where they suffered the most severe hardships in refugee camps and many arrived in the new country with little education and job skills. This massive Somali wave experienced lots of problems integrating into the United States and were confronted with the need for housing, health care, employment and education.

The problems and challenges confronting the Somali community in Columbus are language barriers, lack of education, economic obstacles, and cultural and religious discrepancies with the host community. Although almost all adolescents in the mosque are native English speakers, a significant amount of Somali adults are not able to speak the language. Communication between Somalis and other communities in Columbus is limited and thus leads to marginalization of the Somali community. In addition, due to
civil war and many years in refugee camps in Ethiopia or Kenya, many Somali refugees were unable to obtain a systematic education. After migrating to Columbus, “they are placed in a grade based on their age, not their ability” (CRP DATA BYTE 2009:1). For instance, a Somali refugee at 17 years old is placed in the 12th grade despite their skills in English and lack of previous schooling. Somali refugees have faced tough adjustments to schools in Columbus, beyond just the language barriers, and in some cases are forced to drop out from schools in Columbus, unable to get an educational degree.

Many refugees are struggling with poverty and the language barriers and also the lack of education marginalize them economically and socially within the dominant U.S. society. For instance, though many Somalis are able to ask for public assistance, they are seen as taking advantage of the welfare system, especially by the African-American population due to misperceptions and miscommunications between the two ethnic groups (Kirwan Institute 2010). To many, the welfare-using Somalis have become the “new face” of the “undeserving poor” (Rai 2004). Overall, one can observe economic problems in impoverished immigrants after resettling to the United States and become alienated because of the way they live in the dominant culture. Portes and Zhou (1992:6) summarize this fact as:

Diversity among contemporary immigrants is not limited to their education and modes of entry, but also includes the process through which they insert themselves in the host community and labor market -- that is, their modes of incorporation. This concept encompasses three different levels of reception: first there is the government stance toward different national inflows. In the United States some groups, such as refugees, are granted special resettlement assistance; others are granted legal entry and have access to the same general social programs available to the native born; still others are actively persecuted, their claims for asylum-care
routinely denied and, if legalized, do so under an inferior legal status that limits their entitlements for extensive periods.

Also, a wage gap exists between the native born and immigrants due to low skill level and low productivity of recent immigrants groups. There is a considerable amount of Somalis in the lower sectors, such as transportation jobs (cab drivers, truck drivers) and airport jobs (restaurant servers, cleaners) (Kirwan Institute 2010). Immigrants are “more likely to find jobs in employment sectors that are labor intensive and offer low wages and fewer workplace protection” (Kretsedemas and Aparicio 2004:7). However, Somalis, like other immigrants segregated in specific job sectors, are able to live and survive in the dominant culture with their marginalization.

Such communities provide few opportunities for upward mobility since the assistance that they can give to newcomers seldom goes further than finding them a manual, low-paid job. Still other immigrants are lucky enough to join communities where their conationalists have managed to create a substantial entrepreneurial presence. These communities, referred in the literature as ethnic enclaves, are characterized by a large number of interlinked small and medium-sized firms. (Portes & Zhou 1992:7).

Somali ethnic enclaves have dramatically grown in Columbus since 1990. The Somali community in Columbus has established shopping malls, ethnic restaurants and cafes, charter schools, community and business associations. This “parallel economy” increases the marginalization of the Somali community in Columbus; however, it also “enables them to do everything in the Somali way” (CRP DATA BYTE 2009:1). The Somali way allows the community to conduct the economic and business life as it used to be in Somalia. For instance, I was told by a student in one of my interviews that people buy things in the Somali malls without cash payment nor credit card, but saying that they
would pay sometimes later, whereas in the business life of America this is not the way for any buyers or sellers in any transaction in the United States. However, the Somali ethnic enclaves allow the Somali community to do so.

*Cultural and Religious Discrepancies*

Last but not least, cultural and religious discrepancies create more obstacles in the Somali community in Columbus. Unlike the United States, Somalis are clan-based society (Lewis 2004), but this clan differentiation in Somalia is not derived from racial or color-based categories (Ajrouch and Kusow 2007). Somalis are divided into the six major clans along with 56 sub-clans that are based on geneology: the Dir, the Hawiye, the Digil, the Darood, the Isaq, and the Rahanweyn. According to Samatar and Leitin (1987), geneology makes up “the heart of the Somali social system and is the basis of Somali collective prediction to internal fissions and internecine sectionary conflicts as well as of the unity of thought and action among Somalis- a unity that borders on xenophobia”. The majority of Somalis (most of them nomadic pastoralists who live in two third of the land) possess a segmentary descent system established on genealogical lines. Each family is considered to be “a point of unity and division since through his sons his descendants are divided into separated descent-groups but united in him as one lineage- group” (Lewis 1999:133). A clansperson has an allegiance to their clans and their sub-clans, where their identities are acquired from their clans. Also, a person is not considered to be Somali until he acquires an identity from his clan.
These clans are traced through the male lineage and kinship-based groups who declare ancestry to the Prophet Muhammad. Geneology is the central point in which society is held together and clanship becomes the major political principle that dictates competition for resources. The social organization of groups is separated into social, political, and economic circumstances and social relations (political and social) are dictated by clan differences. It is important to note that clan differences are not specified by racial, ethnic or even economic differences (Luling, 2006), but the ancestors that they came from categorized as "noble" and "non-noble" ancestors\(^1\) (Kusow 2006). Therefore, clan differentiation does not derive meaning from color based categories and Somalis do not see each other as particularly “black or white”, which is the primary basis of social stratification and cultural identities in the United States.

*Racial Formation*

Racial discrepancies based on one’s skin color stay at the heart of American social stratification and cultural identities. Race, in the United States, was once thought to be stagnant. Whether race is socially or biologically constructed is still debated. The biological viewpoint argues that racial groups are “imbued with physical, mental and moral abilities as a result of actual genetic differences”, while the social construct viewpoint supports that racial categories are “culturally and socially produced” (Espiritu, 1992; Lieberman and Reynolds 1996; Nagel 1994).

Race has been one of the major issues that has divided American society and also is a major organizing category of social construction of identity. Ong (1996:751) argues

\(^1\) Certain clans are considered nobles as descendants of a “noble” ancestor, while the non-nobles are descendants of a decidedly non-noble clan.
that the “dynamics of racial othering emerges in a range of mechanisms that variously subject non-white immigrants to whitening and blackening processes that indicate the degree of their closeness to or distance from the ideal white standards”. Race ultimately is related to social relations and structures societal experiences.

In the United States, being “black” has a specific meaning of belonging in society, as it means stratification, status and defining “blackness” has been “derived from dominant American classification. Skin color is an important category of social stratification and enjoys a collectively shared understanding by both blacks and whites”(Kusow 2006:538). Blackness depends on physical characteristics and is attached to any person of known black African ancestry with a “single drop of black blood”.

Most of the Somali Diaspora claim that they were not aware of race before immigrating to the United States or Canada because everyone they knew belonged to one ethnicity (Kusow 2006). Socially speaking, Somalis have a difficult time being aware of different social codes in the host land, while differentiating from their own social construction of ethnicity or culture. Somalis also realize the details of race in the American culture and are aware of how they, as a group, are labeled as just “black” (Kusow 2006). This categorization causes the Somali community to face institutional racism, but also to develop a communal identity as Muslim Somali, the biggest hindrance and cause for isolation and marginalization in the United States for the Somali community especially after 9/11.
Religious Formation

According to Smith (2000), Muslims in America have a challenge of trying to practice Islam that will “coexist peacefully with other faiths” as well as trying to “overshadow the image of militant Islam” prevalent in the American media. Many “cultural Muslims” in America do not practice their religion and do not visit mosques or partake in religious ceremony, identifying themselves as Muslim by cultural affiliation only. Especially after 9/11, Islam has received widespread infamy and notoriety globally, but especially in the United States due to media. “Islamophobia” most prevalent in the United States is yet another other big challenge and discrimination for the Somali community due to religious discrepancy with the host community. After being labeled as “black” in Columbus, which obstructs the Somali community to integrate the wider American society due to their skin color, the community has to experience being “Muslim”. Furthermore, because of the negative impacts of Islamophobia, the Somali community also is perceived as ‘others’ by the wider African and African-American communities, resulting in more isolation and marginalization in the United States.

“Somali immigrants in the United States constitute one of the first black immigrant groups who are not Christian or English-speaking, and who generally operate from a social value system which is radically different from the dominant Judeo-Christian value systems in North America” (Kusow 2006). Somali community depends on Islam in numerous ways for strength and ties to their homeland. Not only does Islam bind the Somali community together in the United States, but also is the mediator between the Somali community and other national and transnational Muslim communities. Islam
seems to be the most “grounding” in their immigrant experience (Kapteijns and Arman 2008).

Shandy and Fennelly (2006) conducted a key study showing the significance of Islam among the Somali community in the United States. They described and compared the integration experiences of two different African American refugee populations (Muslim Somalis and Christians from Southern Sudan) in a small Midwestern town in the United States. The study finds that although they have similar education levels and jobs, and may appear to have similar options for integration, religious differences produce important distinctions between the two. They argue that religion is a key variable influencing Sudanese and Somali interactions with each other, and religious differences have important implications for their resettlement and integration into the American society. Because African refugees usually do not have extended family in the United States, mosques (Islam) serve as important institutions helping immigrants to meet their basic needs, meaning finding ways to hold Islamic services and to follow practices that separate them from their Christian neighbors. As a result, Somalis in Faribault share a common language and continue to strengthen the cohesion of their community. Therefore, they have limited opportunities to interact with Americans which results in a greater segregation from other Americans and foreign-born residents of the community (Shandy and Fennelly 2006).

According to Robillos (2001), the biggest obstacle of being Muslim for the Somali community includes the lack of willingness on the part of employers to permit Somali women to wear hijab at the workplace. Many Somali women feel that most of the
dominant culture does not understand or see them as equals, despite trying to assimilate into culture. Therefore, not only does hijab-phobia make women seclude themselves from the wider American society, but also creates aggressiveness and hatred in the Somali community to the dominant culture enhancing marginalization of the Somali community in the United States.
CHAPTER 3 IDENTITY THEORY AND MOSQUE

This chapter deals with theoretical background and the literature review on which I base my research questions and assumptions. I divide this review into three parts based on the title of the research. First, I review the definition of the concept of identity. Second, I review Stryker’s identity theory/structural symbolic interactionism on which I base my thesis. Finally, I present literature on mosques and their functions in the United States because mosques are the central Islamic institution where I gathered the data of my research.

