Islam, Gender and Integration in Transnational / Heterolocalist Contexts
A Case Study of Somali Immigrant Families in Columbus, Ohio

Dissertation

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By

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation builds from a longstanding sociological question: to what degree and in what manner do immigrants adapt to the new society of the United States. In particular, it examines Somali immigrants’ ways of relating to both their original and the new mainstream American culture concerning gender roles and relationships. This study addresses three central questions: first, how do Somali immigrants negotiate their gender notions and practices between those maintained from the Somali culture and those adopted from the American mainstream culture; second, to what extent do immigrants’ understandings of Islamic gender texts shape the negotiation process- and in turn, how does the integration process shape their understanding of Islamic gender discourse; and third to what extent do resultant gender perceptions and practices reflect transnational/heterolocal integration and reconciliation between cultures.

This study broadens the model of heterolocalism by focusing on Islam and gender to understand the integration behavior of Somali immigrants. It also participates to the gender and immigration literature by focusing on the household and by shedding light on how gender functions in Muslim cultures. Results of this study contribute to Islamic studies by describing how *ijtihad* can facilitate Muslim immigrants’ incorporation into dominantly non-Muslim societies in the West. Results of this study are useful in
designing integration programs for Muslim and Somali immigrants, whose numbers are increasing in the United States.

Heterolocalism is the theoretical foundation this study is built on. In response to the shortcomings of both the classical assimilation and the pluralism models in explaining the behavior of new immigrants, heterolocalism, established by Wilbur Zelinsky and Barrett Lee (1998), explains the relationship between spatial dispersion of new immigrants and the social cross-border networks that help preserve ethnic and religious identities without residential propinquity.

This study is based on a grounded theory approach to collecting/interpreting data obtained from interviewing thirty-eight immigrants in Columbus, Ohio. Analyzing the data centered around two main issues:

1. Gender roles and relationships within the Somali immigrant family, including perspectives on female identity, gender division of domestic labor and decision-making power.
2. Gender relationships outside the family, mainly courtship patterns, “arranged marriages” and sexuality.
Participants’ accounts describe how they view gender roles and relations between the community networks in their original culture and the dominant individualism in the American mainstream, how they modify these in the new society and what Islamic principles they cite to support their new perspectives. Somali immigrants’ re-discovering and interpretation of the Islamic gender principles mediate between the two cultural polarized ends; the original and the American mainstream cultures. As part of the new wave of Muslim population into the United States, Somali immigrants’ gender and family experiences exhibit clear attributes of the heterolocalist behavior that crosses spatial and cultural boundaries. Analysis concludes that neither the classic assimilation theory nor the isolationist pluralism models explain Somali immigrants’ unique hybrid identities and behavior. Somali immigrants cross-cultural selection of aspects from both cultures and interweaving them in everyday lives indicates a heterolocal pattern of integration in a transnational globalised world.
In the name of Allah,
Most Gracious,
Most Merciful.

“O mankind! We created you from male and female,
and made you into nations and tribes, so that you may come to know one another.
Verily, the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is (the one who is)
the most righteous of you.
And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things)”.
(Glorious Qur’an, 49:13)

To my husband, without whose love, support and patience this dissertation
would never have come into being.

To my father, who would have been truly happy to see this work come to fruition.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. General Background

Immigrant groups to the United States struggle to be accepted as part of the new society, while striving to preserve certain aspects of their identities and cultures. Given that the Euro-American population is the “core” group in American society (Barkan 2005), the further an immigrant group is racially, culturally and religiously away from the characteristics of the dominant group, the more problematic to maintain a balance between the basic cultural and religious features of its identity while becoming part of the majority society (Samatar 2004).

John Esposito (2004) finds that maintaining their faith while, at the same time, accepting and functioning within the secular, pluralistic Western society is a difficult challenge Muslim immigrants face. Like immigrant communities before them, Muslims have to meet the challenge of defining their identities and positions in a western society “that is both secular and whose majority has Judeo-Christian roots” (Esposito 2004: Foreword).

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1 (Portes and Truelove 1996; Smith 1997; Zhou and Bankston 1998; Alba and Nee 1999; King 2000; Portes and Rumbaut 2000)

2 Historically, it is well known that pluralism and multiculturalism flourished in Baghdad, Cairo, Damascus, Andalusia (Spain) and other Islamic cities at the time of the prosperous Islamic civilization. Ethnic and religious minorities, including Christians and Jews, lived side by side with the dominant Muslim majority (See al Faruqi and al Faruqi 1986).
For Muslim immigrants in particular, the dilemma of integrating into the dominantly non-Muslim culture, while maintaining their faith and identity is multiplied because of their “traditional” gender notions and practices, of gender roles, gender relationships and Muslim women covering in public,³ which are often perceived as anti-Western (Jawad and Benn 2003).

Some studies conclude that many Muslim immigrants, especially women, have been able to negotiate differences and conflicts between the original and the new cultures (Haddad and Smith 2003; Jawad and Benn 2003; Udel-Lambert 2004). Existing studies, however, fail to consider how Muslim immigrants’ negotiation of gender roles and expectations between old and new cultures could be an expressive indication of their integration pattern into the new society. Current literature has, moreover, overlooked the role that Islamic gender perspectives, as principles not affiliated to any specific culture, can play in mediating between the two cultural poles of Eastern and Western cultures, in the current transnational world. This qualitative dissertation examines Somali immigrants as part of the Muslim population in the United States and how their gender perceptions and practices, influenced by the “traditional” Somali culture, the “modern” American culture and Islamic gender principles, reflect Somali families’ growing multiple, or hybrid identity and unique heterolocal pattern of integration into the American mainstream.

³ This study does not claim the homogeneity of Muslim immigrants into the United States, due to the many cultural, economic, social, geographical, political differences and different individual persuasions within the general Muslim population. Not all Muslim families or women choose to prioritize Islamic principles of gender roles, relations, identities or attire when asserting their Islamic identity.
Heterolocalism in this study is defined as immigrants’ movements back and forth across the borders of the two cultural domains, without totally abiding in either.⁴

Somali communities, part of the Muslim population, are among the fastest growing immigrant groups in the United States (Maloof et al. 2003). Being both Muslim and African, the Somali community is distinct from the dominantly white, non-Muslim American mainstream. More specifically, the Somali community’s gender practices, like many Somali women’s choice to appear in public wearing hijab,⁵ might be viewed as being in sharp contrast with American mainstream gender attitudes that emphasize women’s autonomy, “liberation” and “empowerment” (Jawad and Benn 2003: xiv).

To shed light on how Somali families’ gender perceptions and practices mirror their pattern of integration, this research brings together three areas of scholarly studies: Islam, gender and immigration. More specifically, the study combines firstly, the Islamic gender perspectives presented in Islamic sources: the Qur’an, the Sunnah and the Muslim scholars’ ijtihad;⁶ secondly, the feminist scholarship of gender, family and immigration,

⁴ A detailed explanation of “heterolocalism” is found in the following sections.

⁵ Hijab is the common name of a Muslim woman’s headscarf that she puts on when in public. In Islamic literature, hijab has a wider meaning of modesty, privacy, and morality. Hijab is considered a sign of women oppression in western discourse, while Muslim women who wear the hijab out of individual choice assert that it is liberating and empowering. Rules of Muslim women’s (and men’s) attire are explained in the Qur’an, Islam’s revealed text, and the traditions (hadith) of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). The Qur’an states, “Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty...And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and adornments except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers...[a list of exceptions]” [Chapter 24, verses 30-31]

⁶ Detailed discussions of Islamic terms are in later sections. Islamic, Arabic, and Somali terms will be mostly italicized. Appendix B, Glossary of Foreign Terms, has full definitions of these terms.
and third, the transnational/heterolocalist model of immigrants’ incorporation to the new society, one of three models in the immigration literature. The bridging between these three fields of scholarship is important for several reasons:

First, Somali families’ lives are deeply influenced by Islam. The centrality of Islam in Somali life is one of the most prominent features of Somalis in their homeland as well as in the diaspora (Zaki 1960; Mukhtar 1995; Kapteijns and Arman 2004; Samatar 2007). As with other Muslim cultures, Somali families’ lives revolve around the family and its gender roles and relationships, many of which were originally shaped by Islam. It is often claimed that women and the family are the foundation of the Islamic community, the heart of Muslim society (Haddad and Esposito 1998).

The prominent position of family life in Islam is reflected in the Islamic sources and in Islamic law. Many Muslims regard the family as the fundamental unit of society and the family’s role is considered central in raising and educating children...Moreover, as the Muslim woman has been regarded as the most essential member of the family, the protection of women’s traditional role has been one of the main topics of Islamic literature, particularly from the early nineteenth century. The maintenance of the family’s spiritual status seems to be regarded in terms of the role of women in Muslim society. (Roald 2001: xi)

Second, gender has become a powerful analytical factor in understanding immigration and integration processes. According to Patricia Pessar (2007), gender, households and families “have long been privileged sites in migration studies. They have proven especially amenable to explorations of two related theories of social change: modernization and assimilation” (Pessar 2007: 267).
Finally, the different styles of immigrants’ integration into the new society have been a pivotal area for immigration studies. Since the voluntary arrival of over one million Europeans, mainly from Britain, and around half a million Africans, “forcibly seized and shipped,” America has always been a nation of people from various origins (Samatar 2004: 6). The influx of consecutive waves of diverse newcomers from different backgrounds and the settlement of their progeny have necessarily resulted in different styles of incorporation; the three most prominent of which are: assimilation; differential exclusion or chronic marginalization; and transnationalism, which is the base of the heterolocalism model (Castles 2002; Samatar 2004). The heterolocal model of integration (Zelinsky and Lee 1998) is based on theoretical assumptions that explain the new-wave immigrants’ spatial and social behavior that constantly involves negotiating cultural differences to interweave attributes of two societies in the contemporary age of globalization.

Drawing on the heterolocalism model, the study explores how Somali immigrants’ understanding of Islamic gender principles and their daily negotiation of gender practices, between the “traditional” Somali version and the “modern” American version, could be a significant manifestation of Somali families’ transnational/heterolocal behavior, between the original and the new culture.

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7 The term “chronic marginalization” is taken from Ahmad Samatar’s article (2004), in which he introduces the term as first coined by Manuel Castells (2000). The term “differential exclusion” was used in Stephen Castles’ (2000) book. I place them together, because both refer to the same phenomenon of immigrant minorities’ isolation/exclusion from the larger society.

8 A detailed explanation of this theoretical model follows in the coming sections.
While previous research on gender and immigration is limited to examining the effect of immigration on the shift in individual women’s gender roles, this study aims to analyze immigration’s influence on gender images and practices within the immigrant family, and how the outcome reflects these families’ style of integration. To my knowledge no studies have explored the link between Islamic gender principles and Muslim immigrants’ integration into dominantly non-Muslim western societies. A wider and intersectional perspective is proposed by analyzing how Somali immigrants in the United States utilize the Islamic gender discourse to reconcile cultural differences in their daily lives. This study provides a unique contribution to religion, feminism and immigration studies.

1.2. Academic and Personal Motivation

Heterolocalism theory was established to explain the relationship between spatial dispersion of new immigrants and the social cross-border networks that help preserve ethnic and religious identities without residential propinquity (Zelinsky and Lee 1998). Several recent studies have employed the heterolocalism framework to examine new immigrants’ spatial settlement patterns in the new society (for example, Newbold and Spindler 2001; Hardwick and Meacham 2005; Hardwick 2006). Fascinated by the heterolocalism perspective, I seek in this dissertation to broaden and expand it into the discipline of sociology by including Islam and gender as elements in understanding new immigrants’ heterolocal cultural identities and behavior. The heterolocalism model has considered neither religion nor gender when looking at immigrants’ integration. In this
dissertation I aim to highlight the role of Islam and gender in today’s Somali immigrants’ modes and shapes of living within multiple spaces, cultures and identities.

As a Muslim woman and drawing from my own previous research that examined Yemeni-American women’s pattern of integration into the American mainstream, my background has afforded me specific “personal experience” and “theoretical sensitivity” to study this topic (Strauss and Corbin 1990). I was impressed by the second-generation Yemeni-American women’s unique modes of integrating into the dominant American culture, balancing it with their original culture, and the resultant hybrid identity and lifestyle they have creatively developed. In particular, I was fascinated by the ways women, while maintaining their communal identities, supported their entitlement to education and careers by citing and interpreting the Islamic discourse (al-Huraibi 1999: 109).

Living between two different cultures and creatively applying Islamic texts⁹ have enabled the Yemeni-American women to adopt what they view as women-empowering and family-friendly values and practices from both cultures. The woman’s unique position of being part, but not in the center, of each culture has allowed them to forge a third way of integration that is neither assimilation nor isolation framed. Legitimizing their selective process by constantly referring to Islam has empowered their arguments and behavior both internally and within their community. Given the opportunity through this Ph.D. dissertation to further research this area, I now turn to learning the ways in which Somali

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⁹ Islamic texts are verses from the Qur’an, sayings of the Prophet Mohammed or sayings of his companions.
immigrants, another Muslim community in the United States, position Islam as the mediating area of reconciling differences between their local and the larger American cultures, especially in relation to gender perceptions and practices.

1.3. Conceptual Framework

The following section briefly introduces the three theoretical sources, discussed in detail in Chapter 2, that compose this study’s theoretical background. This conceptual framework section is divided into three sub-segments: Islamic gender thought; gender, Family and immigration; and modes of integration, one of which is heterolocalism.

1.3.1. Islamic Gender Texts / Sources

In this section an introduction to the Islamic gender perspective is presented as a general set of principles that do not affiliate with any particular culture, and the Islamic concept of *ijtihad*, or independent interpretation, which is related to Muslim immigrants’ integration into unfamiliar, non-Muslim host societies. I point out briefly, and return to this point in more detail later, the many differences between the Islamic gender principles and various Muslim cultural gender practices.

Islamic principles of gender identities, roles and relationships are important for this study as it is proposed that the Somali immigrants’ understandings of Islamic principles, together with their daily negotiations of gender practices, are significant indicators of the Somali immigrant families’ transnational/heterolocal pattern of integration into the majority society. This dissertation examines the extent to which Islamic gender
principles, not symbolizing a specific culture, might be used as the transitional space for Somali immigrants between the “traditional” and the “modern” gender ideologies and practices they find themselves between in their new society.

1.3.1.1. Gender Similarities and Differences in Islam

The Qur’an prescribes absolute equality for men and women regarding individuals’ self-worth and origin. Both men and women were created from the same nafs (soul/self). The Qur’an states, “O mankind! Reverence your Guardian-Lord, who created you from a single self (soul), created, of like-nature, his mate, and from them twain scattered (like seeds) countless men and women” (Qur’an, 4:1). In the Qur’an, no difference is made between men and women in relation to God. The Qur’an articulates:

For men who submit [to God] and for women who submit [to God],
for believing men and believing women,
for devout men and devout women,
for truthful men and truthful women,
for steadfast men and steadfast women,
for humble men and humble women,
for charitable men and charitable women,
for men who fast and women who fast,
for men who guard their chastity and women who guard [their chastity],
for men who remember God much and for women who remember
for them God has prepared forgiveness and a mighty reward. (Qur’an, 33:35).

For al Faruqi (2000), the ability to perform all the divine requirements is the same for men and women and so is their reward or punishment: “Whether male or female, whoever in faith does a good work for the sake of God will be granted good life and rewarded with great reward” (Qur’an 16:97). The rights to own property, to obtain an education, to

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10 The translation of the Qur'anic text is taken from al Faruqi (1991:26).
marry and to divorce are all granted equally in the Qur’an, and historically practiced as such during the Prophet’s life.

However, the Qur’an does not present this equality “as implying equivalence of natural capacities and talents, or as identity of roles... Both roles call for the greatest possible intelligence and exertion if they are to realize the ultimate purposes of creation” (al Faruqi and al Faruqi 1986: 150). In the socio-economic order and in the realm of family and property, the Qur’an differentiates between the obligations of the two sexes.\(^\text{11}\) The most obvious realms of these different gender roles are financial provision, an exclusively male responsibility, and the demands of motherhood within the family, mainly a female responsibility.

1.3.1.2. **Islamic Gender Principles vs. Muslim Cultural Practices**

When talking about Islamic gender principle, it is crucial to distinguish between Islamic principles and the “diversity of cultural practices prevalent among its adherents that may or may not be consistent with those teachings” (Badawi 1995: 1). It is important to make such differentiation due to the gap, sometimes very wide, that exists between Islamic gender ideals and common customary practices in Muslim nations and in Muslim communities in the West.

In trying to bridge the gap between “modern” Western gender ideologies and “traditional” gender ideologies of their original cultures, Muslim communities in the

\(^{11}\) Both equal and different gender rights and obligations in Islam are discussed in the next chapter.
West are caught between the two ends of the continuum (Akhtar 2007). At one end of this continuum there are the “traditional” cultures’ denials of women’s rights granted by Islam. At the other end, there are the “modern” Western dichotomous limits which paint gender roles and identities into a corner – to either be identical or discriminatory. This dissertation explores the extent to which Somali immigrants use the Islamic gender thought as the mediator – the transnational space that would permit them to adopt heterolocally certain aspects from both cultures without abiding totally by either.

1.3.1.3. The Concept of Ijtihad in Islam

*Ijtihad* is defined as the creative self-exertion of “extracting laws from the primary sources [the Qur’an and the Sunnah]” (Badawi 1995: 2). Muslim scholars’ opinions should constantly be subject to replacement by subsequent interpretations, because previous jurists’ interpretations were affected by the culture and circumstances under which they lived. Due to the pressure of significant contemporary issues, renewed *ijtihad* (interpretation) is always needed (Badawi 1995). In agreement with the concept of *ijtihad*, Muslims are encouraged to reinterpret old laws and regulations in response to new circumstances.

In this research project, *ijtihad* is used to refer to the method through which Muslim immigrants, and, in this case, the Somali immigrants, can adapt to fast and continual changes in their lives in different societies, times and cultures without being detached from the basics of their faith. Among these dynamic aspects in the lives of Muslim immigrants in non-Muslim societies are changes in gender relationships and roles for
both men and women, modifications in the styles of hijab Muslim woman wear, and legitimizing, at times even prioritizing, women’s work outside the house in response to new social, cultural and economic circumstances both within and outside the family.

1.3.2 Gender, Family and Immigration

Researchers point out the importance of employing a gendered approach in analyzing the immigration and integration processes (Mahler 2003; Pessar 1999; Pessar 2007). The need to include the analytical units of gender and the family in migration and integration studies is generated from

the inadequacy of theories and research methods that privileged either individual migrants (usually understood to be male or genderless) or global structures and forces, such as the world system and capital accumulation. The inclusion of such mediating units as gender and families helped researchers better account for the causes, consequences, and processes of international migration. (Pessar 2007: 258)

Exploring the change, or lack of change, in immigrant communities’ gender ideology, roles, relationships and identities has been the focus of many immigration studies (Mahler 2003). The result is a growing literature that addresses the intersection of gender, immigration and integration. Immigration literature has analyzed households and families as key units in the organization and management of migration and integration. Immigrant families and households support their members by socialization, labor allocation, income generation and budgeting (Pessar 2007). Members of immigrant families, in a mixed

\[12] \text{Again, such statements in this study are not to homogenize Muslim women's stances towards covering. For example, a study about Somali women in Melbourne, Australia found that they practiced their Islamic faith diversely. For example, “Somali women might wear the full-length chador, or a veil covering their hair, forehead, shoulders and neck, or brightly colored cloth tied around their hair, and some-particularly younger women- do not wear the veil at all” (McMichael 2002: 181).}
context of solidarity and hierarchy, coordinate the migration process, mobilize people and resources to guarantee successful departure and integration into the host society, and represent a nexus of economic survival amid the multiple and enormous challenges in the new environment (Pessar 1999).

While research on gender and immigration has largely focused on the effect of immigration on women’s individual emancipation and empowerment (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1992; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Pessar 1995), this study seeks to explore the extent to which Somali immigrants’ gender notions, roles, relationships and identities reflect their families’ patterns of integration.

1.3.3. Modes of Integration / Assimilation

In the immigration literature, there are three main modes for immigrants’ integration into the new society: assimilation, differential exclusion or chronic marginalization,\(^{13}\) and transnationalism, on which heterolocalism is based. Assimilation, which is the oldest mode of incorporation, assumes all “other” non-Anglo groups discard their original folk ways, languages and values, or “their way of being in this world,” and abide by Anglo-conformity (Samatar 2004: 8). Although earlier immigrants who came from Europe could fit perfectly into the “assimilation” approaches, applying these traditional assumptions of assimilation on later diverse immigrants has been widely criticized by immigration scholars (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Zelinsky 2001; Alba and Nee 2003). By assuming

\(^{13}\) Other theorists in immigration literature call the phenomenon of immigrants’ isolation/exclusion in their enclaves as ‘racial exclusion,’ a term that has described the position of minority groups, “chiefly African Americans and, to a lesser extent, Native Americans, Puerto Ricans, and others” within the larger society (Alba 1998: 10).
that Western history and cultures are universal, and not particular to the West, assimilationists have put Anglo-conformity as a prerequisite for new immigrants’ acquisition of full membership in the American society. This has brought scholars to question assimilation’s usefulness for minorities and for the mainstream society alike.

Some accord the deficiency of the old assimilation concepts to:

> the expectation that minority groups would inevitably want to shed their own cultures, as if these were old skin no longer possessing any vital force, and wrap themselves in the mantle of Anglo-American culture. The one-sidedness of this conception overlooked the value and sustainability of minority cultures and, in addition, masked barely hidden ethnocentric assumptions about the superiority of Anglo-American culture. Indeed, it has been viewed as a form of ‘Eurocentric hegemony,’ a weapon of the majority for putting minorities at a disadvantage by forcing them to live by cultural standards that are not their own. (Alba and Nee 2003: 1-2)

The assimilation premise of Euro/Anglo supremacy is viewed by critics as an obstacle to the host society benefiting from the potential and energy of the cultures and communities of the newcomers, which could lead to socio-economic renewal and regeneration (Samatar 2004).

“Differential exclusion” refers to the fact that not all immigrants have been considered as “assimilable” by the assimilation promoters (Castles 2002). As a way of trying to control the growing ethnic diversity, the receiving countries have differentiated between immigrants according to their race, at least until lately, and social and cultural background (Castles 2002). In this mode,

> migrants are integrated temporarily into certain societal sub-systems such as the labor market and limited welfare entitlements, but excluded from others such as political participating and national culture. Citizenship is not an option. Since some of the temporary workers generally do stay
Despite official policies, the result is incorporation in a marginal legal and social situation. (Castles 2002: 1155)

What Samatar (2004) calls the “chronic marginality” model describes how geographical enclaves attract newcomers to be close to people of the same background and identity (Castles 2000). Areas of ethnic-clustering can provide newcomers with comfort and support. Not only can individuals benefit by mental and psychological support to survive the intense stresses associated with the early stages of immigration to a new society, but in some cases, the ethnic group might be the source of better socio-economic opportunities for ethnic entrepreneurs (Alba and Nee 2003).

Nevertheless, many of these enclaves can become isolated ghettos characterized by impoverishment, public insecurity and systematic social and political exclusion (Castles 2000). For most immigrant communities in the long run, minority enclaves become the prey of racial discrimination and spatial segregation in which minority individual potentialities and civic vitality are mostly stymied (Castles 2000). Both “assimilation and differential exclusion share an important common principle: that immigration should not bring about significant change in the receiving society” (Castles 2002: 1156). The predominance of these excluded areas, just like the traditional assimilation assumption’s outcomes, can impede the potential for a two-way integration that can foster the interaction and openness between the minority and the mainstream cultures.