Definition of the Concept of Identity

“Who are you?”, “What are you doing?” are some of the questions that one can never escape being asked by ‘others’ since the first day of socialization. Those are the question that one identify with himself or herself and an individual is identified through particular classifications and categories based on one’s gender, ethnicity, nationality, age, religion, etc. “An identity is the set of meanings that define who one is an occupant of a particular role in society, a member of a particular group, or claims particular characteristics that identify him or her as a unique person” (Burke & Stets 2009:3). It not only describes “who or what one is” (Gecas and Burke 1995:42), and “an individuals’ sense of self” (Peek 2005: 216), but also ones’ “group affiliations, structural positions, and ascribed and achieved statuses” (Peek 2005:217).

Identity is the vital subject of research in many academic disciplines such as psychology, political science, social psychology, and sociology (Howard 2000; Polletta and Jasper 2001; Burke and Stets 2009; Cadge and Ecklund 2007; Cerulo 1997; Peek
due to impacts of post-modernism and globalization on the social structures in which people live. In organic societies, identity was the concept that was “assigned on individuals, rather than selected or adopted” (Howard 2000:367); whereas today it is “becoming” not “being” (Dillon 1999:250) for one because of his/her experiences and “an overwhelming pace of change in surrounding social contexts” (Howard 2000:367; also Peek 2005; Haddad 1994; Nagel 1995; Burke and Stets 2009; McMullen 2000). Today, identity is not static but dynamic because of a more globalized life style. It is easier to connect to other groups of people and a person’s identity is influenced by interaction, rather than an assigned identity.

The definition and understanding of the concept of identity show that identity connects individual and society (Burke and Stets 2009). It enables scholars to determine the relationships between individual and society which are intrinsically related as “the two aspects of the same thing” (Cooley 1902:37). Individual and society are closely related because society affects the individual and the individual affects society.

To sum up the definition of identity from sociological perspective, I conclude this part with the definition of identity given by Gecas and Burke (1995), where they illustrate the two aspects of identity: personal identity and social identity. In doing so, I review identity theory which ties one’s own conception of self (personal identity) and one’s behaviors and actions within larger social structures that he/she belongs to (social identity).

Identity refers to who or what one is, to the various meanings attached to oneself by self and others. In sociology, the concept of identity refers both to self-characterizations individuals make in terms of the structural features of group-
memberships, and categories, and to the various character traits an individual
displays and others attribute to an actor on the basis of his/her conduct (1995:42).

Identity Theory

Identity theory derives from structural symbolic interactionism developed by
Stryker (1980 [2000]) based on the traditional symbolic interactionism and Mead’s
writings, especially *Mind, Self, and Society* (1934). Stryker, first, takes Mead’s frame as
his formula: *Society shapes self shapes social behavior*. This is the starting point for
identity theory by specifying ‘society’ and ‘self’.

In the traditional symbolic interactionism, society is a singular unity,
undifferentiated, unstable, and unorganized. Society is the result of the socialization
process of the individual through the development of *self* and *mind*. This development
evolves in the constant social interaction where consequently one takes the role of others.
Taking the role of others enables one to understand the attitudes of all participants to get
together into a symbolized unity which creates society (Mead 1934).

Mead sees individual and society in the ongoing social process, which is based
upon one’s social interactions and experiences and thus unstable, and “never-ending
process” (Stryker 2008:17). However, Stryker diverges from Mead in the
conceptualization of ‘society’ with a reliable contemporary sociological imagery which
“stresses the durability of the patterned interactions and relationships that are the
foundation of sociology’s sense of social structure” (Stryker 2007: 1090). He
conceptualizes society as

a mosaic of relatively durable patterned interactions and role relationships,
differentiated yet organized, embedded in an array of groups, organizations,
communities, institutions, and strata—the last incorporating a great variety of
crosscutting lines based on social class, age, gender, ethnicity, religion, and more. The diversity of parts is seen as organized in multiple and overlapping ways, interactionally, functionally, and hierarchically. The parts of society, nevertheless, are taken to be sometimes relatively independent of each other and sometimes highly interdependent and as sometimes conflicting and sometimes close and cooperative. (Stryker 2007:1090; Stryker and Burke 2000:285; 2008:19).

This conception not only makes society as an organized structure, but also states that larger social structures and social interactions influence one’s behaviors. The patterned interactions and role relationships in an organized society asserts the main argument of structural symbolic interactionism: “the probability of entering into the concrete (and discrete) social networks in which persons live their lives is influenced by larger social structures in which those networks are embedded” (Stryker and Burke 2000:285). This argument implies that social structures play roles as “facilitators” and “constraints” for individuals to enter into or depart from social networks (Stryker and Burke 2008: 285). Stryker describes the effect of the larger social structures as “the stubborn reality of a variety of kinds of social forms, including stratification and institutions that clearly impact social behavior” (2007:1090).

The conceptualization of society leads Stryker to the different conceptualization of ‘self’. Even though the traditional symbolic interactionist premise that “self reflects society” sees ‘self’ as a singular unit, undifferentiated, unorganized, and unstable, Stryker accepts this dictum and proposes the new conceptualization of ‘self’ based on his specification of ‘society’. He indicates that

self must be seen as multifaceted, composed of diverse parts that sometimes are independent of one another and sometimes interdependent, sometimes mutually reinforcing and sometimes conflicting, as well as being organized in many ways (Stryker 2007:1090; also in 1980[2000]; 2000; 2008; Stryker and Burke 2000).
The new conceptualizations of ‘society’ and ‘self’ take roles as catalyst points for structural symbolic interactionism (SSI) than the traditional symbolic interactionism (TSI) in terms of defining society and self. SSI perceives both society and self as multifaceted, complex, and diverse, but organized. Having the same characteristics between society and self allows Stryker to go beyond the general premise of TSI that society shapes self shapes social behavior from where identity theory develops.

Identity theory begins with the specification of the premise that society shapes self shapes social behavior. First, Stryker specifies ‘social behavior’ as role choice behavior. He defines role choice as “choosing to undertake action meeting the expectations contained in one role rather than another” (2007:1091). This is the quintessential question identity theory seeks to answer: Why does one person take his or her children to the zoo on a free weekend afternoon, while another person chooses to spend that time on the golf course with friends? Why do persons choose one particular course of action?

Given these questions, Stryker focuses on the concept of ‘self’. By defining ‘self’ as multifaceted and diverse, first, he adopts the notion of self stated by James (1890) as “a man has many selves as there are individuals who recognize him and carry an image of him in their mind” (1890/1950:214). One has as many selves as groups he/she interacts within. Stryker transforms James’ notion of many selves to identities and rewrites James’ premise as “persons have as many identities as distinct networks of relationships in which they occupy positions and play roles” (Stryker and Burke 2000:286). When one reverses this statement of Stryker, he/she can acquire what identities mean in identity theory. Since the social roles one plays are expectations in particular networks of relationships,
Identities become persons’ role expectations. This asserts that persons’ role choices are a function of identities they carry with them in a situation. Thus, one’s identity in a particular social network determines his/her role choice behavior in that social network.

Since one plays different roles in different social networks, he/she has appropriate identities attached to every role. For instance, the role of faculty, mother, and friend leads one into the networks of academic, family, and friends. In each network, one also holds the corresponding faculty identity, mother identity, or friend identity attached to each role. These diverse identities which are the role expectations show how one views his/her self.

Conceptualizing self as multifaceted and diverse, but organized, Stryker argues that role identities within a person’s self must be organized in a salience hierarchy. He termed this organization as “identity salience hierarchy”, which is the specification of self in the premise of Mead that “society shapes self shapes social behavior”. Stryker defines identity salience as “the probability that an identity will be invoked across a variety of situations, or alternatively across persons in a given situation” (Stryker and Burke 2000:286; also in Stryker 1980[2000]; 2007; 2008; 2000). Identities are organized and ordered in a salience hierarchy because a person’s self is considered multifaceted and diverse, but organized.

To explain the relationships of identities in a salient hierarchy, Stryker turns to cognitive social psychology (Markus 1977). Identities in social cognition are considered as cognitive schemas, “abstract and organized packages of information” (Howard 2000:368). They are “internally stored information and meanings serving as frameworks
for interpreting experience” (Stryker and Burke 2000:286). Therefore, identities specifically are not situations, but are used in defining situations and thus “can be carried by persons into the many situations they experience, affecting conduct in those situations” (Stryker 2008:20). The consequence of the specification of self points to the second hypotheses of identity theory: “The higher the salience of an identity relative to other identities incorporated into the self, the greater the probability of behavioral choices in accord with the expectations attached to that identity” (Stryker and Burke 2000:286). The higher the salience of an identity “relative” to other identities, the probability will be larger that one will act on an expected behavior which is attached to that identity; therefore by specifying self, “role choice is hypothesized to be a consequence of identity salience” (Stryker 2008:20). For instance, if one’s father identity is more salient, he would take his children to the zoo on a free weekend afternoon, instead of spending that time on the golf course with friends. Since the father identity is more salient, he prefers to spend more time in the family network where he can perform his father role behaviors.

The specification of social behavior and self in Mead’s premise enables identity theory to rewrite it as society shapes identity salience shapes role choice. To complete the foundation of identity theory, Stryker states that to specify ‘society’ and asserts that the concept of commitment is the specification of society. He finds the referent of the concept of commitment in social networks and relationships within those networks.

Commitment is defined as “ties to social networks” and is utilized in groups. It is “a social structural term, a small unit of structure and a specification of society”. It develops through the recognition that persons conduct most of their lives not in the context of society as a whole but rather in the many contexts of relatively small and specialized social networks, networks composed of persons to whom
they relate by virtue of occupancy of particular social positions and the playing out of associated roles (Stryker 2007: 1093).

Commitment to a social network implies that individuals’ social networking and relations to others in that network are dependent on the role that they play in that network and the particular identity that they carry with them in that particular role. The degree of commitment can be measured by the costs of losing one’s social relations with others. There are two dimensions of commitment of which can examine the costs. The first one is the quantitative or interactional commitment, which involves the number of relationships that is associated with the given identity and networking relationships. The second is qualitative or affective commitment, which is “the depth of emotional attachment to particular sets of others in networks of relationships” (Stryker 2007:1093).

In the first dimension, commitment is greater when the number of persons that one is related to is greater in that particular identity, whereas in the second dimension, commitment is greater when one’s emotional attachment is deeper to others in that particular identity. To conclude, Stryker argues that the stronger the commitment to a particular identity, the greater and higher the identity in one’s identity salience hierarchy (1980 [2000]). Thus, “commitment is hypothesized to be the immediate source of salience attached to identities” (Stryker 2008:20).

Overall, identity theory seeks to explore the relationships between society, self, and role behavior. For this purpose, it began with specifying the terms of Mead’s premise that “society shapes self shapes social behavior”. First, social behavior is specified by taking role choice behavior. Second, self is specified by identity salience which affects one’s role behavior. Finally, society is specified by commitment as the source of identity
salience. Through the specification of Mead’s formula, identity theory establishes its own formula: commitment shapes identity salience shapes role choice behavior.

Why Identity Theory?