Distinguishable from both the conventional unidirectional, ethnocentric assimilation and the isolationism of the chronic marginality modes, the transnational/heterolocalism model
acknowledges the co-existence of both cultures in immigrants’ lives, especially in this age of advanced technology, communication and transportation, and views cultural coexistence as productive for the minority and the mainstream cultures alike (Zelinsky 2001). Heterolocalism is a sociospatial, non-traditional model in the immigration literature developed by Wilbur Zelinsky and Barrett Lee (1998). Heterolocalism is linked to transnationalism, another recent development, “as millions of migrants have begun shaping a novel form of action-space whereby ethnic groups can inhabit two or more countries simultaneously. Such behavior has begun to redefine the meaning of ethnic identity” (Zelinsky 2001: xiv).

Transnationalism includes the processes through which immigrants form and maintain “multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement…and leads to social fields that cross geographic, cultural, and political borders” (Alba and Nee 2003: 145). A growing number of immigrants live dual lives, speak two languages, have homes in two countries, and lead lives that continuously cross two cultural spheres, forming distinctive type of communities (Portes 1998).

Transmigration and transnational social spaces and practices have, since the 1990s, emerged as important topics in sociological and cultural studies (Portes 1996; Guarnizzo and Smith 1998). The term transnational suggests that immigrants' behavior and activities span both tangible and non-material borders. Transmigrants take action, make decisions and develop subjectivities and identities, embedded in networks of relationships, that connect them simultaneously to two or more national cultures (Pessar 2007). Thus,
transnational flows are not restricted to transmigrants physical geographic mobility. With the help of global media, ethnic tourism and religious or secular festivals, they also include multiple exchanges of monetary and non-monetary resources, materials and symbolic objects, commodities and cultural values (Guarnizo and Smith 1998). The result is the occurrence of “deterritorialized identities” and a number of creative ways in which people “experience and constitute lives in expansive, deterritorialized spaces where social borders do not necessarily conform to national borders” (Pessar 1999: 56).

Reflecting the simultaneous identities, cultures and locations of current immigrants, heterolocalism and transnationalism “share a common property: a propensity to leap over boundaries, whether territorial or cultural” (Zelinsky 2001: 124). Heterolocalism is an alternative model that reflects the realities of new waves of non-European immigrants in the new historical context of globalization and advanced communication. Heterolocalism is the theoretical model from which this study draws, aiming to broaden the transnational/heterolocal analysis of immigration, by including Islamic gender discourse as the foundation of Somali immigrants’ negotiation behavior between two different cultures. The extent to which Somali immigrant men and women utilize the Islamic gender texts while reconciling gender notions, roles and relationships between the two cultures is explored using the transnationalist/heterolocalist model of integration.

1.4. **Significance of the Study**

This study contributes to three fields, namely Islamic studies, gender and immigration scholarship, and immigration and integration research.
The last three decades have witnessed a dramatic increase in Muslim immigration to the United States from around the world, including from Somalia. Issues of identity and integration of Muslim-Americans (or American-Muslims), in general, have occupied a significant place in immigration literature. The idealist position of Muslim women in Islam versus the cultural practices within Muslim cultures, and the extent to which these positions have been affected by immigrating to the United States is a topic that has attracted the attention of many studies.

However, the existing literature on Muslim immigrants, their religion, cultures and integration into the host societies has several limitations. Firstly, there is a scarcity of systematic studies of Islam and Muslim societies in Western Sociology. Despite an increasing interest in Muslim societies and cultures, due to world events and growing globalised links between Muslim and Western countries, research on Islam, especially from its original resources, the Qur’an, hadith and Muslim interpretations, is surprisingly underdeveloped. Bryan Turner (1975) refers to Islam as the grossly neglected field in Western sociology when writing,

An examination of any sociology of religion textbook published in the last fifty years will show the recurrent and depressing fact that sociologists are either not interested in Islam or have nothing to contribute to Islamic scholarship...There is no major tradition of sociology of Islam and modern research and publications on Islamic issues are minimal. Most academic sociologists who are responsible for teaching sociology of

Until recently, studying Islam “was largely the exotic focus of a relatively small group of academics who wrote books about it mainly for another’s consumption” (Ahmed and Donnan 1994: 1).

Secondly, not only has Western sociology ignored the systematic study of Islam, but, on the rare occasions it has undertaken such study, there is a noticeable degree of distortion and inconsistency in the results achieved (Ba-Yunus 1981). Among the reasons for the shortcomings in Western Sociology’s study of Islam are the misrepresentation and the Western researchers’ hegemony that dims the voices of those under study. Of the few studies about Islam which have been undertaken by Western intellectuals, only a few of whom were Muslims, the “Muslim voice itself [whether as subjects of study or as researchers] was seldom heard” (Ahmed and Donnan 1994: 1).

The need for Muslim scholars’ voices to represent their religion and cultures is, therefore, urgent. The age of globalization and world events have brought the necessity of studying Islam and Muslims “not as an esoteric or marginal exercise but as something that concerns the global community” (Ahmed and Donnan 1994: 2). The events of September 116

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11\textsuperscript{th} along with the subsequent Islamophobia encountered by Muslim people in western societies “have highlighted the urgency to increase understanding and awareness of Islam and the experiences of Muslims throughout the world” (Jawad and Benn 2003: xii).

The third limitation within current literature on Muslims in the West is that the position of gender and Muslim women, in particular, has often been “ill-conceived” and “grossly mis-represented” in western studies (Jawad and Benn 2003: xiv). “The voices of Muslim women, striving to keep their religious identity [including covering] in Western contexts, are seriously under-represented in academic research” (Jawad and Benn 2003: xiv).

Giving a study’s “subjects” a voice has been one of the most revolutionary contributions to qualitative research. This study is committed to fully and transparently conveying the participants’ voice and making their rich accounts and narrations the foundation for forming theoretical assumptions.

The bridging points between gender and Islam sorely need to be studied, especially by allowing Muslim women in predominantly western cultures to speak for themselves. A focus on the multi-faceted relationship between dynamics of gender and migration may offer new insights into the ways in which identities are forged and negotiated in the daily lives of immigrants (Sorensen 1998). Perceiving the integration style as the outcome of intersectional Islam and gender influence, the central contribution of this study, is also needed, since gender perceptions and practices among Muslims are viewed by some as the parameter against which Muslim immigrants’ incorporation into the new society is
measured (Jawad and Benn 2003). The intersectional relationships between Islam, gender and Muslim immigrants’ integration has not yet been addressed.

This study’s significance is also drawn from the fact that the Somali population in the United States is rapidly growing. Studies on Somali communities’ cultural origins and choices in shaping their relationship with the host culture are few. Research on Islam, gender and integration within the Somali immigrant family, as well as in the larger Muslim communities in the West, is even scarcer. The need for qualitative studies that facilitate mutual understanding and communication between the majority society and the Somali minority is also growing. Since studies of Somali immigrants in the American society, especially where Islam and gender's roles and relationships are the focus, are few, my research will be among the first whose aim is to explicitly understand this new immigrant group and how an Islamic gender framework impacts its form of integration in a transnational age.

While immigration studies have intensively investigated economic aspects of the transnational practices of immigrant families, mainly via remittances, other aspects, especially religious belief systems, have been under-investigated (Gardner and Grillo 2002). Although some studies discuss transnational Islamic religious organizations (Ahmed and Donnan 1994; Metcalf 1996), transnational Islamic activities and beliefs at the household level are absent from the literature. Household-level analysis of the Islamic gender notions and practices among Somali immigrant families offer a valuable contribution to understanding the relationship between Islamic gender principles, as these
immigrants understand them, gender practices and heterolocalism as a pattern of integration in a transnational context.

By focusing on gender, this dissertation contributes to the feminist literature on immigration, in which researchers call for the inclusion of gender, and emphasize the family as a site of struggle and negotiation for power. Inclusion of gender, household and families in immigration literature has been the result of “a growing consensus about the inadequacy of theories and research methods that privileged either individual migrants (usually understood to be male or genderless) or global structures and forces, such as the world system and capital accumulation” (Pessar 2007: 258). Results of the dissertation contribute to western feminists’ understanding of how gender functions in non-western cultures, and how this role might be affected by immigration.

To the best of my knowledge, there is no in-depth study to date on the Islamic gender discourse and the integration pattern of the Somali family, or any other Muslim immigrant community, in the West. This work aims to remedy this deficiency by examining relevant issues from the start. The results of this study have the potential to produce, in addition to the previously noted theoretical contributions, practical benefits for both the Somali community's integration and for policy makers of immigrant integration programs. The results will be useful to organizations supporting the Somali immigrant community in Columbus, such as local non-profit organizations. I hope this study will benefit Somali immigrants by reflecting their own explanations of the cultural
transformations they are experiencing as a result of being uprooted from their home land and becoming part of a different cultural environment.

1.5. **Background of the Somali Community in Columbus, Ohio**

This section addresses the historical and cultural background of the Somali community in Columbus, Ohio, who shares this background with other Somali communities in the Western diaspora, including the United States. Four aspects are covered:

- A brief review the landmarks in Somali history that have influenced and shaped its current conditions and identity.
- Somali cultural perspectives on gender and the family.
- Perspectives explaining the main reasons behind Somalis’ massive migration from their country are underscore.
- Multiple difficulties Somali immigrants, especially refugees, encounter in the American host society, especially in Columbus, Ohio, where the second largest Somali community in the United States resides.

1.5.1. **Somalia and the Somalis: A Brief History**

The last two decades have witnessed an increase in the numbers of Somali immigrants and refugees to North America. The situation in Somalia, since the beginning of the 1990s, has been characterized by chaos, the loss of centralized government control, inter-tribal conflict, warfare and foreign intervention (Coleman 2006; Nur 2007). Fleeing the terror of numerous wars in Somalia, Somali communities around the world have grown steadily since the early 1990s. Today, Somalis constitute a complex transnational set of
communities spanning the world from Australia to Western Europe and North America (Kapteijns and Arman 2004).

Somalia is part of the Arab World, a member of the Arab League, and a country whose religion is Islam (al Tahiri 1977). Mohamed Mukhtar (1995) finds Somalia as the only African country, whose population is virtually all Muslim, following the Sunni doctrine of Islam. Even though the origins of Somali people is debated, some assert that the ancestors of 95% of Somalis migrated from the Yemeni tribe of Himiar in the Arabian Peninsula to settle in the African Horn, while the remaining 5% are descendants of the African Bantu tribe (al Tahiri 1977). Others, however, assert that the Arab influence on the demographic composition of Somalis has been exaggerated (Kusow 1995). Because of the harsh, dry landscape of the horn of Africa where they live, Somali people are traditionally nomadic in their lifestyle. In the majority of nomadic populations, there are divisions based on clans and sub-clans, some of which speak distinct dialects (Bryden and Steiner 1998).

Imperialism has been one of the strongest foreign influences affecting Somali society. During the old colonial era in the nineteenth century, Somalia was occupied by more than five colonial powers, each of which imposed its own language, currency, educational and racist systems on the region under its control. Somali land, because of its strategic

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17 Sunni Islam is one of the two main branches of Islam. Sunni Muslims consider all of the first four caliphs as rightful successors to the Prophet Mohammed.

18 Tribalism or clannism is defined as “the real or perceived tendency of individuals to support—irrespective of rationality, morality, or justice—the interests of their ‘tribe’ or ‘clan,’ that is, a group that defines itself in terms of (fictive or real) common descent” (Kapteijns and Ali 1999: 80).
geographical location and its rich natural resources, was divided between the British, Italian, French, Ethiopian and Kenyan colonial controls of governments, with the latter two occupying parts of Somalia with European support (al Tahiri 1977; Yahia and Mahanna 1981).

Since independence in 1960, Somalia has struggled to build a national state. However, competition between the two world powers at that time, the United States and the Soviet Union, with both wanting military bases in Somalia, was a major factor behind the repeated failure of Somalis to reach a strong, unified national state (Yahia and Mahanna 1981). The heritage of poverty, corruption, chaos and tribal/class conflict the colonial powers left behind has greatly impeded the Somali people from reaching their ambition of a strong and stable state (al Tahiri 1977). Currently, Somalia and Somalis are still suffering catastrophic conditions under tribal conflicts and the Ethiopian occupation (Omar 2008).

1.5.2. Somalis’ Communal and Islamic Identity

There are secondary classifications that categorize Somali people, based on clan affiliation and economic and cultural lifestyles, such as pastoral nomadic communities, traders in the coastal cities and towns or farmers (Kapteijns 1994). Somalis, in general, nevertheless have a strong sense of collective identity and cultural pride. During the colonial period, Soomaalim, or the ‘national, Somali communal identity’ was developed by the nationalist programs that “denounced divisive clan identity and loyalty and emphasized a common Somali and Islamic identity in the face of British pressure to
constitute clan-based political parties” (Kapteijns 1994: 227). Soomaalimino grew in the framework of the Africa-wide, anti-colonial movement for political independence and the specifically Somali nationalist aspiration for the reunification of the five Somali territories (Kapteijns 1994). After several civil wars, however, the Somalis’ tribal/clan, identity has regained its power and comes second only to the Somalis’ Islamic identity.

Bryden and Steiner (1998) affirm that Islam is the most ancient and pervasive influence on the social lives of Somali people. By the 10th century, Muslim Arabian migrants and traders had succeeded in reaching the Somali shores, “bringing with them the faith that has since become a defining feature of Somali identity” (Bryden and Steiner 1998: 10).

Islam infused new and powerful values into the existing Somali cosmology. Among these were a deeper spirituality and a greater sense of piety. At the worldly level, Islam also brought Qanoon, a set of laws to guide the behavior of the believers (Samatar 2007: 53).

Islam has been the central moral and social order for the Somali society. For example, Somalis from all tribes have been diligent in sending their children to the duqsi19 to learn the Qur’an in their early years before joining the regular school system (al Tahiri 1977). For the heterogeneous Somali society, with various clans and dialects, and lifestyles ranging from pastoral, to farmers and traders, Islam has been “an essential coalescing factor...[and] Shari’ah (Islamic law) has long co-existed with xeer, or unwritten Somali customary law...” (Bryden and Steiner 1998: 10).

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19 ‘Duqsi’ refers to places where children study passages from the Qur’an in Arabic, memorize and repeat them before the teacher (Carlson 2004). Duqsi programs include educational sessions about Islamic morals and acts of worship.
For the diasporic Somalis, Islam and the collective Somaliness are the two main sources of their cultural and social identity, according to Livwien Kapteijns and Abukar Arman (2004). After the weakening of Soomaalinimo, because of the civil wars,

> the new public communal identity that has emerged is more explicitly based on Islam. Even though, after September 11, 2001, Islam in the USA is often viewed by the mainstream as ‘public enemy number one,’ due to the authority it has in the Somali community, it is strongly imbued with power and relevance. Within the Somali community it is in many ways an enormous source of strength. It often brings out the best in its members, brings and holds them together, and connects them to a national and transnational community of Muslims (Kapteijns and Arman 2004: 34).

Immediately after their arrival in a new society, one of the first priorities for Somali immigrants is the establishment of duqsies. These have become a prominent feature of Somali immigrant communities. The recent comers often join previous immigrants and live close to them in the same towns, neighborhoods and buildings. “Their solidarity and mutual support in times of emergency, such as labor disputes, illness, or death, are extraordinary...They feel strongly about their cultural values and habits as well as their religion, Islam, which appears to strengthen their resilience” (Kapteijns and Arman 2004: 27).

1.5.3. Gender and the Extended Family in Somali Culture

The position of Somali women is not homogeneous throughout Somalia; positions can vary due to clan, class, geographical location and economic lifestyle differences (Kapteijns 1994; Bryden and Steiner 1998). Some think women in nomadic and agricultural communities make more significant contributions to public life than those in
towns and cities and many urban Somali women are restricted to domestic sphere responsibilities (Bryden and Steiner 1998).

Somali clan traditions are viewed by some as an explicit expression of unequal gender outlook and practices (Kapteijns 1994). When comparing the pre-colonial and contemporary Somali society, both are characterized as “patriarchal [that] devalue women’s roles and significance to a great extent” (Kapteijns 1994: 213). Even during Siyaad Barre’s\(^{20}\) socialist “state feminism,” in which the government tried to enforce secular legislation and practices to replace Islamic and customary law, only a minority of elite women, mainly urban, benefited practically from new educational and economic opportunities (Kapteijns 1994; Bryden and Steiner 1998).

Clear sex and age-based division of labor dominated the Somali communities, where men and women of different ages had specific and distinct labor tasks. Nevertheless, there was some flexibility in the division of labor; in the pastoral community, for example, if no young girl was available, flocks of goats and sheep might be herded by a boy or even a grown woman or man. However, the categories of appropriate work for each sex and age-group were clearly established, which allowed for specialization and the development of considerable skills (Kapteijns 1994: 17; Samatar 2007).

Gender roles are linked to relationships within the family and on the whole community’s survival. In describing the pre-colonial social and economic conditions in Somalia,

\(^{20}\)Siyaad Barre was a Somali leader who ruled Somalia with a communist ideology from 1970 to 1986.
Samatar (2007) writes that the Somalis’ livelihood was based on the household and, for the most part, was self-sufficient. This correlation between gender relationships within the household and its survival created a complex age- and gender-division of labor, in which

womenfolk were primarily responsible for the management of domestic concerns, including the condition of the portable home or Agal; men dealt most with issues of security, knowledge about the weather and the range, general welfare of the herd, and formal relations with the world outside, including relatives. Finally, young boys and girls were assigned to look after small ruminants grazing around the homestead (Samatar 2007: 52).

Western researchers’ evaluations of Somali women’s status vary appreciably. Colonial anthropologists (1940s-1960s) considered the male-female relationship in Somalia as one of “noble-slave” and described Somali women as “chattel, a commodity, and a creature with little power” (Ahmed 1995: 159). The Eurocentric approach is used in seeing Somali women as “others,” and as part of the non-European, “exotic” Oriental, where women are presented as subordinate.

More recently, critical western researchers opposed the Orientalist portrayal of Somali women as oppressed and without political or economic power. Rather, they assert that Somali women are independent, strong, and have economic property of their own (Ahmed 1995). These critical “post-colonial” studies try to understand gender relationships in Somali society in the historical and social context of Somalia. Somali

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21 Orientalism is the study of the Orient, the Islamic East; its cultures, people, languages…etc. by the Occident, or western scholars. According to Edward Said (1978), Orientalist scholars are accused of producing false image of the Orient and Orientals, and that the relationship between the Orient and the Occident has been a relationship of “power” and “domination” (Said 1978).
society has clear and specific gender roles that often correspond to gender organizations, mainly in the extended family. Unlike western societies, the family unit in Somalia is defined as the extended family, in which a woman’s relationships to her own lineage maintain its strength and durability even after marriage (Ahmed 1995). After getting married, a Somali woman does not become a member of her husband’s lineage, nor does she change her name as is the case in the West. Her roles as sister and mother are equally emphasized as her role as a wife, and her link to her mother’s lineage maintains its strength (Ahmed 1995).

In the family, traditionally, both Somali men and women have been “extremely family-and child-oriented, with motherhood and childrearing central to women’s social status and self-perception” (Kapteijns and Arman 2004: 28). The extended family’s relationships and regulations were, and are still, to a great extent, strong and influential in the lives of Somalis. Kinship, a combination of blood-ties and customary law, produced the foundation of social, economic and political life. “Each household, Reer, was led by the oldest male, usually the father or grandfather, who was expected, particularly at a certain age, to have acquired a degree of competence in local history, culture, and values” (Samatar 2007: 52).

The strong extended family relationships and social networks are the basis of continuous and deep transnational ties among Somali immigrants around the world (Sharmanie
Somali transnational families\textsuperscript{22} make collective decisions about living arrangements of relatives; which family members live together and where, how to meet the extended family’s obligations across borders, how to maintain interdependent transnational relationships, and how to negotiate tensions and conflicts resulting from the contradictory ambitions of family individuals (Sharmanie 2007).

1.5.4. Women between Somali Culture and Islam

Islam considers men and women as equals in origin and grants women equal rights of education and autonomous economic property and decisions. Some aspects of the Somali culture, as with all other Muslim cultures, are in obvious contradiction with Islam on women’s rights. Although Islam constitutes an integral part of their communal identity and unwritten constitution, Somalis’ customary law often denies women and girls some rights granted to them by Islamic law. For example, even though Somali society values women’s labor as indispensable to its sustenance, many women are banned from their right of economic legal autonomy and do not hold formal positions of political and religious authority (Kapteijns 1994). In addition, Somali customary law “imposed many rules nonexistent in Islam and disregarded or sidestepped some specific Islamic legal provisions, such as those governing women’s inheritances” (Kapteijns 1994:216).

Females are typically valued less highly than males, regarded as intellectually incapable, and a Somali proverb says, “Knowledge cannot come to reside in a bosom that has contained milk” (Kapteijns 1994: 217; Bryden and Steiner 1998: 27). It is accepted that a

\textsuperscript{22} “Transnational Families” are those whose individual members maintain strong and continuous relationships as they physically separate to different nation-states (Sharmanie 2007).
woman who gives birth to boys “earns greater prestige than mothers of girls only” (Bryden and Steiner 1998: 27). In case of financial hardships, girls are deprived of educational opportunities in favor of their brothers.

In the United States, a western capitalist cultural milieu, women’s rights for education and pursuing careers have long been established. In the past few decades, they have been strongly promoted to the extent of devaluing women’s unpaid domestic roles. This dissertation examines whether moving to the United States, and experiencing such cultural contrasts motivates Somali immigrants to negotiate gender notions and practices between the two cultures.

1.5.5. Reasons for Somalis’ Migration

Immigration scholars debate the main causal reasons that force individuals and groups to leave their homeland to establish new lives in foreign and unfamiliar places. Alejandro Portes and Jozsef Borocz (1996) criticize the “orthodox” theories of “push-pull” factors that provide a simplistic approach for interpreting international migration. For Portes and Borocz (1996), these conventional theories explain migration as individuals or groups “pushed” from “poor backward” countries to more “advanced” countries where they are attracted by “pull” factors, mainly economic prosperity. By examining both micro factors, such as individual optional decisions to migrate, and macro structural factors such as international relations’ determinants, a more comprehensive analysis explains migration as a result of economic, but, more significantly, political dynamics.
While conventional theories offer shallow portrayals of “push-pull” factors, such economic and political realities are not simply “natural” conditions in either the sending or the receiving countries. Rather, one should focus on a larger context of global relationships between the countries of the South, or what are called “Third World” countries, such as Somalia, and those of the North, such as the United States (Portes and Borocz 1996). Relationships within a global context have generated the conditions of both the sending and the receiving societies.

Several macro-structural push and pull factors underlie Somalis’ mostly compulsory immigration throughout the world. The most important pull factor in the United States is the passage of the Immigration Act of 1965 and the Refugee Act of 1980. These two Acts, combined with the Family Reunification law, which allows for the reunification of the family, children, spouse and parent(s) of American citizens to join them in the United States, helped the growth of the Somali immigrant population in Columbus.

Push factors are the unstable and catastrophic political, humanitarian and economic conditions in Somalia which not only persist but have negatively increased. Arising from the calamities Somalis have suffered in their country, many first migrated as an immediate act of survival to neighboring countries. From these temporary destinations most of the immigrants take the second journey to what is perceived to be more desirable

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23 The Immigration Act of 1965 abolished the national-origins quota system, which placed restrictions on non-European immigrants to the USA and stated the preference for “natives of Western Hemisphere countries.” The Refugee Act of 1980 “provided the first permanent and systematic procedure for the admission and effective resettlement of refugees of special humanitarian concern to the United States” (Waters and Ueda 2007: 695).
places, especially to North America and Europe. As a result of the instability, and, in particular, the devastating wars from 1990 onward, large numbers of Somalis have migrated to different countries over recent decades. Somali immigrant communities are now found in the diaspora all around the world.

Micro-analysis pays more attention to individual differences in encouraging migration flow over time. Individual differences explain why all people in one poor country do not migrate and why those who are most impoverished do not migrate. Individual differences also explain why ethnic groups concentrate in specific areas in a receiving country. The most important micro factor in Somalis’ immigration, which mostly holds true for the first-wave migration before the civil wars, were individuals motivated “by a personal sense of curiosity and adventure” seeking educational and work opportunities (Kapteijns and Arman 2004: 20). Chain migration, or familial and social networks, is another micro factor behind Somalis’ growing numbers in Columbus. Through these networks individuals are often supported in their emigration bid to join relatives who preceded them in settling down in a new land (Portes and Borocz 1996).