The focus of my thesis, the role of Islamic institutions in Somali adolescents’ identity formation, leads me to apply Stryker’s identity theory to this research. Since Stryker emphasizes the influence of social structures in identity theory, it enables me to discuss the impact of the mosque on the identity saliences of Somali adolescents who attend activities. Specifically, I am addressing issues regarding the mosque’s role in changing identities of adolescents who have multiple identities such as religious identity as Muslim, Somali as ethnic identity, clan identity, and American racial identity due to being educated and raised in America.

The other reason for my dependency on Stryker’s identity theory is to accept the fact that a person has multiple identities. As I indicate in the first chapter, Somali adolescents have Somali ethnic and clan identities. “Ethnic identities are a subset of identity categories in which membership is determined by attributes associated with, or believed to be associated with, descent (described here simply as descent-based attributes)” (Chandra 2006:398). Based on mutual culture, mutual history, mutual ancestry, mutual language, and mutual homeland, Somali adolescents carry their roles with the corresponding ethnic and clan identity in the social settings such as their family, Somali friends groups, and the mosque.

In terms of religious identity, Somali adolescents are Muslims and the social networks within which they play their roles are shaped by their Muslim identities are
their family, Somali friend groups, and the mosque. Besides these common social networks within which they perform their ethnic and religious identities, another social network is school, where they interact with American adolescents whose ethnic, religious, racial and social identities are quite distinct from the Somali adolescents’ relative identities. One can assume that it is inevitable for them, as minorities in the school network, to be affected by this network and by their relationships with others; thus Somali adolescents develop particular role behaviors and corresponding identities with that role in the school. This corresponding identity to the school network is their black/American identity.

The mosque is the only social setting where Somali adolescents carry their ethnic, clan, religious, friend, and American/black identities with them. Even though they develop an American identity in school, they may also carry this identity to the mosque because most of the members of friend groups that they interact within the mosque are being educated and grown up in the American school system. The distinct characteristic of the Somali mosque of Columbus as the social network, therefore, becomes more interesting for one to investigate Somali adolescents’ identity formation.

I am using a micro-sociological theory such as symbolic interactionism when the focus of my thesis examines the impact of a social institution such as the mosque, on adolescents—alluding to macro-sociological approaches to social structure. As the contemporary sociological understanding indicates, social systems and structures play a key role in the foundation of social institutions and society. However, it is also not possible to ignore the role and impact of individuals and their everyday interactions with
others in the foundation of groups, institutions, and finally society. Therefore, one cannot overlook the roles of Somali adolescents and their interaction with other adolescents, teachers, and adults in the mosque when they are developing their identities. Particularly, when one considers that these Somali adolescents grow up and are educated in the United States, where individualism and the individual rights of a person are always advocated, the emphasis on the choice and interactions of Somali adolescents with others in the mosque become more significant when exploring their identity formation. The mosque is the social network where adolescents can perform role behaviors corresponding to their Muslim, Somali and black American identities and their interactions with others in the mosque could affect the social and religious structure of the mosque. In doing so, Stryker’s identity theory becomes more applicable and useful for the objectives of this thesis.

Because the mosque is one of the major facilitator and the immediate source in the hierarchy of Somali adolescents’ identity salience, in this section I now review literature on mosque and its functions in the United States.

*Mosque in the United States*

The mosque plays a central role in the life of the Muslim community in the United States, where it represents a powerful religious and cultural symbol. This function of the mosque enables scholars to clarify Muslims’ identity in the Western World. Before I review functions of mosque in the United States, I provide some demographic characteristics of mosque in the United States.
Demographic Considerations

The wave of post-1965 immigration has brought new religious diversity to the United States. Over the last few decades, Islamic mosques have appeared in most major cities. The number of mosques and mosque participants are experiencing tremendous growth. One of the largest studies on mosque in the United States was done by Bagby, Perl, Froehle, who produced *The Mosque in America: A National Portrait/ A Report from the Mosque Study Project* (2001). The report compares and expands the 1994 Mosque Study by Ihsan Bagby. The major findings on demographic characteristics of mosque in the United States are:

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of mosque in the United States

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1994</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>Increase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Mosques</td>
<td>962</td>
<td>1209</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Associated per Mosque</td>
<td>485</td>
<td>1625</td>
<td>235%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Associated with all Mosques</td>
<td>500,000</td>
<td>2 million</td>
<td>300%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on the demographics above, the authors estimate a total Muslim population of 6-7 million in America which seems reasonable compared to 2 million Muslims who associate with a mosque. The exact numbers of Muslims in the United States are nonexistent because the Census Bureau does not collect data on people’s religious affiliation. Some other characteristics of mosque in the United States: 30% of all mosques were established in the 1990s and 32% were started in the 1980s. Four-fifths of mosques are located in a metropolitan (urban or suburban) area, most often a city neighborhood.
At the average, 33% of members of mosque are South Asian, 30% of are African American, and 25% are Arab. Ethnic composition of mosque is very diverse. Only 7% of mosques are attended by only one ethnic group. However, almost 90% of all mosques have some South Asians, African Americans and Arabs. (Bagby, Perl, and Froehle 2001).

Identity, Immigration and Mosque

There is not one monolithic interpretation of the role of religion on immigrant adaptation, just as there is no single path to assimilation in American society. Many old and new immigrants are indifferent, if not hostile, to other forms of organized religion, except their own. However, many immigrants, historical and contemporary, joined or founded religious organizations as an expression of their historical identity as well as their commitment to building a local community in a new country (Hirschman 2006). Through religious organizations, these communities have emphasized or reaffirmed a strong identity as a minority in the United States. However, Muslims in non-Muslim countries have to “reinvent what makes them Muslim” (Roy 2004), meaning that Muslims lose cultural or language characteristics relating to religion. One of the indicators to display the reaffirmation of Muslim identity is the type of architecture of mosque.

The Architecture of Mosque and Its Orientation

Biondo (2006) argues that Muslim identity in the Diaspora can be described by analyzing the architecture of mosques. According to the author, there are three types of mosque architecture in the United States and Britain: house, storefront, and purpose-built. Each type also has a different orientation: internationalist-inclusive,
internationalist-exclusive, and regional-exclusive. Each orientation expresses a theological interpretation of ummah (community of the believers of Islam) and dawah (making an invitation to Islam), or inclusiveness towards other Muslims and the host society as well as outreach to non-Muslims. The two international styles are based on inclusive versus exclusive interpretations of ummah. For instance, mosques and Islamic Centers based on Saudi architecture always mean a prioritization on social outreach, an important element in the United States and Britain that almost always signifies intended and actual engagement with the larger society.

In the third type of mosque, Muslim communities are more attached to their homelands, and are poorer, less educated, face greater prejudice, and remain largely divided. In this type, mosques are ethnically segregated and they are divided into ethnic-philosophical schools. Geographically, it is important to note where mosques are built because they dictate “neighborhood connections, national affiliations, or regional associations” (Aitchison, Hopkins & Kwan 2007).

**Functions of the Mosque**

According to Islamic law, any enclosed space or building can qualify as a mosque (masjid) if it satisfies the requirement of cleanliness. However, although Muslims can pray almost anywhere, they have often set up mosques as a nucleus for community life, fulfilling social as well as cultural and aesthetic needs.

Mosque is both a space and an institution through which Muslims make statements about themselves and about their faith (Lotfi 2001). Lotfi notes that in Muslim societies, the mosque has always played a central but changing role in the life of the
community (2001). However, Handlin (1973) argues that religion is a bridge that connects the old world with the new. Faced with changes and challenges in every other aspect of their lives, immigrants sought to recreate the religious institutions and faith of their homeland in their place of settlement. That means that functions of the mosque in Western World (new settlement) and Islamic World (homeland) are different. Biondo states that mosques have different functions in the United States and Western World than the Islamic World (2006). The difference between a mosque in the United States or in the Western World and a mosque in Somalia or elsewhere is that mosques in the West serve as Islamic Centers, not just a mosque. This implies that there is a difference between a mosque and an Islamic Center in the West and this difference is that the Islamic Center can better fulfill the two functions of a new mosque: to aid in professionalization and to provide a sense of identity (Biondo 2006). Therefore, the mosques in the United States are not just a building, but a beneficial catalyst for change and a meaningful social organization (Kahera 2002).

For mosques in the United States to have different functions is not a particular characteristic of Islam or its institutions. Similar roles can be seen in other religious organizations. For instance, churches and other religious organizations also play an important role in the creation of community and as a major source of social and economic assistance for those in need. If immigrants cannot find a church or temple with their religious traditions, and preferably in their mother tongue, the custom has been to start one of their own in their new home (Hirschman 2006).
One of the similar roles of the mosque and other religious organizations is to identify their community in that they represents the center of the community around which community members orient themselves. This is more important for the Islamic Centers because they not only contain mosques but also their own mini-societies. They are multi-functions places of business which consist of bookstores, cafeterias, a mortuary, wedding and tax preparation services, their own school, day care centers, basketball courts and youth sport leagues, language and citizenship classes. The Islamic Centers are places of worship as well as community centers. The mosque must be established as the “single most important base” for Muslims for the unity of brotherhood (Rasdi 1998). With this multifunctional type of establishment, mosques play a central role in the lives of the Muslim communities where they can hold on to religion as a constructing of their religious identity, and developing a communal identity in the United States. Therefore, this identity can have an important political significance even if the institution itself does not sponsor political activities. It can create solidarity that allows individuals to take others’ concerns as their own. It can influence ideas about the public good. It can transform events of private significance into causes with public consequences (Jamal 2005).

Jamal (2005) examines the relationship between this dimension of political engagement and Muslim Arab- American mosque participation. The Muslim Arabs in the sample, who did not attend a mosque, accepted stereotyping as the price of becoming American, turning their anger on their ethnic community rather than on those who disparaged it. By contrast, Muslims who frequent the mosque are more politically
effective and knowledgeable about their rights (Jamal 2005). Jamal concludes his research based on gender differences in political engagement and he argues that not only does participation in mosques allow women the opportunity to practice their faith, preserve key elements of their identities, and situate themselves in larger communal discourses, but it also increases their levels of political efficacy and willingness to exercise voice over silence (2005).

Overall, the mosque has a crucial place for its members to keep their ties with their own community. Belonging to a particular mosque community is a way of connecting with other family members because most often, immigrants establish their ties to the mosque through their families (Ehrkamp 2005). The Somali Mosque of Columbus plays a key role to bind Somali families and their children in Columbus. Because of its functions and programs that I will explain in the next chapter, it is an urgent study to explore its impacts on Somali adolescents’ identities and the third way that they develop in Columbus.
CHAPTER: 4 DATA AND METHODS

For this project, I utilize two qualitative methods: participant observation and in depth interviewing. Participant observation is “a way to collect data in naturalistic settings by ethnographers who observe and/or take part in the common and uncommon activities of the people being studied” (DeWalt and DeWalt 2002:2). With this way, a participant observer collects quality data on the field in which he/she has participates. It also enables the researcher to improve the quality of the construability of the collected data through participant observation and in depth interviewing.