1.5.6. In the New Host Society

Minneapolis and Columbus are, respectively, the first- and second-most popular destinations for Somali immigrants and refugees in the United States. Somali communities in these two cities are growing not just from new refugees but from Somalis who primarily settled elsewhere then moved in search of work, or to join family or friends (Edward 2001). The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services estimated the
number of Somali population in Franklin County to be only 15,000, while a Somali community organization has reported a number as high as 80,000 (Ferenchik 2009). Although it is difficult to determine the exact number of Somalis living in each city, it is estimated, from informants’ accounts, that Columbus has 30,000 to 40,000 Somalis.

The Somali community in Columbus is composed of “first-wave” immigrants who started arriving to the United States in the late 1960s when “many young men came to the U.S. for work, study, or both” and the “second-wave” whose numbers are vastly larger than those of the first wave and who have arrived as refugees and asylum seekers, since 1990, to escape civil wars and political oppression (Kapteijns and Arman 2004). The second-wave includes those who experienced the greatest terrors and suffered the biggest losses. “Many fled with no more than the clothes on their backs, and often suffered great hardship in the refugee camps or in the overcrowded homes of relatives already living abroad” (Kapteijns and Arman 2004: 20).

Most first-wave immigrants hold good educational and professional qualifications, and work in academic and governmental institutions, or run successful private businesses. Integration conditions are more challenging for the second-wave of the Somali community in Columbus. Many of these refugees would not have left their homeland had the civil war not forced them out. Difficulties of adjusting to the new environment make their compulsory immigration even harsher to live with. Even those who are highly educated and professionals have had to sacrifice their professional standing “Once
doctors, lawyers and engineers, they are now driving taxis, working on factory assembly lines or packing meat” (Pyle 2004: A8).

Somali immigrants and refugees, in particular, are struggling to overcome multiple obstacles for safe and decent lives for themselves and their families. These impediments can be classified into those related to racism, housing, transportation, jobs, lack of fluency in English language, unreceptive educational environment for their children, religious discrimination in the workplace, and the necessity of women’s work outside the house in the absence of extended family support.

Somali immigrants are shocked by mainstream American racial discrimination and racist stereotypes. Somalis “do not regard their black skin as the liability or handicap that mainstream society often insists it is…[and they struggle to reject] the negative social categories and straightjackets United States mainstream society has readied for them” (Kapteijns and Arman 2004: 28). Back home, Somalis’ understanding of “blackness” is totally different to that defined in the United States. In their homeland, the system of differentiation is a cultural and social one that is based on tribalism, with some tribes or clans seen as higher than others due to their occupations or social behavior, which does not have anything to do with physical features, like skin color (Kusow 2006).

Although many refugee Somali families have low housing costs in Columbus, it is still not very beneficial for them. Low cost houses are too small for many of these families
who can have as many as six children. Moreover, families cannot rent apartments without a job or credit history (Pyle 2004).

Most of the refugees, in contrast to the first-wave of Somali immigrants, arrived in their new country “with skills and wisdom for which the new environment had no use” (Kapteijns and Arman 2004: 20). With their weak English, finding work has been one of the most difficult processes faced by Somali refugees. Despite the many pitfalls Somali refugees face in starting new lives, being group-oriented, and entrepreneurial and merchants by “nature,” as many Somalis believe, they have established as many as 300 businesses during the few years they have lived in Columbus (Rutledge 2007). The local Somali community’s strong sense of solidarity and the small businesses have lessened, to a great degree, the intensity of this problem by employing Somali individuals who would otherwise remain unemployed in mainstream work opportunities. However, the need for the larger society to train and accommodate these refugees’ special conditions is urgent for Somalis to integrate and for the larger society to benefit from their potential.

Children of Somali refugees face many obstacles to succeed and integrate smoothly into the American educational system. Although there are large numbers of Somalis, “especially among those who came before 1990, who are well educated and reasonably well-off, many second-wave refugees live in economically challenged, minority-dominated neighborhoods, with children attending large public schools that were not adequately prepared to receive them” (Kapteijns and Arman 2004: 22). Before reaching the United States, many of these children had stayed in refugees’ camps in neighboring
countries where they missed several years of education. Interrupted schooling, lack of English proficiency and basic learning skills, and a hostile mainstream environment toward black minorities have all contributed to these children’s educational deficit. Just like most children of minority groups, who live close to other American minorities, Somali refugees’ children are often discriminated against and attend sub-standard schools (Kapteijns and Arman 2004). A concern is that the majority of these children will be pushed to follow what immigration scholars call the “downward mobility” of second-generation immigrants (Portes and Rumbaut 2001).

Due to some employers’ failure to understand and accommodate Muslim culture, some Somalis have experienced difficult times while trying to practice their religion during work hours. Observing prayer times and covering for women are the most prominent examples in this regard. A Muslim must perform the act of worship, salah, five times a day at fixed times. Although prayer time does not exceed five minutes, some employers, especially in warehouse or assembly jobs, are not flexible in allowing their Somali workers to perform their prayers while at work, and some Somali workers were fired after asking for time to pray. Muslim women with hijab have even tougher times than men, to the extent of considering it a “victory” when some Somali women obtained permission to retain their hijab while at work at Ohio State University Medical Center (Pyle 2004).

24 “Downward mobility,” “second-generation decline,” and “segmented assimilation” are all terms in the immigration literature that indicate that children of immigrants who are poor and “visible” or “concentrate in clustering areas” are at the greatest risk of doing worse than their parents did, and to assimilate into the American underclass, and permanent poverty (Zhou and Bankston 1998; Portes and Rumbaut 2001).
Women who never worked outside the home in Somalia do not speak English, do not have transport to get to work nor relatives to care for their children, but are striving to meet the welfare-reform rules that require all adults to work or go to school. This difficult situation can be particularly distressing for women whose husbands have died or could not come to the United States (Pyle 2004).

The historical and cultural landmarks in the Somali history and culture, are critical in understanding Somali immigrants’ ways of utilizing the Islamic gender concepts when negotiating cultural differences and relating to the larger non-Muslim society in the United States.

1.6. Research Questions

Previous studies found that Somali immigrants in the diaspora continue to maintain dense networks of obligations and traditions, and strong relationships with their original land, culture and extended families (McGown 1999; Kapteijns and Arman 2004: 22; Leitner 2004; Sharmanie 2007). Even where Somali immigrants do not have relatives in Somalia, they establish and maintain social, familial and financial links with relatives and co-tribes who have settled in other host societies. In applying the transnational/heterolocalism theoretical perspective on the Somali immigrants' social and cultural behavior, this dissertation assesses two major issues:
First, the extent to which Somali immigrants cite Islamic gender texts while bringing together gender practices of both the “traditional” Somali culture and the “modern” American mainstream’s culture.

Second, the extent to which Somali immigrants’ reconciliation of two different cultures through Islam, could be an indication of their emergent hybrid identity and transnational/heterolocalist pattern of integration into the larger host society.

This dissertation is based on “grounded theory,” which draws from interpretive sociology to legitimate obtaining knowledge by revealing how participants understand and conceptualize the phenomenon studied. The grounded theory approach is based on the tenet that theory must be grounded in, or emerge from, the data (Chamberlain 2003). This study is based on the assumption that a qualitative analysis of the participants’ accounts could lead to a genuine understanding of the potential role Somali immigrants’ understanding of Islamic gender principles can play in the formation of their integration pattern. Thus, a great portion of the analysis has been devoted to present the participants’ accounts, or their “voice.” The goal is to develop a grounded perspective of how the Islamic gender principles, which do not necessarily identify with any specific culture’s practices, appear in the participants’ accounts as an intermediary between the two different cultures in which Somali immigrants live. Somali immigrants’ conceptualization of the Islamic gender texts, along with their daily negotiations of gender practices, can provide an indication of their heterolocal style of integration into the new society.
Grounded theorists, rather than forming research questions as specific hypotheses, believe research questions must be open and general to allow for the emergence of themes from data analysis (Glaser and Strauss 1967). The general purpose of this study is to unmask the richness, complexities and intersectional nature of Islam, gender and integration in Somali immigrants’ everyday lives from analyzing the accounts of respondents.

From qualitative analyses of thirty eight interviews with Somali immigrants and refugees, the following themes, most of which emerged during data analysis, are examined in this dissertation:

- To what extent have Somali immigrants’ “traditional” notions of femininity, or women’s gender identity, along with women’s rights been renegotiated after migrating to the United States and being exposed to “modernity”?

- To what extent have Somali families' “traditional” values of gender roles and relationships been redefined? I am particularly concerned with gender role expectations in terms of housework and child rearing, income earning and providing financially for the family and domestic decision-making power relating to activities and finances within the Somali family.

- To what extent do Somali wives participate in decision-making relating to their families' outside activities? Here I am mainly interested in those activities that contribute to forming these families’ identities and integration style into the American mainstream.
To what extent have Somali “traditional” values of gender roles outside the house been altered? Here, I am particularly concerned with courtship patterns and sexuality.

How have respondents’ personal interpretations (ijtihad) of Islamic texts affected their selective adoption from both the ‘traditional’ Somali and the ‘modern’ American cultures? To what extent could this employment of Islamic gender perspectives reflect the transnational/heterolocal identities and lifestyle of Somali immigrant families?

What gender and family aspects of original Somali culture and American mainstream culture have Somali immigrants maintained, abandoned, adopted or rejected?

1.7. **Organization of the Dissertation**

This chapter provides a conceptual framework for the study, a social and cultural background of the Somali immigrants in the US, and the significance of the present study in Islamic, immigration and gender literature. Chapter Two presents a review of literature on immigration and integration, gender and immigration, and Islamic gender principles. Chapter Three provides a detailed description of the research methods used to conduct this study in the field and for analyzing the data. Chapters Four and Five are devoted to analyzing the participants’ accounts and derived themes. These data are analyzed to explore ways of contextualizing Islamic and cultural gender concepts, and indications of a heterolocal integration style. Chapter Six concludes with findings and includes comments on the dissertation’s limitations and suggestions for related future research.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter is divided into three parts, each of which reviews the literature on one of the study’s main topics. These are Islamic gender principles, gender and immigration and the transnational/heterolocal integration model. It is important to link these three fields of literature to adequately understand how their understanding of Islamic gender texts and their negotiation of gender practices in the new society reflect Somali immigrants’ heterolocalist pattern of integration into the American mainstream.

2.1. Islamic Gender Principles

The word Islam is derived from the Arabic root ‘SLM’ which can mean, among other things, peace, purity, tranquility and submission (Abdalati 1989). Islam views itself as the last message of Allah, the One and the Same God, to humanity. Judaism, Christianity and Islam are considered links, among others, in a long ancient chain that has connected earth to heaven through a succession of messengers, since Adam till the last Prophet; Mohammad (al Faruqi 1981). Islam has proclaimed that it “was not a new religion but an old one, indeed, the oldest...the religion of all the prophets, the religion God conveyed to Adam when ‘He taught him the names of things’” 25 (al Faruqi and al Faruqi 1986: 107).

25 Qur’an 2:31 (The first number indicates the surah or chapter. The second indicates the ayah or verse.)
Muslims believe the Qur’an, the holy book of Islam, is God’s word as revealed to Mohammad. The Qur’anic texts include not only the rituals and principles of faith that guide Muslims in their spiritual lives, but also the basic principles and rules governing worldly matters. The part of Islam that regulates people’s everyday lives is called *shari’ah*, or Islamic law. Islam is considered by its followers not only as spiritual guidance and creeds, but also as a formula for daily life; an ideology which affects its followers’ social, political, economic, psychological and aesthetic life (al Faruqi 1991).

The Qur’anic verses (ayat) that are related to the *shari’ah* are subject to human interpretations according to changes in time or place. “*Ijtihad*” is the Islamic term referring to the re-interpretation practice that guarantees constant revival of principles. For example, Muslim family law is one field in which Muslim scholars have employed *ijtihad* to accommodate changes in gender realities over recent years. John Esposito (1982) writes that Muslim family structures, especially woman’s status and role, remained mostly constant during the first centuries of Islam. Classic Islamic law reflects the society of that time and could therefore remain effective until the modern period, or the beginning of the 20th century, when Muslim societies began to meet the challenge of Western colonization and “modernization.” Muslim women’s status has been changing due to expanding educational and employment opportunities, and the need for a new *ijtihad* or a re-interpretation of family Islamic law has become greater (Esposito 1982).

*Shari’ah* is derived not only from the *Qur’an*, but also from the *Sunnah* and the *ijtihad*. The *Qur’an* is the book that Muslims believe to be divine guidance for all mankind and
the final revelation of God. The *Sunnah* is the second primary source of Islamic principles and *shari’ah*, and is constituted of the Prophet Mohammad’s sayings, actions, known as *hadiths*, or his approval of other’s sayings and actions. *Ijtihad* is the scholars’ interpretations of texts in the primary sources. *Ijtihad* are not equal in authority to the two primary sources of Islamic *shari’ah*, and can be replaced by newer interpretations following changes in time or place.

It is important when discussing Islamic gender ideology to identify the primary sources of Islam, the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah* of Prophet Mohammad, as different from scholars’ opinions or interpretations. Islamic principles do not promote any specific culture, race or tradition. Historically, Islam’s universalism allowed Muslims in new areas to reintegrate, through *ijtihad*, Islamic principles to their local cultures.

The following section presents the main aspects of Islamic principles relevant to women’s lives and the family. These aspects include family and gender relationships, gender roles within the family, extended family, women’s careers and legal rights.

### 2.1.1 Family and Gender Relationships

The importance attached to marriage and family life in Islam is reflected in the many Islamic laws aimed at supporting and protecting the institution of the family. Within the family, gender relationships are portrayed as intimate and complementary. When creating man and woman, the Creator built in them a mutual correspondence so that each would find contentment in the other. The *Qur'an* calls man and woman a “garment” for each
other, “signifying their reciprocal closeness to each other (what is physically and continuously closer to oneself than one's clothing?), their mutual interdependence” (al Faruqi 1984: 45).

Pre-marital and extra-marital sexual relationships are prohibited and considered not only as individual sins that harm the involved parties, but also irresponsible behavior that produces social ills for the whole society (al Faruqi and al Faruqi 1986). Marriage is recommended for every individual Muslim; when God constituted humanity into male and female, He established mutual affection between them to find love and quiescence in each other.²⁶ The following excerpt explains Islam’s view of sex and marriage:

*Celibacy is condemned and marriage is encouraged.... Islam is free of the preconception of woman as temptress, as source of evil and death, or as cause of the fall of humanity. Sex and procreation carry no stigma, being in themselves natural like food, growth, and death, and having been instituted by God as integral elements of the process of existence and life, the very medium and mat`eriel of ethics and religion*  
(al Faruqi and al Faruqi 1986: 149).

However, marriage is not considered a sacred ritual unaffected by human conditions and wishes; its requirements are based on the two parties’ announced agreement and include conditions. Al Faruqi and al Faruqi (1986) explain the worldly aspects of a marriage contract in Islam and the necessity of the two parties’ agreement for validating the contract when they state,

*MARRIAGE NOT BEING A SACRAMENT, ITS CONTRACT IS CIVIL AGREEMENT, WHOSE TERMS MAY BE ANYTHING AGREEABLE TO THE TWO PARTIES. ONCE EXECUTED, THE*

²⁶ Qur’an 31:21
contract regulates the life of the married couple, their interrelation on the economic or any other level, as well as the termination of marriage. (p. 149)

Throughout the marriage and even after its dissolution both partners’ conduct is regulated by contract (al Faruqi and al Faruqi 1986).

In the marriage arrangement, in addition to the individuals’ free decision, families’ role and parents’ consent are important and respected. In Muslim societies, “prearranged marriages have been the rule, though marriages of two individuals committed to each other have always been known and accepted. In all cases, agreement of the parties to the marriage is an indispensable prerequisite [for a valid Islamic marriage contract]” (al Faruqi and al Faruqi 1986: 149).

2.1.2. Gender Roles within the Family

In Islamic texts, the fundamental principle of man and woman relationships is equality. Maysam al Faruqi (2000) describes the basic premises of this relationship when she interprets verses of the Qur'an, writing,

The absence of gender in referring to the foundations of humanity is remarkable. When God creates humankind, the word used is khalifa, which applies to both men and women. When God offers His vicegerency to the universe, it is humankind (al-insan) that accepts it (Qur'an 33:72). When the Qur'an speaks of the origin of humankind, it refers to ‘the male and female from whom you sprang out’ and has Adam and Eve created from a single soul. When the first sin is committed, it is both Adam and Eve who are at fault. They both repent and are both forgiven...Nowhere does the Qur'an affirm a difference based on race or gender in the endowment of intelligence, ethics, talents, or anything needed to carry out the vice-gerency... (al Faruqi 2000: 79).
Despite the absolute equality women and men have in their origin, self-worth and relation to God, Islam assigns men and women different obligations to create a system of interdependence and partnership within the family. Men are mainly required to financially support all the women in the family and ensure their financial security, while women are required to fulfill spiritual and social roles as wives and mothers. In contrast to the dominant attitude of honoring one set of gender roles over the other, namely, those of males, Islamic traditions maintain that both roles deserve equal pursuit and respect, and when accompanied by the equity Islam demands, “a division of labor along sex lines is generally beneficial to all members of the society” (al Faruqi 1991: 26). In Islamic principles gender equity, rather than identity, is emphasized which is often translated in modern realities as a uni-gendered (male) society (al Faruqi 1991).

Islamic instructions of different gender obligations, if associated with Islamic gender equity, fulfill two vital functions for the individuals, family and the society as a whole. First, they adjust the imbalance of biological tasks, most of which rely on the woman. Women fulfill the duties of pregnancy, delivering and nursing, and Islam counters these by placing economic responsibilities upon the men (al Faruqi 2000). Due to the exhausting biological demands on her, the woman should never also shoulder financial responsibility for herself or the family, unless she chooses to reject the financial accountability of her male relatives (al Faruqi 2000). Second, different gender obligations within the family ensure retention of the foundation of interdependence in the extended
family, which, in turn, guarantees the material, social and mental security of all its individuals.\(^{27}\)

Despite being different, the two gender roles are not mutually-exclusive dichotomies in Islamic thought, as it is understood in western contexts. In many cases, each sex can, and even should, step onto the other’s domain. It was narrated in the *Sunnah* that the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH)\(^{28}\) would help in the household chores and take care of several tasks that later became viewed as women-only.\(^{29}\) Moreover, a woman’s enforced seclusion, not of her own choice, from the public sphere, which is normal in a few Muslim cultures, was alien to the prophetic period. There is clear and authentic historical evidence that women at the Prophet’s time participated actively in public spheres of worship, learning and teaching, trade and market place, public discussions, political issues and the battlefield (Badawi 1995). The Qur'an reports that women argued with the Prophet himself and with other Muslim caliphs (leaders).\(^{30}\) “*The Qur’an reproached those who believed woman to be inferior to men (Qur’an: 16:57-59) and repeatedly gives expression to the need for treating men and women with equity (Qur’an: 2:228, 231: 4:19, and so on)*” (al Faruqi 1991: 27).

\(^{27}\) This concept of “gender roles and interdependence” is discussed in more detail under the Extended Family and Women’s Careers’ section.

\(^{28}\) ‘Peace be Upon Him.’

\(^{29}\) Aisha, the Prophet’s wife, said, “*Prophet Muhammad used to stitch his clothes, milk the goats and help in the chores inside the house*” (*hadith* in Bukhari and Muslim).

\(^{30}\) Qur’an 58:1
Many times in current Muslim cultures, gender differentiation in the Islamic principles have been distorted to justify depriving women of the entitlements granted to them by Islam, like the right to education, inheritance and free choice of marriage. For example, Islam states very clearly that women and men are equally obligated to pursue education. One of the Prophet Mohammad’s hadiths\(^\text{31}\) states, “It is the duty of every Muslim and every Muslimah [female Muslim] to pursue knowledge throughout life.” This hadith expresses an explicit command to Muslims to seek knowledge, regardless of gender.

Because the first Muslim society practiced education for all, more so than later Muslim societies, there were many women scholars during the time of the Prophet, including his wife, Aisha, who taught both men and women (al Faruqi 1991). Nevertheless, due to customs and traditions, many contemporary Muslim cultures deny women and girls their entitlement to education.

In addition, some Muslim families pressures their daughters into getting married and do not consider their opinions. Others, especially in tribal areas, deprive their daughters or sisters from their assigned inheritance in shari’ah.\(^\text{32}\)

\(^{31}\) Hadith are the sayings and actions attributed to the Prophet Mohammad. Muslims consider verified hadith as the second source of shari’ah (Islamic law) after the Qur’an.

\(^{32}\) This is not to say that every gender norm that is practiced in Muslim cultures is un-Islamic or un-empowering for women. For example, “family stability and cohesiveness, the respect and adoration of mothers, and the sense of self-fulfillment of women who are not frequently seen in public” are among Muslim cultures’ positive practices that are inherent in the Islamic principles and are empowering for women as well (Badawi 1995: 43). These cultural practices are empowering for women insofar as women-empowerment refers to being in a respected social position that is also the source of self-fulfillment. However, such cultural practices contradict what is considered to be “modern” in the West. From a western point of view, women’s roles that are not identical to those of men must be discriminatory and “anti-women.” For example, the smaller proportion of career women in many Muslim societies might be seen through a western perspective as a symptom of the oppression of women by their societies. “Little attention, if any, is given to the personal choices of Muslim women and their concepts of family happiness, which may or may not be the same choices or concepts of their non-Muslim sisters” (Badawi 1995: 44).
On the other side, in western cultures, like the American, some argue there has been a strong movement toward a “unisex society,” in which any differentiation in gender roles is rejected and looked upon as discrimination, and where, as a Muslim woman wrote,

\[ \text{a single set of roles and goals [those traditionally fulfilled by the male members of society] are given preference and esteem by both sexes and are pursued by all members of the society regardless of sex and age differentials...The roles of providing financial support, of success in career, and of decision making have been given overwhelming respect and concern while those dealing with domestic matters, with child care, with aesthetic and psychological refreshment, with social interrelationships, were devalued and even despised. Both men and women have been forced into a single mold which is perhaps more restrictive, rigid and coercive than that which formerly assigned men to one type of role and women to another} \]


Between the different cultural sets of gender ideologies and practices, Somali immigrants should be able to negate negative, unfair and women-harming aspects and adopt positive, fair and women-empowering aspects of both cultures by employing the Islamic notion of \textit{ijtihad} (interpretation).

\section*{2.1.3. Legal Rights of Women}

In Islamic principles, women have a separate legal status that ideally should not be affected by marriage. Every Muslim individual, whether male or female, retains a separate identity from cradle to grave. Al Faruqi (1991) affirms,

\[ \text{This separate legal personality prescribes for every woman the right to contract, to conduct business, to earn and possess property independently. Marriage has no effect on her legal status, her property, her earnings - or even on her name. If she commits any civil offense, her penalty is no less} \]

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or no more than a man’s in a similar case (5:83; 24:2)\textsuperscript{33}. If she is wronged or harmed, she is entitled to compensation just like a man (4:92-93) (al Faruqi 1991: 27).

Marriage, under Islamic law, does not change a Muslim woman’s name or legal status as a full personality, able to own and dispose of income and property as she pleases.

A woman can initiate divorce for a variety of reasons “which the shari’ah defines as incompatibility, cruelty, injustice, prolonged absence, adultery, insanity, and incurable or contagious diseases” (al Faruqi and al Faruqi 1986: 150). In addition to these causes, there is the khul divorce that can be initiated by a woman, when a wife simply does not feel happy or secure with a husband, despite no offense. Here, she can divorce him in court in exchange for paying back half of the dowry that he gave her upon marriage.\textsuperscript{34}

Along with gender role differentiation, the Islamic laws of inheritance guide, enhance and guarantee the survival of the extended family. A sister in Islamic law inherits half of her brother’s share\textsuperscript{35}. A man (father, brother, husband or son) is responsible for the financial

\textsuperscript{33} Numbers between brackets refer to versus from the Qur’an.