In the initial phase, I performed site observations at five main Somali mosques in Columbus, Ohio to decide which mosque would be the best setting to carry out my research. I obtained letters of permission from two Somali mosques out of five\(^2\).

After I received permission letters from the two Somali mosques, I began my field observations in June 2009. These mosques were the Islamic Center of Somali and the Somali Mosque of Columbus\(^3\). The Islamic Center of Somali is located in the east side of Columbus where the Somali community is concentrated in Columbus. It is situated behind the Somali shopping centers and is surrounded by Somali neighborhoods. There is a charter school where the Somalis attend near the Islamic Center. Most of the Somalis there seem to work in African restaurants or the shops in Somali shopping centers.

\(^2\) One mosque rejected my proposal and did not allow me to conduct my research, because the directors of that mosque wanted to attend interviews with adolescents. I did not want to agree to their request so as to protect the confidentiality of data and the ability of the adolescents to speak freely. The other two mosques that I asked for permissions and could not obtain them for my research had primarily been open to my research, and wanted to discuss my proposal with the boards of the mosques. However, they also did not give to me permission for my research without presenting any reason.

\(^3\) All the names of mosques and adolescents in this research are pseudonyms.
The Islamic Center of Somalis is a branch mosque of one of the bigger Islamic organizations in North America, which is an American reform movement, based on a moderate and balanced understanding of Islam. Among its goals are reviving Islam, uniting the Muslim community regardless of ethnicity, and promoting Islamic universal values under the framework of American pluralism. Even though the Islamic Center of Somali devalues ethnicity in its establishment and goals, the director and the congregation are mainly from Somalia.

*The Somali Mosque of Columbus*

The Somali Mosque of Columbus was established after 2000. It is the largest and most organized ethnically Somali mosque in Columbus. The building was purchased and renovated to serve as a mosque for the Somali community. It consists of two prayer rooms for men and women separately, where more than 1000 people can pray at the same time; a small library which has mostly Islamic books in Arabic; offices for the Imams, the director for the youth program, the president of the mosque; and restrooms along with a special area for taking ablution. Outside, there is one basketball court, a small field for adolescents to play soccer, and inadequate parking lots.

The Somali Mosque of Columbus represents the third type of mosque style, which I explained in the previous chapter. It is a regional and exclusive mosque, which is purposely built as a mosque after 2000. It is located in the neighborhood where the

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4 After spending two weeks in the Islamic Center of Somali, I decided to leave because of the following reasons: First, there were only a few adolescents who regularly attend the center’s religious activities. For instance, the center was providing Quran Studies, where adolescents learn to recite the Quran in Arabic text and memorize chapters from the Quran, four days a week, but the majority of attendants were children, aged from 5 to 11, which is not the focus of my research. In addition, some days the program was cancelled because the director of the center was not able to come to the Islamic Center.
Somali community is concentrated in Columbus. It is an ethnically segregated mosque. The executives, board members of the mosque, the religious clergies, and the congregation are all from Somali community. The philosophical Islamic understanding of the mosque represents a Salafist community that bases its ideological orientation on a combination of Saudi-Wahhabi and Muslim Brotherhood concepts\(^5\).

The main reason for me conducting my field research in this mosque is the fact that based on my primary observations on the Somali mosques in Columbus, the Somali Mosque of Columbus is the largest and most well-organized in terms of their programs and activities for adolescents. For instance, the mosque had more than 300 students in the summer school and more than 400 students in the weekend school which starts in September. Half of the students were between 12 and 20 years old, whereas the total number of students in four other mosques was less than 300 and the majority was children who were less than 11 years old. Therefore, the Somali Mosque of Columbus was the best setting for my research, which focuses on adolescents, especially age ranging from 13 to 18.

Another reason why I chose the Somali Mosque of Columbus as the research setting is the programs of the mosque that it provides to adolescents. Not only does the mosque have very systematic and intense religious programs, but also offers a variety of

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\(^5\) For instance, the original name of the mosque corresponds to one of the Islamic scholars from whom the Saudi-Wahhabi movement was inspired. In addition, in my initial meetings with the president of a Somali community organization and Somalis from other mosques, I was told that the Somali Mosque of Columbus follows the path of Saudi-Wahhabi tradition, and they argued that the Somali Mosque of Columbus is financially supported by Saudi Arabia, but, I could not receive access to information regarding funding sources of the mosque. However, the religious practices and implications in the Somali Mosque of Columbus indicate that the Saudi-Wahhabi tradition has a strong impact on the philosophical understanding of the mosque.
social activities which makes it attractive for adolescents and families to attend this mosque. For instance, the mosque offers basketball and soccer tournaments, trips to other states, and graduation ceremonies. These activities (religious and social) thus made the Somali Mosque of Columbus the best possible setting among the Somali mosques in Columbus to collect the most quality data.

I conducted my field research from June 2009 and continued until February 2010. From July to mid-August, I spent 6 days a week in the mosque, approximately 4-5 hours a day. After schools had begun, I went to the mosque in the weekends for the remaining period of research, spending 4 hours a day. From my field research, I was able to record my observation as jot notes when I was in the mosque. Every day, when I was conducting my field research, after I had left from the mosque, I wrote down my field notes based on the jot ones daily. These daily field notes enabled me to use my field notes in my analysis along with the interviews. To sum up, during my field research, I had a chance to meet with adolescents, talk to them, attend classes with them, and to conduct in depth interviews with them.

The in depth interviewing is a form of conversation between the interviewer and the informant (Lofland and Lofland 1995) which “seeks deep information and understanding” (Johnson 2001:103) of the informants’ behaviors, actions, and perceptions in a particular setting. It aims to comprehend “the lived experience of the informants and the meaning they make of that experience” (Seidman 2006:9) in the particular social setting. For this purpose, I conducted 15 interviews with adolescents,
ages ranging from 13-19. Eight of the adolescents were males, and seven of them were females.

In selection of my interviewees, I used snowball method, which relies on a chain of referrals from one contact to the next. After the initial sample, I provided the handout summary of my research listing my contact information to the participants to share with his/her peers. I did not directly contact my interviewees but I allowed them to contact me if they were interested. In my interviews, I was primarily interested in how Somali Islamic institutions affect male and female Somalis adolescents’ identity formation and which identity becomes more salient when and after they attend the mosque’s activities. Therefore, I prepared semi-structured interview questions which sought to explore adolescents’ life journey until they start attending the mosque, their participation level to the mosque and its activities, their social and religious negotiation in and out of the mosque, and finally how they identify themselves.

The biggest hindrance for me during my field research was to do interviews with female students. First of all, in the Somali Mosque of Columbus there is no kind of interaction between male and female students based on their understanding of Islam which forbids the opposite sexes mixing together. Therefore, male and female students have classes in separate areas of the mosque. Break times from classes were also different

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6 Interview guide is attached to appendix.

7 Before every interview, I sent consent forms to parents to make sure that they were informed of the study and they had given their permission for the interviews. I sent the consent form to parents with adolescents to obtain parental consent and I did not begin the interview until the consent form (signed by both parent and adolescent) was returned even though a few adolescents wanted to have interviews with me without the consent form.
so that there would not be interactions between them outside of the mosque. I was allowed to observe classes of female students. However, none of the female students wanted to have an interview with me. To obtain meaningful reliable data and to avoid a gender bias in my research, I sought the assistance of a female colleague to conduct interviews with female adolescents on my behalf. This person, a colleague from the Sociology Department, had experience doing interviews with Muslim women during her studies and conducted the interviews with female students in the mosque.

After I transcribed each interview and field notes, I developed a coding schema for the analysis. The coding schema is based on identity theory on which I base my thesis. Identity theory proposes that the impact of the social structure can be measured by commitment degree of individuals to that structure. Therefore, during my analysis, in order to measure commitment and thus the role of the mosque in identity formation, I coded my data under family and culture, clothing, time, emotional attachment of adolescents to teachers in the mosque, religious and social activities, friends that they hang out, and future plans; which shed lights on the degree of adolescents’ commitment to the mosque. Based on my field notes, and the analysis of open-coded interviews and of field notes, I found out two distinct tendencies/movements/identity formations among adolescents who attend to the Somali Mosque of Columbus: identity transformation and identity conflict. The former develops Islamic identity as the most salient identity from their Somali or black/American identity; the latter experiences identity conflict in their identity salience hierarchies due to intense religious activities in the Somali Mosque of Columbus.
CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the findings and discussion of my research. My analysis indicates that the first group of adolescents who attend the Somali Mosque of Columbus experienced transformation from their ethnic and black American identities to developing a religious/Muslim identity as the most salient identity. However, there are two types of developing Muslim identities: the first type formed a Muslim identity by isolating themselves from the wider American society and culture, whereas the second one developed the Muslim identity while integrating into American society and culture.

This second group of adolescents faces conflict between their ethnic, religious, and black American identities. Joining the Somali Mosque of Columbus created identity conflict in adolescents between their multiple identities.

Identity Transformation

“Before they (adolescents) come to the mosque, they are Somalis. After they come to the mosque, they are Muslims.”

Abdurrezzak, Teacher, the Somali Mosque of Columbus

Identity transformation is the change in one’s identity salience hierarchy. In the Somali Mosque of Columbus, a group of adolescents that I interviewed experienced change in their identity salience hierarchy due to the role of the mosque in their lives. The Somali Diaspora has been known to have multiple identities in the new homeland. Somali adolescents have Muslim, Somali ethnic (clan), and black/American identities and my research further reinforces this dynamic.
Most of the adolescents who I interviewed said that their journey to the Somali Mosque of Columbus began with the parental pressure. It was one of the ways for Somali parents to enforce their culture by forcing their children to attend the mosque. However, adolescents, after attending the mosque said that they had been extremely happy with Islam, and how it had affected their lives. Thus, they felt very close to the mosque afterwards. Osman, 15, said “in the beginning, my parents made me. But after that, I like loved it. I had fun. We basically mix fun and learn something new. Before I was forced but now I love it.”

Adde, 15, a freshman in high school, also was very afraid to come to the mosque. He had no interest in the mosque but the mosque personnel and teachers changed his mind:

To tell you the truth, I cried. I did not want to come. I did not. I was scared of being whipped. I bawled my eyes out. I came to the door and wiped my eyes. And (teacher) came to me. I then had a different perspective of him. He became my family. He is like my second parent. He’s both a mother and a father.

Not only did attending the mosque become enjoyable for the adolescents, it also enhanced their lives in a number of ways to reinforce the happiness derived from Islam. For example, Eva, 14, who was at a refugee camp in Kenya before coming to the US, felt that Islam was a peaceful factor in her life: “For me, Islam gives you peace and you feel like you’re doing it for a reason. Every time I do something, I ask myself “Am I making Allah proud or not?”. It gives me peace and tranquility”. Many of the teenage girls, like Latuschka, did not seem to have trouble “fitting into” American schools. They did not
seem to have issues that mainstream teenagers experienced while attending school, like low confidence, self esteem and other issues.

Preeti, 18, a senior in high school, who came to the U.S. with her mother, said that because of Islam, she did not have difficulty in an American high school. Usually, American high schools are difficult on immigrant teenagers, but she said she felt comfortable there because of the role of Islam in her life: “For me, Islam has helped me a lot where it hasn’t been that difficult in school. I put my trust in Allah, I do good and Islam is there for problems/difficulties.” Like Preeti, the teenage girls did not seem to have issues of self-esteem, even when they were targeted for being Muslim- “In middle school, someone once pulled my hijab. It was horrible, but people are ignorant. I said to myself ‘I'm better than that’. When asked if these things bothered her, Preeti said that “No, it did not bother me”.

Even though the female adolescents sometimes face discrimination or stereotypical reactions from non-Muslims outside of the mosque because of the way that they dress, Islam and their strong attachment to it motivates them to endure any issues that they face in the American society. After sharing how she had experienced prejudice and stereotyping, Latuschka indicated that she was able to find peace and tranquility from Islam in her life. Even though there were hard situations, she depended on Islam and was not affected by it. She told that:

Well, I was walking on the street and there were a group of girls who were walking on the other side. I heard them saying something like “see what’s she wearing?” in a different way and laughing. I didn’t look their direction but I know that they were talking about me. For me, Islam gives you peace and you feel like you’re doing it for a reason. Every time I do something, I ask myself “Am I making Allah proud or not?” it gives me peace and tranquility.
It was clear from interviewing these students that many of them saw that Islam was the source of their happiness and confidence in life: “Islam is perfect and amazing. God always forgives. He has mercy and he’s my 1st and only friend. It’s for all generations. It’s universal.” Islam seemed to be a very important factor in their lives and they depended on Islam for every hardship they experienced.

Adolescents after attending the mosque and its classes said that they were more closely tied to their Islamic identity. In fact, it becomes the most salient identity for these adolescents. Adolescents in this group identify with their Islamic religious identity, rather than their ethnic Somali or black American identities. For example, Latuschka, 14, who was born in Kenya as Somali and came to the United States when she was 2 years old, said that “I don’t call myself Somali or American, but I’m Muslim” and stated that “I think religion is more important than culture. And it’s great. It’s such a good thing.”

Muhammad, 15, pointed out that he is more religious than what his parents were comfortable with:

Before I came here, after school I used to play soccer with kids in my neighborhood. I didn’t use to pray 5 times a day and my mom didn’t use to tell me anything. But now after school I come here (mosque), and my mom tells me why don’t you come to home? Religion is more important for me. But for my mom, it is not that important.

Mohammed implied that the older generations are more cultural Muslims, where they learned religion in Somalia, even though it might be the incorrect way. Latuschka had similar things to say in terms of parents. She stated that “Here, the older people (Somali) are more cultural Muslims, you know. They think that even children playing in
the mosque is haraam and yell at them. That's not right. But the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) used to let the children play in the mosque”.

Some parents, like Hafsa’s, did not like the freedom of how she was very active in the mosque. At Hafsa’s home, my female colleague noted that Hafsa stated that her father had high blood pressure and expected her to cook: “He wants it exactly on time. I can’t be one minute late. If I am late, he gets really mad. When we wake up in the morning for prayer, he expects his breakfast right at that time. But I don’t care. Sometimes I don’t cook. I don’t care”. Hafsa did not care that her father was forcing her to fit into being a traditional Somali woman. From what Hafsa said, she is more interested in books than cooking because “Ilm is so important”. She is more interested in marrying a man who is educated and who is in religion”. She also stated that “my parents make fun of me because they say that whoever you marry will think you are nice, but he’s going to leave you because you can’t cook”.

Hafsa, also, was very religious and tried to come to the mosque as much as possible. Sometimes, she was not at the mosque and she would explain that she had to stay at home and do housework sometimes, even though she did not want to. For Hafsa, Islam and the life of the Prophet Muhammad are more important than what her parents culturally believe to be true. For instance, after Hafsa mentioned about the first marriage of the Prophet Muhammad9, she told the discussion about marriage that she had with her

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8 Ilm means knowledge or science in Arabic. Here, it refers to the Islamic knowledge and its sciences.

9 In the first marriage of the Prophet Muhammad, Khadija, his first wife, sent him a marriage proposal.
mother. She said that “I like a brother who is part of the masjid\textsuperscript{10}. I told my mother that I like this man, am interested in marriage and that I think we should send a mahram\textsuperscript{11}. My mother said “NO! A girl doesn’t show interest in a man first. The man has to show interest first.”

Hafsa loved Islam so much and wanted to follow every aspect but her parents were more focused on keeping the Somali culture, by forcing her to be traditional. She wanted to read books, go to college and become a scholar, because the Prophet of Islam had encouraged people to get knowledge. However, she was feeling pressured because her family wanted her to become more Somali-oriented but she wanted to be more Muslim, which liberates and encourages her to have her own Islamic identity.

\textit{Integrating into the American Culture with Muslim Identity}

Adolescents in this group believe that integrating into American society does not conflict with their salient Muslim identity. However, because of the language difference, adolescents and their parents can have cultural conflicts and the adolescents feel “guilty” for being integrated into American culture because they were losing their “Somaliness”. They said that having had growing up in the United States and away from their homeland affected their identity. Even though they felt that they were Somali, they felt more comfortable in the American culture. Many said that they were “modernized” and did not feel that the American culture threatened their Islamic identity. However, although they had integrated into the American culture, they did not think they were American.

\textsuperscript{10} Masjid means the mosque.

\textsuperscript{11} Mahram is a relative or escort who will carry the marriage proposal.
Abdi, 15, said “I came as a little kid. I’m losing more of my (Somali) culture and gaining more of culture here. You spend time with friends here. In Somali, you spend more time with family. Here you spend more time with friends. Go out to eat.”

Some adolescents felt that the American culture is conflicting with the Somali culture but that it didn’t have any “bad” qualities in it. They are comfortable in American culture, even though he identifies himself as Muslim first. Growing up and being educated in the United States makes some adolescents more comfortable in the American culture than the Somali culture. Adde, 15, who identifies himself first as a Muslim feels more pressure fitting in the Somali culture. When pressed about this versus fitting into the American culture he notes:

I’m losing Somali culture. When I speak to Somali people who are straight from Somali, old people, it’s different. Most kids are born here. You’ll notice how people straight from Somalia go to shops and say like “I don’t have the money today, I’ll give it to you tomorrow” and just take stuff. People don’t do that here. If you want something, you gotta have the money. It’s funny for me because it’s Somali culture. I think I’m losing the culture because of American culture.

Adolescents in this group believed that integration was not a bad thing, but it is recommended and necessary. One of the indicators for this integration into the American society is adolescents’ future plans. For instance, Adde would like to be a cardiologist and also at the same time he wants to be a teacher in the mosque. In doing so, his role model is the director of the youth program in the Somali Mosque of Columbus. Referring to the director in the mosque, Adde said that

he’s finishing the college this year. He’s working for the dunya\textsuperscript{12} and he’s working for the akhirah\textsuperscript{13}. He’s following the sunnah\textsuperscript{14}. I also want to work for

\textsuperscript{12} Dunya means the world in Arabic. In this context, it means worldly affairs in the modern secular world, excluding religious affairs.
this dunya and get good with akhira. I don’t want to put all my effort in akhira but also dunya. I wanna go to 4 year school. Medical school. Cardiology.

Adde’s family also supports his integration into the American society and his future plans. One of his brothers is studying in medical school and wants Adde also to go to medical school as well: “My brother wants me go to college. He is going to 4 year college and going to medical school. Two days ago, he came back from Iowa. He’s trying his best to go to Harvard”. It was interesting to see the difference between the male and female adolescents. The males wanted to go to college and pursue a career but many of the female teenagers wanted to seclude themselves from the American culture even though they are affected by the American culture because of their dress and their understanding of Islam.

Many of the female Somali adolescents who attend the mosque dress in long black abayas\textsuperscript{15} and black long headscarfs that reaches their waist. All Somali females cover with headscarf and abaya, even girls as young as three years old. They are socialized to never wear pants, unless it is inside the abaya, covering it, because they are taught based on the hadith\textsuperscript{16} stating that women should never wear men’s clothes. Many

\begin{footnotes}
\item[13] Akhirah means Here-After in Arabic. In this context, it indicates any type of religious affairs.
\item[14] Sunnah means the sayings, attributes, and traditions of the Prophet Muhammad in Islam. It is the second religious source and authority in Islam that Muslims follow, after the Holy Quran.
\item[15] Abayas are loose black robes that cover from head to toe.
\item[16] Sayings of the Prophet Muhammed.
\end{footnotes}
teenagers wear niqaab\textsuperscript{17}, which is a new trend among Somalis that came from Saudi influence, because the imams and directors of the mosque studied Islam in Saudi Arabia.

Hafsa, 18, a high school senior stated that even though she was attending the mosque and wearing niqaab, her family was still struggling with America. Many of the adolescents said that their parents did not speak much English and were mostly only around other Somalis. The adolescents were closer to American culture than to parents, which made some parents feel very uncomfortable. Hafsa said that:

My parents don’t really trust me, you know. They get scared. Sometimes they just keep calling every minute, because they think we’re up to something. When me and my sister go out together at a mall, when we come back, he will ask each of us separately about the details whether they match up. We ask him “don’t you trust us?” I think he’s so scared we’re going to be American.

Nura, 18, a senior in high school, also wears the niqaab and believes that American culture has affected the Somali teenagers growing up in the United States. Most of the adolescents thought that American culture influencing them was negative, rather than positive. Some even tried to deny that they had any American-ness in them. However, Nura said: “Well, the thing is American culture has affected us. If someone says that American culture hasn’t affected them, they’re lying.”

The parents of the female teenagers were much more worried about the American culture than the parents of the male teenagers. The male teenagers had parents who encouraged them to go to college but the female teenagers’ parents were very worried that the American culture might influence their daughters. However, many of the

\textsuperscript{17} The niqaab covers the face with a slit open for the eyes.
teenagers wanted to distance themselves away from the American culture because of their understanding of Islam.

Distancing away from the American Society

Specifically, regarding female teenagers, the extra pressure of parents on female adolescents and the specific protective group towards females in the mosque, established by the mosque, causes the female adolescents to start distancing themselves from the American culture while developing the Muslim identity.

The females had a teenage sisters group in the mosque that helped them keep their Muslim identities. They were different from the Somali male adolescents because they wore the niqaab and became outsiders in high school and society, in general. However, they did not state that they had any issues with wearing hijab or niqaab. They were very comfortable with niqaab. Latuska said that: “I wasn’t always into the religion but (the group) changed all that. Before I wore the hijab, but I didn’t act upon it. And I had memorized the Qu’ran but my heart wasn’t in it.”