\textsuperscript{34} Another example of how cultures in many Muslim societies deny women’s rights assigned to them by shari‘ah. Upon marriage, in shari‘ah, the groom should pay the dowry to the bride. In reality, however, many families do not give the bride her dowry.

\textsuperscript{35} Many contemporary Muslim scholars have been motivated by the globalized movement advocating women’s rights to search in the Islamic literature for women-empowering principles. One result of such a research has concluded that the rule of doubling a male’s share compared to an equivalent female does not apply to all cases of inheritance in shari‘ah. In his book, “The Woman’s Inheritance and the Issue of Equality,” Salah Sultan (1999) reviews all the inheritance cases in the shair‘ah and reports only four cases where a woman inherits half of the equivalent man, double this number where she inherits as much as he does, at least ten cases where she inherits more than he does and a few cases where she inherits and the equivalent man does not.
security of all women in his close kinship circle.\textsuperscript{36} al Faruqi and al Faruqi (1986) explain how the laws of “dependents and inheritance” support the very existence of the extended family, when they write,

\begin{quote}
The former [dependence] regard as the male’s dependents all the women in the extended family, regardless of their financial status, thus relieving them of having to earn their livelihood; the latter [inheritance] regard all the members of the extended family as heirs in varying degrees, assigning to the males double the share of females. \\
(al Faruqi and al Faruqi 1986: 149-151)
\end{quote}

Maysam al Faruqi (2000) considers the socio-economic order in the Qur’an takes the family, rather than the individual, as its starting point when assigning its members different rights and obligations based on age and sex. The ultimate aim of this socio-economic construct is to create a system of interdependence in which the extended family unit is the norm and where the community takes full care of its members on both legal and moral grounds so that, whatever happens on the wider social and political scale, the individual is still protected. The socio-economic order in the Qur'an guarantees the possibility of individual independence through private property, but it avoids falling into the traps of individualism and selfishness, which ultimately destroy and break up society, by making members legally and morally responsible for each other (al Faruqi 2000).

\subsection*{2.1.4. The Extended Family and Women’s Careers}

Islamic gender perspective, with its gender role specialization and laws of inheritance, basically cultivates the extended family system. The western alternative of nuclear family

\textsuperscript{36} For more detail on the subject of “dependents and inheritance” in Islam, see: Glander, Annelies. (1998). \textit{Inheritance in Islam: Women’s Inheritance in Sana’a (Republic of Yemen)}. Frankfurt: Peter Lang
systems, let alone individualism, is at odds with deep-rooted Islamic traditions and customs (al Faruqi 1991). Since the family is the primary cell of the social fabric and the foundation of the social order, Islam prioritizes women’s roles as mothers and wives. Therefore, if a woman wants to seek employment, this should be after securing her family’s well being and her husband’s consent, “unless her right to work was mutually agreed to as a condition in the marriage contract” (Badawi 1995: 18).

The extended family system can however facilitate women’s careers. According to al Faruqi (1986) an extended family makes careers possible for “women who have such inclination and aptitude to pursue vocational goals outside the home without damage to children or to household harmony and beauty” (p. 151). Extended families, with at least three generations living together, provide mutual support and interdependence among its members. Accordingly, working mothers in extended families are not faced with the challenge of their children being “unguarded, unattended, or inadequately loved and socialized because the extended family home is never empty” (al Faruqi 1991: 24).

I argue that since Islamic gender principles do not identify with, or affiliate to, a specific culture, migrating from Muslim-dominated societies to the diasporic West, Muslim communities, part of which is the Somali community in Columbus, Ohio, could contextualize these principles in a heterolocal pattern to negotiate cultural differences and to create a new set of gender practices in their lives. Moreover, it is an opportunity for Muslim immigrants, who, by virtue of being emancipated from traditional cultural pressures, have the opportunity in their new country to establish new interpretations of
Islamic texts. Their unique position between the two cultures would enable them to create interpretations that do not honor any specific practice just because it is common in either the “traditional” or the “modern” customs.

2.2. The Gender and Immigration Literature

In this section, the literature on the second major theme of this study, gender and immigrant families’ integration is presented. In immigration literature, immigrants’ identities and integration/assimilation models have been the central focus of researchers. Links between gender and integration have been widely investigated. Feminist social scientists have been mainly concerned with demonstrating how gender power, roles and relationships in families and societies are not determined by biological differences, but are socially constructed, and can thus be negotiated and reshaped (See Butler 1990).

Describing how different aspects of immigrant social life are interwoven with gender dynamics, Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo (2003) maintains that “gender is one of the fundamental social relations anchoring and shaping immigration patterns, and immigration is one of the most powerful forces disrupting and realigning everyday life...Globalization, immigration, and transnationalism are significant sites for contemporary inquiries of gender” (p. 3-4). Current literature on immigration and the family calls for the inclusion of gender, and emphasizes the immigrant family as a site of struggle and negotiation. Some argue that immigrant women, as socializers of the young, bear a special responsibility to pass on culture and maintain cultural integrity. Examining
women’s roles as culture bearers is critical to understanding immigrant families’ cultural integration (Papanek 1994).

For Hondagneu-Sotelo (2003), while immigration literature has helped to understand how race, class and education affect the process and outcomes of integration, little has been done to illuminate how gender might lead to different integration experiences and outcomes. Despite the fact that gender affects social relationships that organize immigration and social institutions, for example, family or labor markets, in both the immigrants’ country of origin and country of destination, current immigration literature, especially classical assimilation theory, has displayed a lack of consideration to its role in the assimilation/incorporation process (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2003).

Hondagneu-Sotelo (1998) indicates existing immigration literature has two main problems, namely excluding women and focusing exclusively on migrant women. It is only since the early 1990s that the concept of gender, as an organizing factor of social life, has been given importance in the immigration literature. Previously women were neglected, despite all the “women on the move” intra-nationally and internationally during the 20th century. In the men-only immigration research, the question of gender was altogether ignored “as if men were without gender” (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994: 3). However, in studies where the point of departure was gender, women were only the focus in isolation from “men’s gender” or just by “adding” women to the picture. A real understanding of gender, as a set of social relationships that organize immigration and integration patterns, requires that researchers use this as an analytical tool equally
relevant to men’s and women’s migration; which involves switching from a “women only” approach and “conceptualizing men as gendered actors” (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1998: 203). Only then, will studies contribute to explaining how gender represents a social system that shapes immigration and integration processes for all immigrants, both men and women.

In the immigration literature, the “relevant question becomes not why are women excluded but to what extent have the overall institutional structure, and the character of particular institutional areas, been formed by and through gender?” (Joan Acker 1992, as cited in Hondagneu-Sotel 1994: 3).

The task is to examine how gender, in relational and dynamic ways, facilitates, or constrains, both women’s and men’s immigration and integration experiences (Hondagneu-Sotel 1994). The crucial part of this endeavor is to examine the immigrant family’s gender relationships, whose study leads to understanding the ideological and cultural meanings embedded in families and social networks (Hondagneu-Sotel 1994).

2.2.1. The Acculturation and Structural Approaches

Researchers have employed two main approaches in studies on gender and immigration intersecting, namely the acculturation/modernization and the structural approaches. The acculturation/modernization approach focuses on gender as a concept that relates only to individual women. In this approach, gender relationships in immigrant families are usually explained as culturally determined by either preserved “traditional patriarchal”
or adopted “modern egalitarian” values. The main question of this approach is: “Do traditional gender relations disintegrate once they are immersed in the new...society? Or do they remain intact, with patriarchal cultural legacies continuing as before?” (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994: 9). The more gender relationships are affected by the feminist, “modern” culture, the more egalitarian they will be (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1992).

Studies of the first approach conclude that immigrant women assume more liberal gender ideologies in America due to the effect of American culture (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1992). Maxine Margolis (1994) concludes that because of migration, the Brazilian community in New York has witnessed a noticeable level of gender adjustments and traditional gender role modifications are more liberating for women. The study reports that reasons for gender adjustments in the Brazilian-American community are women’s economic independence and the increase of their economic contribution to the family, which leads to more equal domestic division of labor and decision-making processes (Margolis 1994).

In her study on Mexican transnational migrants in the United States, Luin Goldring (1996) argues that migration affects the divisions of labor and more uses of social opportunities by women compared to men. Men thus assume more housework, which is deemed to be feminine, and women work outside the home and, by earning an income, contribute more to household expenses, thus assuming more control over household decisions. The same was found in studies about the Vietnamese American community, which has experienced a shift in gender power relations due to changes in men's and women's relative degree of control over social and economic resources (Kibria 1993).
In their study on Dominican immigrants, Grasmuck and Pessar (1991) find that emigration contributes to women’s ability to renegotiate gender roles and relationships. Although men and women migrate from their countries in a “staged pattern,” where husbands migrate and wives stay behind to follow later, as settlement takes place and wives’ participation in the household’s income increases, women become more able to renegotiate their share in the domestic decision-making process.

The second approach taken by gender and immigration studies is the structural approach, which challenges the acculturation perspective by considering the effects of structural economic, political and social factors in shaping immigration and integration outcomes (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1992). “The alterations in patriarchal behavior are attributed neither to the adoption of feminist ideology or of ‘modern’ values, as the acculturation model posits, nor to women’s enhanced financial contributions to the family economy but to arrangements induced by the migration process itself” (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1992: 394). Immigration and integration provide new challenges, and changes in both women’s and men’s roles.

Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) disputes the acculturation model’s assumption that immigrants embrace more feminist/modern values and practices due to an exposure to American culture. Rather, as she asserts, immigration as a systematic process reconstructs gender roles and relationships. The following excerpt elaborates on this perspective:

Patriarchal gender relations undergo continual renegotiation as women and men rebuild their families in the United States. Gender is reconstructed in different ways, guided by the limits imposed by particular
contexts and patterns of migration, but family and community relations exhibit a general shift in the direction of gender egalitarianism...changes do not occur in ways that conform to any formulaic linear stages. They happen unevenly, and often result in contradictory combinations of everyday practices (Hondagnue-Sotelo 1994: 193).

The change in Mexican immigrant families' gender relationships toward greater equality is not attributed to “any ‘modernizing’ Anglo influence or acculturation process... [but to] changes in the women's and men's relative positions of power and status in the larger social structure of power” (Hondagnue-Sotelo 1994: 195). This conclusion, according to the researcher, is supported by the fact that most Mexican immigrants in the United States live in relatively segregated communities and jobs, which do not allow for much acculturation or being influenced by the Anglo culture. One example introduced by the author was the change in the household division of labor where men have become more involved. This change is mainly noticed in families that experienced “family stage migration,” where men migrated first and lived for many years in “bachelor communities” where they took responsibility for some of the housework (Hondagnue-Sotelo 1994).

The wage/labor assumption that a woman’s improved financial contributions to the family leads to more egalitarian gender relationships is also challenged. Instead, Hondagnue-Sotelo argues that it is how families adapt structurally to new environments that democratize family structures. In the case of the Mexican staged migration, what wives and husbands do during the spousal separation, with wives taking responsibility independently and husbands’ living in bachelor communities, ultimately affect both by
weakening patriarchy. New gender relationships and roles occur from new patterns of behavior induced by the migration process itself and the dramatic structural transformations.

In her study on how transnational practices influence traditional gender power relationships in a Salvadorian community in New York, Sarah Mahler (2003) found that the traditional gender relationships, of gender segregation and male dominance, are reproduced and transformed in the context of transnational ties linking this specific community to other communities of the same origin.

Changing structural arrangements and dynamics, such as structural opportunities and new sources of power within the immigrant family produce changes in gender relationships and roles. These in turn shape strategies of integration. However, it is equally important to consider personal choices of the individual players, based on their cultural values, religious persuasion and daily practices, when examining gender and family integration. Hence, the subsequent approach in gender and immigration studies focuses on the household and family as the major unit of analysis, intermediating between the macro, structural and the micro, individualistic approaches.