The teenage group was started by a 19 year old female Somali adolescent in the mosque who knew what “they were going through” according to Latuska. They meet and discuss Islamic matters, while sharing their problems with each other that they could not share with the older Somali women in the mosque. Latushka said: It’s a group of sisters who got together. Like a youth group. Teenagers who got together for the sake of Allah”. The teenage girls also said that the teenage group did not function strictly as an Islamic group. It also was there to combine the issues they dealt with and to combine the resolutions of Islam to them.
The teenage Islamic group functions as a support group to help the female adolescents share their issues with being Muslim, and Somali in the American culture. The group is not only for religious activities, but also is used for discussing personal issues of the female adolescents. To indicate the social role of the group, Latuska also told that there are personal problems. It’s not really related to Islam, but there are personal issues. Sometimes there are ego clashes. When the teachers say “do this or do that”, it can result in ego clash and teenagers have pride. Even though gossiping and backbiting is not Islamic, you know the American culture affects them. If someone says that American culture doesn’t affect them, they’re lying.”

The teenage girls were having a difficult time balancing their Somali and American identities with their Islamic identities. They always seemed to talk about America as if it was negative. They were trying their best to follow Islam and trying to distance themselves away from the American culture.

In addition to the religious role that the group plays among the female adolescents, they also were happy that they had a group that they could share their struggles growing up in a Somali-Muslim atmosphere while attending a U.S. educational system. They also seemed to use it as a way of protesting against Somali cultural Islam and the elders.

During a Qu'ran competition and youth convention, the girls and boys were divided, with the girls on one side and the boys on another. Some girls who are the member of the sister group were sitting in the back. They sat together, and were chatting. Some elders came over and told them to move because some “mens” were going to sit there. The girls completely rejected this by saying that “I'm not moving.” “Why should we have to move?”
Regardless of the regular issues with teenagers, with the positive support of the sister group and the mosque, the female adolescents did not feel any discomfort wearing the niqaab in the American society. They had started out wearing just the headscarf, but soon, changed their bright headscarves for the black niqaab and abaya, which indicates the intensification of identity transformation that they have experienced. Amina, 18, said that being a Muslim and dressing niqaab makes her feel beautiful. She was prepared to wear the niqaab even though the American society would discriminate against her. She was ready to face any possible discrimination for the sake of her Muslim identity- “I feel like a queen. I mean, I love the niqaab. It’s so beautiful. I wish I could walk around with niqaab but parents say that I’ll get discriminated against and it will hard in America. I don’t care though.”

My female colleague was told from other people, that once a girl joins the sister group, all she wears are the black abayas and niqaab. Apparently, this was the uniform of the teenage group. Amina also clarified that

I used to not follow the religion. I used to wear like normal clothes. But then I started following Islam and I used to wear bright beautiful scarves. People used to say how they like them. But I started reading more about Islam, I joined the sister group and I started wearing black abayas.

My female colleague noted that the little girls and pre-pubescent girls wore very bright, sparkly headscarves, but the sister group (who were teenagers) were conspicuous by their black abayas and niqaabs. At one point, one 12 year old girl was studying and reciting Qu’ran in class and she had been wearing bright colored scarves. The next time, my female colleague saw her; she had started wearing all black. When my colleague
asked about this girl, she was told that this girl had joined the sister group. It was obvious that the sister group established in the mosque played a major role for the female adolescents to develop and intensify their Muslim identities as the most salient among other identities that they had.

Another indicator how the Muslim identity had become the most salient one in the female adolescents is their interaction with males. For instance, in classes, adolescent girls were very enthusiastic about learning and were modest in the way they sat or asked questions to the male teacher. Some girls had their back turned to the male teacher and when asking a question, covered their mouths with their abayas when speaking. They have learned that everything a woman has includes her awrah (charm), including voice and laughter. When asked why these girls have turned around and covered their mouth, Leeya said that it was because of modesty purposes.

The female adolescents are also taught that they should not have any kind of interaction with males, and they should avoid themselves to capture attention by males with the way they dress and they speak. For instance, during the summer, the mosque organized its first youth convention for three days at a university near the mosque. There were speakers invited from across the United States to give lectures to adolescents on Islamic topics. Because the huge hall had Somali male adolescents, many of the female teenagers wore niqaab and long gloves that completely covered their hands. During one noteworthy speaker, the female adolescents at one point were also told to wear hijab in

\[^{18}\text{Hijab means headscarf in Arabic.}\]
a way that strongly criticized Muslim females who do not do so, speaking strongly and directly:

When a woman takes off her hijab, it is open defiance. This is one of dangerous of sins. What could be sinful of women exposing her beauty to everyone in public? Likewise, my sister who guards her chastity, I give you the good news from the One who created you. Allah says, verily to him we will give them a good life. and from this provision, Allah will give you on account of hijab, a good and pious husband, with whom you will live a good life. Likewise, when you wear hijab, you protect yourself from the curse of Allah. It will protect you from hellfire.

The female adolescents, during this speech, were very affected and had their hands over their mouths, indicating that they were in fear of divine punishment. The female adolescents are taught that wearing hijab is their identity, which causes them to be more disintegrated with the American society because hijab was symbolized as a tool which separated them from non-Muslims. In the same convention, the female adolescents were told that “a woman should feel that this hijab is part of her body. It is what testifies. Everywhere you go in this world you can tell difference between Muslim women and non-Muslim women. It has become identity.”

Some teenagers did not follow the sister group’s “uniform”. Some wore short hijabs which were more stylish and trendy. From what my female colleague had been told, short hijabs were not proper. A Muslim woman must wear long hijab and skirt that covers their feet completely. Nobody talked much to my female colleague until she also started wearing the same kind of Somali Muslim outfit, with long hijab and a long skirt that completely covered ankles. After that, all the women were more open to talking to her. Having no interaction with males and differentiating themselves from non-Muslims with hijab, most of the female adolescents distanced themselves away from the American
society. Thus, they develop their Muslim identity within a secluded small mosque social network.

Moreover, teachings for other religions have increased their seclusion to the point of having enmity towards other religious groups. Even though Islam has the foundation of being close to Judaism and Christianity, the teenagers were taught that only Muslims were the privileged. Leeya stated that from her understanding of Islam, she had to hate the other Abrahamic faiths. She said that “we’re supposed to hate the Jews and Christians. Allah says to hate the Jews and Christians”. This exclusive teaching was taught to the female adolescents in the mosque.

My female colleague noted in one lecture that the teacher sitting in the chair who is an older Somali man around his mid-thirties said that according to the Qu’ran, only Muslims would go to Heaven and others would go to Hell. Some females turned around and asked again for clarification. He confirmed that indeed, Muslims would be the only ones going to heaven. It is obvious that the teacher had influenced their understanding of Islam because many of them look at him as an authority of Islam.

It was also interesting to note that the girls who were so modest that they turned their back towards the teacher were being taught about sexual matters, such as how to take ablution and the sunnah of kissing. The girls giggled but I was shocked that there wasn’t a female teacher, who was talking to the extremely shy girls about this.

The impact of this teaching in the mosque can be observed in reactions of women in the mosque towards visitors from the outside. My female research colleague stated that one of the adolescents told her that there was a woman who had come to the mosque to just visit and had been interested in Islam, but Somali women had yelled at the woman
who entered because of her dress. She told that “some women come here because they’re interested in Islam and they’re looking around. But then, some of the Somali women go up to them and get mad, saying “Why is your hair uncovered?”

Even my female colleague, herself, was scolded for wearing pants the first time at the mosque. She noted that:

I went and sat down near the wall of the masjid. I was sitting with my back and just observing the proceedings. Very few Somali women were open to me and I felt a bit of hesitancy. The Somali children and pre-pubescent girls would hardly smile at me. I was not sure what was going on. A Somali woman came and greeted me but quickly moved to chastise me, telling me that “everybody is wondering why you are wearing pants!, grabbing my pants for extra emphasis. It was clear to me that this was a very secluded mosque, and I had not experienced that before in any other mosque that I had visited.

Besides considering other religions as the enemies of their Islamic identity, some of the female adolescents also felt that the American society had fitna, or trials, that were against their understanding of Islam. These female adolescents did not want to compromise their Islamic identity, anywhere. Some did not even want to attend college because there was free-mixing of sexes. It was clear that they wanted to distance themselves from the American culture as much as possible. Aziza, 19, a niqaabi who came to the United States at an early age stated that “I’d rather stay home after getting married. I don’t want to attend regular college because there is free mixing (of sexes). I want to take online classes. I’d love to stay at home all day and homeschool my children.” Aziza was very calm and content with Islam and said that she did not feel the need to go outside at all.
When my colleague asked the girls what they thought of American friends, most of them said that they did not have American friends. They were at the mosque all day except for the times they were in school. They took their Muslim identity very seriously and did not think that having American friends would help with their faith. Latuschka said that “most of our lives are inside the masjid¹⁹, not outside. People hang out with friends here at the masjid. We don’t really have American friends that much.”

Preeti also felt that having American friends would conflict with her Islamic identity. “Well, I do have (American) friends. More like associates where it’s just a “hello hi”. You don’t take advice from them”. The sister group, teachings of hijab and niqab, representing the Muslim identity outside of the mosque because of the clothing, and teachings on other faith groups and Americans have led most of the female adolescents in the Somali Mosque of Columbus to seclude themselves within the mosque and disintegrate themselves from the wider American society. However, for the male adolescents in the Somali Mosque of Columbus have different reasons for not being integrated into American society than the females.

First, outside of the mosque they are not supposed to symbolize Islam with their clothing. They just have to wear kameez²⁰ and kufi²¹ in the mosque when they attend classes or religious programs. Thus, unlike many of the women, they would not face

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¹⁹ Majsid means mosque in Arabic, she refers to the Somali Mosque of Columbus.

²⁰ Kameez is a loose suit with long sleeves and a tunic like shape that covers the thighs, with slits to allow the legs to move. It is worn in India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, the Middle East and etc. It symbolizes modesty in men.

²¹ Kufi is a traditional short rounded cap worn by men.
discrimination or stereotypical reactions from others because of their clothing. However, some adolescents think that it was useless talking to Americans because of their ignorance and stereotyping Islam. For instance, Othman, 14, who had also become religious after coming to the masque felt that he did not want to talk too much to Americans because he might feel angry against them and get in a fight. “I don’t really like (American friends) them because they are ignorant. They talk about my culture and religion a lot. I ignore them. My teacher (in the mosque) says that’s the right thing to do. If I make fun of them, I get a sin.” They did not think highly of American friends, because they did not have an understanding of Islam, and did not think that spending time with American friends was a good idea. They also did not want to be influenced away from their religion.

Not only ignorance or stereotyping Islam caused them to stay away from the American society, but also they think that American culture and society is “fitna” and against their Islamic identity. They struggled against being influenced by Americans, which could sometimes interfere with their family life. Muhammed, 16, who developed his Muslim identity after attending the mosque, told me that “American culture is fitna. It is against Islam. That’s why I spend most of the times in the mosque. Sometimes mom’s complaining about me. She says “I miss you. Why don’t you come to home. Sometimes I sleep in the mosque because we clean the mosque.”

Mohammad physically isolated himself from the American culture because he was so fearful that he was going to be influenced from the American culture. He thought

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22 Fitna means chaos, upheaval in Arabic. In this context, it means anything which is against the Islamic law.
that being at the mosque would preserve his identity. Adolescents like Ahmad did not think highly of the American culture because they did not have faith in God.

Ahmad, 17, who is a senior in high school, also felt that what you do depends on the amount of your faith and considered the American culture as having low faith in God:

If you have low iman and you go to school, someone of your friends do bad things. You also do bad things with them. If you have high iman, like more of American culture, they respect that I’m Muslim. You also fear Allah a lot. My religion is number 1. It is my top priority.

Thinking the American culture as fitna, the male adolescents in this group have different future plans than those who are integrated into the American society. After high school, they do not want to go to college in the United States. They even do not like high school and cannot wait to graduate from the high school. Instead of having higher education in the United States, they would like to enroll an Islamic college in an Islamic country such as Saudi Arabia, Yemen, or Egypt. Their goal is to study Islam and Arabic and to become Islamic sheikhs. After they obtain an Islamic education, they would like to go back to the United States and preach and teach Islam. One of the other major impacts on this decision is the director of the youth program and the Imams in the Somali Mosque of Columbus.

All religious figures in the mosque have studied Islam and Arabic in the Middle East, and their role and authority have affected male adolescents in the mosque. In

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23 Iman means faith in Arabic. It refers to Islamic faith in this context.

24 Sheikh means authority or scholar in Islam.

25 Imam means religious clergy in the mosque.
discussing school and career plans Muhammad indicated that he strongly want to go to Yemen to study Islam because his teacher in the mosque studied there. “I hate school. Instead, I study Quran everyday 4 hours. After school, I wanna go to Yemen and study Islam like my muallim\textsuperscript{26}. After then, I wanna go back here and teach like him.”

Ahmad also would like to go the Middle East to study. His main goal is quite different than Muhammad. He did not even want to pursue going to college in the United States because he thought that he would be able to have a strong Muslim identity abroad in the Middle East learning about Islam. “Here I am memorizing Quran but don’t know what it means. I wanna go to an Arabic country so I can learn Arabic and understand Quran better. So I can be a better Muslim.”

Overall, the majority of adolescents that I interviewed have developed their Muslim identity. After they attended the Somali Mosque of Columbus, their Muslim identity has become the most salient one in the identity salience hierarchy. The adolescents who have experienced transformation in their identity salience hierarchy divided into two groups. The first group has been integrated to the American society, whereas the second one has started to separate itself more widely from the larger American society.

The rest of the adolescents that I interviewed, however, have experienced identity conflict between their Muslim, Somali and black American identities. Even though the mosque does not play a major role in this conflict, having joined the mosque’s activities

\textsuperscript{26} Muallim means teacher in Arabic.
enhanced this conflict because of the strong and intense religious and social activities in the Somali Mosque of Columbus.

Identity Conflict

When you are in school, you’re a different person.

When you come to mosque, the masjid is different.

Like how you dress up. How you act.

Ali, 16, Student

In immigrant studies, identity conflict refers to “a broad range of conflicts associated with simultaneous membership in two distinct cultural groups” (Stroink and Lalonde 2009:45). In the case of Somali adolescents, the two distinct cultural groups are Somali-Muslim identity and black American identity. Adolescents in this group felt that they did not feel as much in touch with their Somali-Muslim identity as much as other students in the first group, but at the same time they did not disclose their identities to their non-Somali and non-Muslim groups.

Othman, 16, stated that “nowadays I’ve become more Americanized because of the people. Parents keep telling me what has been going on in Somalia. They tell me what’s going on. They help me staying connected with culture.”

However, even though Othman indicated that he had become more Americanized, when asked whether he fit into Somali or American culture, he said that he fit more with Somali culture. “It’s the way that I act. Like wearing a kameez. I eat the same food as Somali person. Most of the times, I eat Somali foods. I speak Somali language a lot. That helps me feel Somali.”
Sanadas, 17, a senior in high school who wants to go to college has also similar conflict like Othman. He said that: “I’m Muslim. I’m Somalian. I’m African-American. I understand Somali and American. I am probably modernized. I wear jeans and some other stuff.”

However, he was more comfortable fitting into Somali culture. “I fit in Somali culture. Like I attend weddings. Where we understand ceremonies and all that. I have a lot of friends. They’re all mixed (different backgrounds). Not really sure which friends I have more of.”

Because of cultural and family expectations, adolescents in this group are pressured to go to the Somali Mosque of Columbus, and this pressure increases conflict between the Somali-Muslim and American cultures. For instance, Ali, 16, who moved to Uganda after leaving Somalia and came to the United States just a few years ago did not remember Somalia because he was “just a baby”. He also did not seem to be connected to the Somali culture but was attending the Mosque because of parental pressure. When I asked him whether he feels pressure to come to the mosque, He replied that: “They wanted me to come to mosque. They force me to wake up in Salat Fajr\(^\text{27}\). They always wake me up at 4 in morning.”

Ali only attended the Quran study class even though the mosque provided a wide range of religious programs such as Islamic lectures, memorization of hadith, and memorization of Quran competition between students. He also said that he spends most of his times at home and playing soccer with non-Somali friends without letting them

\(^{27}\) One of the obligatory prayers that Muslim are supposed to make before dawn, according to Islamic law.
know of his Somali and Muslim identity: “They don’t even know that I’m Muslim. We go and play. That’s it. They think I’m black. African-American. We just play”. Ali did not even want to tell his friends about his identity, showing that Islam was not that important to him. He was experiencing identity conflict, where he was struggling against American culture influence and Somali-Muslim culture.

Ali also told me that he had a girlfriend from his school and they just talked on the phone, even though he was not supposed to have a girlfriend according to the mosque where there is a very strong emphasis on separation between sexes. When asked what others would think about him having a girlfriend, he said that: “Well, everyone has a girlfriend. When you’re in school, you’re a different person. Like, when you come to mosque, you act differently but when you go to school, they’re normal kids. The masjid is different. Like how you dress up. How you act.”

However, Ali knew that he was not supposed to have a girlfriend according to Islam, even though he indicated that Islam is everything for him when I asked him what the meaning of Islam in his life was. “It (Islam) means everything to me. You have to do what Islam says. You have to follow it. That’s it.”

The similar conflict, Islam (mosque) versus interaction with the opposite sex, was also reported by the female adolescents. Though they tried their best to disintegrate from the American culture, their sister group had to deal with this certain problems. Amina indicated that “the (group) learns and everyone and are sisters at the same time. They sometimes have issues with- I mean, like boys and everything. They know it’s forbidden but they date on Facebook.”
Latushka reported that during the month of Ramadan\textsuperscript{28}, some adolescents spent time outside of the Somali Mosque of Columbus in the parking lot with boys and girls freely mixing, while the congregational prayer was being conducted. Some adolescents had issues with dating and other gendered relationships that were normal in high school but forbidden in the mosque. “Well, the guy and girl usually just hold hands and the most they do is kiss.” After stating this, Latushka added: “I think that they should trust the masjid to be innocent because it’s trying to do you good. In school, it’s very hard to trust people”, indicating the source of conflict between the mosque and school that some adolescents face.

Overall, adolescents in this group have experienced identity conflict because of the two distinct social networks that they participate in. Even though the Somali Mosque of Columbus does not have a major role in this conflict, because of its distinctive characteristics than the American culture and society, it becomes inevitable for adolescents in this group to have more identity conflict after they attend the mosque.

**Discussion**

In the Somali community, adolescents’ identities are changed by societal expectations and networks. Having multiple identities and the pressure of having to fit into the Somali culture, the American culture and the mosque have created changes in their salience hierarchy of identities. The adolescents’ identities were shaped by different social networks such as the mosque, the family, and the school and they went through identity transformation and experienced identity conflict, because of the changing of their

\textsuperscript{28} Sacred month in Islam when Muslims fast during the day and have long prayers at night in congregation in the mosque.
commitments to the particular social network. Commitment is the key to measuring the impacts of the particular social network in identity theory. Since my focus is to explore the role of the mosque in the identity formation among Somali adolescents in Columbus, in this section I discuss the degree of commitment of adolescents who have identity transformation and identity conflict to the Somali Mosque of Columbus by various things, such as clothing, time, and emotional attachment to teachers.

*Clothing*

Findings show that clothing was an important component of Islam and the Somali Mosque of Columbus. Many of the adolescents who I interviewed spoke about how they wore Islamic clothing which seemed to symbolize their commitment to the mosque. In the girls group, it was very obvious that they went through an identity transformation because they went from wearing “brightly colored headscarves” to the niqaab. They tried to separate themselves from the younger girls who wore brightly colored scarves and dresses. Wearing black abayas showed a seriousness of the interest in the religion. In the adolescent girls, wearing all-black was their way of showing their commitment to the mosque and how the mosque had affected their identity. Some were even willing to experience discrimination in the American culture wearing the niqaab, even though their parents did not want them to. It was clear that the adolescent girls interviewed proved their commitment to the mosque through clothing. Their Muslim identity became more salient by wearing black abayas and niqaab. The male adolescents who had identity transformation also showed their commitment to the mosque by wearing the kameez and kufi. Based on my observations, those adolescents wore kameez and kufi everyday that
they were in the mosque, even sometimes when they were playing basketball or soccer in the parking lot of the mosque.

However, there were some adolescents whose clothing indicated that they were not as committed to the mosque, thus revealing an identity conflict. Adolescents in this group did not like wearing the kameez or any type of Islamic clothing but claimed that religion is the most important in their lives. They used to come to the mosque by wearing jeans and T-shirts, which is their daily clothing in the American culture.

**Time**

Time spent in the mosque is another indicator to show the level of adolescents’ commitment to the mosque. The classes were held every day Monday through Friday in the summer. The longer an adolescent spent in the mosque, the more they went through identity transformation. Many of the teenagers came for Quran classes, and Islamic lectures and sometimes, to even spend time with friends (in the case of female adolescents). The female adolescents spent half of their daytime in studying the Quran, while also attending (the sister group) meetings and Islamic lectures for the other half of their daytime. Through these events, the Muslim identity became the most salient in the female adolescents in this group, rather than Somali or black American identities. They were deeply impacted by the teenage group and willfully came to the mosque. The male adolescents who experienced identity transformation also reported that they spend a lot of time in the mosque for religious activities. They, at first, attended out of parental pressure but after they loved to stay in the mosque. For instance, Muhammad, who developed his Muslim identity by disintegrating himself from the American society after joining the
mosque, spent all of his time in the mosque after school. He even sleeps some nights in the mosque. His time commitment to the mosque also made his mother criticize Muhammad because she missed him. The more time they spent in the mosque, the more they learned about Islam. The intense Islamic educational programs did not actually focus on Somali or American culture; thus the Muslim identity became the most salient in the hierarchy of their identities.

However, adolescents who had identity conflict felt that they were in the mosque because they were forced to by their parents. For instance, Abdi only attended the Quran classes because of his parents, which was the indicator of less commitment to the mosque. Othman and Sanadas, as well as Abdi, liked to sit in the back in the class and to hide, because they did not want to be there. The teacher always told them along with some other students to come to the front but they did not want to be part of the mosque. After classes, adolescents in this group used to take off the kameez which they rarely had and they used to run to the basketball court to organize a game. This indicates that some adolescents went through identity conflict because they were forced to attend to the mosque. In addition, the mosque expected every attendants to follow the same rules and regulations which enhancing the conflict of identities that adolescents in this group had.

Emotional Attachment to Teachers

It was evidently clear that all but one adolescent were affected by the mosque’s teachers. Many of them claimed to have identity transformation because of the attitude of their teachers. In the case of adolescent boys, they all loved one particular teacher at the mosque. One even said that he was like his “second parent” and because of that teacher,
he ended up loving the mosque. Other adolescents also said that that teacher was a huge role in them becoming Muslim and loving the mosque. The attitude of the teachers profoundly impacted their identity. That particular teacher, according to the boys, applied Islam to practical daily life and focused on the religion, rather than the culture. During classes, boys were soon socialized to become better Muslims, who were working for the “hereafter”. One adolescent boy had a motto of “work good in the *dunya* so you’re working for the hereafter”, which he learned it from that teacher. Social networks in the mosque emphasized practicing the religion and it thus became their most salient identity. The adolescent girls reported to the same thing with their (the sister group)’s teacher, where they felt more spiritual because she was so “energetic”. They claimed that because she was like them, 19, and going through the same things, she could relate to them more. Since they spent most of their time in the mosque and only spent time with Somali friends there, it is obvious how their most salient identity would be being a Muslim.

Overall, as identity theory argues, the deeper emotions one feels to a particular social structure, the higher identity salience of the corresponding identity is for that social structure. Thus, the deeper male and female adolescents have emotional attachment to their teacher, the more salient their Muslim identities are, because their teacher was one who focused solely on Islam, rather than the culture of Somali or of America.
CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION

I was extremely curious as a Muslim researcher about the role of the mosque for immigrants in the United States. I wanted my research to probe into identity, identity transformation, conflict and the role of religion in adolescents when they are developing their identities. The Somali adolescent group was a very interesting and rewarding group for me to observe identity and its various components. After interviewing the group, I found that the role of the mosque was a strong factor in their lives, which intensified identity transformation.

After 9/11, Islam has been widely studied by researchers and scholars. My study focuses on identity and religion, to understand the dynamics in the mosque. The Somali mosque was an ideal setting for research because of its organization of Islamic studies classes for minors and Columbus was also a very important setting due to the second largest Somali population in the United States.

In review, my thesis involved interviewing (through snowball method), teenage girls and teenage boys. However, I encountered some obstacles when conducting interviews. It was difficult interviewing the Somali female adolescents because they did not want to reveal their voice to a male, even to me on a tape recorder due to their religious understanding and I had to resort to asking a female colleague to interview them. Also, many Somali parents were uncomfortable with the idea of me, a stranger, asking their children for an interview since they were unfamiliar with theses and research.

In the findings, I found that the mosque kept the identity of many teenagers as Muslims first and then as Somalis. Many teenagers felt that they could go through the
pressure of teenage life and high school with the help of Islam. The teenagers stated that they were motivated to learn more and to experience life. Many of the adolescents did not identify with their parents’ culture, a common second generation immigrant experience, but being in close contact with their parents kept them connected to being Somali.

However, the most important finding was that Islam was the strongest bond between the teenagers and their parents. Because so many of the teenagers followed Islam closely, the first generation parents did not fear losing their children to the dominant culture of America. Many parents, according to teenage interviews, were extremely glad that their teenagers showed interest in Islam, but ironically, parents were concerned that their children might be taking Islam a little too seriously. I found this idea to be fascinating, since one would expect the first generation parents to have found the idea that their children were following familial religious outlook to be comforting. However, in the cases in Columbus, this was not the case.

Relating to gender, another important finding was that Islam was a very positive factor in the life of the teenage girls, who were stuck between the two cultures: the Somali and the American culture. The Somali culture demanded girls to be traditional and obedient, while the American culture preferred that girls be modern and outspoken. As the teenage girls stated in interviews, it was not easy to wear jilbab and go to a public school. However, with Islam, they did not feel discomfort and felt that they were doing the right thing. Despite teenage conflict and pressures, these adolescent girls felt that Islam gave them an ability to maintain a balance between their religious identity and the
American culture. By having a teenage sisters’ group in the mosque, they felt that they could share and vent their frustrations of being a Muslim balancing the Somali and the American culture. Hence, the girls showed a strong commitment to the mosque because of the fact that the other sisters in the group could identify with the difficulties and pressures of balancing the two cultures.

For most of the teenagers, Islam was such a strong force that they felt in touch with it, even while working in mainstream American culture. Many of the interviewees wanted to become doctors and scholars, which could lead them to success in this world and the “hereafter”. They did not feel obligated to isolate themselves away from the American culture. As long as they were sure that they would be able to apply Islamic ideas to their work and schooling, they were at ease in integrating into the American culture.

In conclusion, this research showed me that the role of the mosque is very crucial in the identity transformation of adolescents. In particular, however, it is imperative that the adolescents feel comfortable in the mosque and their experience depends on the mosque personnel (teachers). The findings show that Islam was an extremely powerful and motivating factor that helped them through the hardships of being a teenager stuck between the two cultures.

For further research, I believe that to extend this thesis further, comparison between two mosques in Columbus, which have distinct Islamic understanding and philosophy, would be a fascinating study in order to find out different impacts of the two different mosques on the development of adolescents’ identity. I was unable to study two
different mosques because of the reasons that I mentioned in my data and methods chapter. But, it would be a very valid study to compare two different religious institutions in their differences and similarities in terms of their roles in identity formation of Somali adolescents in the same city.

Also, studying different groups of Somali adolescents would be another vital subject; in this instance, studying adolescents who do attend mosque activities and those who do not attend mosque activities. Comparing these two adolescent groups would be a valid opportunity to deeply understand the role of the mosque. How does the adolescent group who does not attend mosque handle the cultural pressures from parents and school? What are the differences between the first group and the second group? Are there cultural adjustment differences between the first and second group? This particular research would be very important for future research on the role of the mosque in identity transformation in adolescents.

Lastly, it would be extremely interesting to conduct a longitudinal study following the adolescent group that I just studied in my research. What will become of the students in three years? What will their viewpoint be like in five years? Will they be as closely tied to the mosque or would they have further difficulties with adjusting into the Somali and the American culture? What kind of dogma will these adolescents follow in the five years? These particular research questions would be helpful for a possible longitudinal study of these adolescents in Columbus to observe the long term impacts of the Somali Mosque of Columbus.
Overall, I had questions regarding possible research of the Somali adolescents in the Somali Mosque of Columbus. At the time, I was not sure what I would be able to find but their vigor for Islam was a huge positive research experience since their enthusiasm for Islam at an early age was a surprise for me as a Muslim researcher. With this research, I hope to prove that Islam is a positive motivating factor in the lives of Somali teenagers and helps with teenage pressures and adjustment issues.

As mentioned in the first paragraph of my thesis, Islam and its institution, mosque, would be a positive catalyst for research for Muslims to develop the third way in the United States, which neither completely rejects American culture nor assimilates fully away from their religious and ethnic identities; but, rather, develop and sustain their Muslim identity as the most salient one, meaning simultaneously integrate into the American culture and the way of life values acquired from the Declaration of Independence. This third way will inevitably enable Muslim immigrants and Americans to coexist without clash or conflict caused by religion. The only threat for this coexistence would be the rise of Islamphobia and anti-Muslim discrimination after 9/11 and the possible reactions of Muslims against this attitude. If the United States can minimize hate movements and reactions against Muslims, it will not be surprising to see the emergence of American Islam and American Muslims with very distinct characteristics than the rest of the Islamic world. These American Muslims will sustain their religious identity as the most salient identity in their identity hierarchies; also this identity will depend upon the values and the beliefs that the forefathers of Americans hold and stated them as the basic pillars of the American society and culture. With further
research, I strongly hope to conduct studies on the emergence of American Islam and its distinct characteristics along with its impacts on the American society and the world as well.
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APPENDIX: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

Schedule of Topics

1. Demographic Data
   • How old are you?
   • Where were you born? US or abroad?
   • How long have you been in the United States/Columbus?
   • What is your education level?

2. Mosque Participation
   • Do you regularly attend mosque activities?
   • What kind of activities does this mosque have? Which ones do you attend?
   • Does this mosque have weekend school? Do you attend the weekend school?
   • How long have you been attending the weekend school?
   • What subjects do you study in the weekend school?
   • Which language is spoken in the weekend school? English? Somali? Arabic?
   • What is the most enjoyable subject in the weekend school?
   • Do you go to other mosques? How often and which ones?
   • Do you attend other mosques social or religious activities? Please give an example.
   • Does going to the mosque make you feel part of Somali culture? How has it helped you to fit into Somali culture? How has it helped you with your relationships with your parents?
3. Religion and Social Negotiation

- Where do you spend your free time? Where would you rather spend your free time? Mosque? Friends? Family? And etc.?
- What makes you attend mosque activities?
- Do mosque activities help you in relationship with your parents? With your friends in the Somali community?
- Do you have friends outside of the Somali community? If so, where are they from? Where did you become a friend with them?
- How long do you spend with your friends outside of the Somali community? What kind of activities do you do with them?
- What problems have you faced outside of the mosque? Please give an example.
- Did you get any assistance from the mosque that you attend when you faced a problem? Please give an example.

4. Identity Formation

- How would you identify yourself? Somali? Muslim? First Muslim and then Somali? American, African-American, etc?
- How has your parents’ culture affected you?
- Do you have more Somali friends or American friends?
- Do you fit in more with Somali friends or American friends?
- What are the reasons for you not being able to fit in with Somali friends? Or American friends?
- Do you feel more pressure to fit in with American culture or Somali culture?
- What is the most important institution in your life? Family? Mosque? School?
- Why is it the most important in your life?
- What role does imam/manager play in your life?
- Who has the most impact in your life? Parents? Imams? Teachers? Friends?
- Do you feel pressure from anybody to come to mosque, or do you willingly come to mosque?