2.2.2. The Individual and Household Approaches

In contrast to the gendered approach to migration that focuses on individual immigrant women, the household approach takes the household as the central analytic unit (Pessar 1982). This approach studies how the migration experiences, especially the economic
aspects of these experiences, are shaped by gender relationships that occur between social players who live in “particular social contexts [family], not in a vacuum outlined only by huge structures” (Hondagnue-Sotelo 1992: 187) nor as individuals who are disconnected from their social context. The household is defined as a “contained unit composed of kin-related persons who share a set amount of land, labor, capital, and social resources, such as immigrant network ties” (Handagnue-Sotelo 1992: 395). It can also refer to the “basic unit of society involved in production, reproduction, consumption and socialization” (Gardner and Grillo 2002: 182). The composition and organization of households have an immediate impact on women’s lives, since they organize a large part of women’s domestic/reproductive labor (Gardner and Grillo 2002).

The importance of the household as the unit of inquiry in immigration literature is “to understand the meanings and implications of transnationalism for ordinary people [Hence, one needs also] to consider activities and relationships within households and families” (Gardner and Grillo 2002: 182). Although the household approach promotes the whole household as the central unit of analysis when studying the immigration processes, it acknowledges that household members do not inevitably act as a harmonious unit. Conflicting and coherent interests over migration and integration may coexist between members of the household, especially men and women (Hondagnue-Sotelo 1992).

2.3. **The Literature on Transnational Heterolocalism**

This study draws on the non-traditional heterolocalism model in immigration literature to place the experiences of Somali immigrants in the context of other new immigrants to the
United States. The heterolocalism perspective was developed by the cultural and social geographer Wilbur Zelinsky (2001). Although Zelinsky’s model was basically developed in the field of geography, my present research applies and focuses on the social and cultural aspects of heterolocalism to shed some light on the Somali immigrants’ experiences.

2.3.1. Critical Review of Assimilation and Pluralism

Before investigating the transnational heterolocalism model, it is necessary to briefly discuss the traditional models of assimilation and multicultural/pluralism. In response to these, transnational heterolocalism appears as the third alternative, which better fits today’s globalized, mobilized and deterritorialized world.

Assimilation, a concept used to describe immigrants’ incorporation into a new society, indicates that immigrants would inevitably, and gradually, relinquish their ethnic and cultural distinctness and ultimately immerse into the “core group,”37 or the mainstream Anglo-American culture. Cultural assimilation, through which minority groups adapt the behaviors, values, attitudes, language and religion of the dominant group, is a prerequisite to structural assimilation, or the integration of minority groups into the structure and social institutions of the larger society (Gordon 1964).

The assimilation model has been challenged for its assumptions on at least five aspects.

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37 Richard Alba and Victor Nee (2005), note it was Milton Gordon (1964) who coined the term “core culture” to refer to the cultural standard of the “middle-class cultural patterns of, largely, white Protestant, Anglo-Saxon origins” (Alba and Nee 2005: 238).
First, it has been criticized for its Eurocentric prejudice and inapplicability to non-white groups. According to Nathan Glazer (2005), although at the time of their formation they were liberal concepts that defended immigrants’ rights in the American society, assimilation assumptions until about World War II were intended only for European immigrants. The most prominent minorities of that time, African Americans and Native Americans, were excluded. The assimilation model’s effectiveness, at least until recently, is attributed “in part to the fact that most [early] immigrants fell into the broad racial classification of Caucasian and were members of the extended Western, or European, cultural community and of various branches of the Judeo-Christian faith (who didn't challenge the American religious or racial tolerance very much)” (Zelinsky 2001: 126).

However, the majority of later immigrants, especially since 1965, have been characterized by different features from those of the earlier immigrants and from the “core group.” Most recent immigrants, refugees and sojourners have come from non-European countries and are different to the earlier immigrant stream in their racial appearance, creeds, religions and modes of social behavior and attitudes, for example, family togetherness versus the Euro-American pattern of individual autonomy (Zelinsky 2001: 127). For the earlier immigrants, mainly Judeo-Christian Caucasians, they became indistinguishable from the old-stock citizenry. Indeed, by the 1930s, to all appearances the melting pot had worked its magic. Over most of the land – that is, all those great stretches of territory where there was little evidence of African American, Latino, or Native American minorities—it was possible to envision a perfected, socially and culturally unified nation majority of Americans, the Other had ceased to be a concern.

(Zelinsky 2001: xi)
In recent eras, with new immigrants of “alien” cultural and physical characteristics, there has been a certain resurgence of xenophobia, embodied in “drives to limit ingress, to curtail social benefits and legal protection for the newer arrivals and their offspring, and campaigning to make English the only permissible language” (Zelinsky 2001: x).

Second, the conventional assimilation theory has been criticized for its assumption that intergroup relations, between the immigrant communities and the mainstream, are linear, one-way and irreversible. Assimilation, in its classical connotation as “Americanization,” “made the assumption that American culture was something already complete which the newcomer must adopt in its entirety” (Read Lewis 1930 as cited in Glazer 2005: 120). This assumption does not take into account that “American culture” is not a static entity but rather a work in progress. Indeed, ever since its infancy, the American cultural system has been mutating and evolving at a pace that is readily observable, and never more rapidly than at present. Assimilating into a moving target is not a trivial challenge. More readily seen is the fact that, despite all those forces nudging national and global communities toward homogeneity, marked regional differences do persist in the United States. Thus the specific assimilationist path followed by the immigrant will depend upon just where and when he or she chances to settle. Disconformities in eventual outcomes can be quite striking. Compare the culturally, if not structurally, assimilated South Carolina Jews with their New York City coreligionists, Texas Germans with their coethnics in Milwaukee, or second-generation Mexican Americans in Reading, Pennsylvania, or Westchester Country, New York, with those in San Antonio. (Zelinsky 2001: 129)

Third, the “Melting Pot” concept is a concept developed under the assimilation paradigm and it has been a target for profound challenge. Although the melting pot is a term that apparently suggests equal contributions from all groups, it has been nothing other than one-directional acceptance of “Anglo-Conformity” (Alba and Nee 2005: 240). In theory,
the melting pot doctrine hypothesized a two-way process, in which immigrants adopt, as well as contribute, to the dominant culture. However, in practice, it has become clear that the “tendency has been to downplay and minimize the alien ingredients in the ultimate amalgam” (Zelinsky 2001: 125).

Fourth, the assimilation model is criticized for its denial of the possibility that immigrants combine their original cultures with the new one. Transnationalist literature criticizes assimilation theory for its tendency to dichotomize ethnic identity into “traditional/old” versus “modern/new” culture. Instead, in the course of cross-cultural interaction, identity and integration are negotiated and re-created on the borderlands between the two cultures (Zelinsky 2001). Vast advances in communication and information technology, market integration and mass air transportation, allow new waves of immigrants to retain relationships with their original towns and cultures “that hold a special place in their hearts and memories” (Alba and Nee 2003: 6).

Anglo-conformity was perceived as the norm throughout the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century (Wolfe 2004). In this globalized age, where international migration is sharply increasing and migrants are more diverse in social and cultural backgrounds, applying concepts of traditional assimilation, which indicate mono-culture and identity, on new immigrants has become more difficult and unrealistic (Zelinsky 2001; Castles 2002). With increasing cultural, religious and racially diverse communities settling in the receiving countries, “the old myths of national ... homogeneity have been undermined” (Castles 2002: 1157). With ethnic communities’ preservation of their
languages and cultures into the second and third generations, the anticipation of complete cultural assimilation has proved unlikely.

Finally, the transnationalist literature also criticizes assimilation theory for its neglect of gender relationships. Studies on families, immigration and transnationalism point out that to effectively understand gender in the resettlement process, researchers must investigate gender and ethnicity as a socially-constructed phenomenon, and the family as a site of power and struggle whereby men and women renegotiate their gender roles, ethnic identities and integration styles (Mahler 2003). Gender and transnationalism are increasingly seen as central theoretical concepts in migration literature, due to “the rising magnitude and multitude of migrations, the increasing proportion of women migrating, and the access migrants have to rapid transportation, telecommunications, and other technologies that facilitate transnational processes” (Mahler 2003: 290).

The conventional model of assimilation, as a unidirectional, unimpeded and homogenizing process that treats all immigrants as a single undifferentiated category and leads to monocultural identification, or the melting pot, has been the target of wide criticism and modifications (e.g. Portes and Zhou 1993; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Alba and Nee 2005; Glazer 2005). The massive influx of immigrants, refugees and sojourners into the United States, along with the significant restructuring of the world economy and society, necessitates the re-evaluation of the traditional assimilation perspective (Zelinsky 2001).
The multiculturalism/pluralism approach, promotes acceptance and tolerance for immigrants’ cultural and religious diversity. Theorists define multiculturalism ‘in terms of groups’ rights that the state not only tolerates, but seeks in various ways to protect and enhance’ (Kivisto 2005: 22). As early as 1924 Horace Kallen coined the notion of pluralism, to, unfortunately, only include Euro-immigrants at the time.

*In lieu of fusion into a single sociocultural community within the melting pot, pluralists envision a mosaic of self-sustaining ethnic communities, each firmly engaged in the larger polity, economy, and society, that is, Americanized to a certain degree, but still retaining a traditional identity and complex of cultural practices in perpetuity* (Zelinsky 2001: 130).

However, multiculturalism has its shortcomings. The main shortcoming of the pluralism model is its claim of fixed, particularistic ethnic and cultural identities for immigrant communities; a claim that leads to isolationist attitudes among immigrant groups and to segregation of different groups within the whole society. The primary focus of pluralism is in the relatively insular ethnic entity rather than the nation as a whole...At the metropolitan level, pluralism leads us to expect a population both highly diverse and highly segregated ethnically. At the group level, we infer spatial correlation among residential, economic, and social spheres to be strong, influenced in only a minor fashion, if at all, by upward mobility, English language acquisition, and other forces antecedent to dispersion in the assimilation model (Zelinsky 2001: 130).

In addition, pluralism portrays equality among diverse communities, overlooking the existing political system of dominance and subordination (Zelinsky 2001). The neglect of inequality by the pluralist model is illuminated in the following quote:

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38 Multiculturalism and pluralism have been used synonymously in many studies to refer to the larger society’s recognition for a minority’s distinct cultural identities, and their worth to the value system of the American mainstream (Harris 1995). Multiculturalism describes conditions in which the minority groups may practice their own cultural traditions and still participate in the host society (Harris 1995).
The initial American version of pluralism was concerned only with recent European immigrants and old-stock Anglo-Americans. But, in fact, even though few scholars bothered to look at and comment on the situation, the United States has been a pluralistic society for some time, but inequitably so, given the social and political arrangements for African Americans, Native Americans, and Latinos (Zelinsky 2001:131).

The third point of criticism of multiculturalism is, according to Castles (2002), its idea of belonging primarily to one society and its concern to control difference within that nation-state framework without considering the deterritorial nature of the current globalized movements of international migrations. “It implicitly assumes that migration will lead to permanent settlement, and to the birth of second and subsequent generations who are both citizens and nationals” (Castles 2002: 1157). Current and expanding “mixed-heritage” populations, composed of immigrants and their descendents, have multiple identities within one society, a fact that contradicts the hypotheses of both assimilationists and pluralists (Zelinsky 2001).

In his study on ethnicity and ethnic identities in the United States, Zelinsky (2001) criticizes traditional theories of assimilation and pluralism, arguing that both are deficient in describing and explaining the current ethnic American, and globalized, scene. Zelinsky asserts that “The assimilation model makes no pretense of honoring difference; indeed it celebrates its obliteration. Pluralism, on the other hand, seeks to conserve and wall off ethnic particularities” (Zelinsky 2001: 124).

The transnational heterolocal model avoids the shortcomings of the two previous models. According to Peter Kivisto (2005), in contrast to Horace Kallen, the founder of pluralism,
who viewed ethnic identities as fixed and distinct, Randolph Bourne (1916) who first formed the term “trans-national America,” presents a more dynamic vision that “not only would ethnic groups be transformed as a result of their encounter with the larger society, but American society would also be transformed positively as a consequence of the encounter between the core culture and outsiders moving in” (Kivisto 2005: 11).

Not only has the rise of transnational communities challenged the assimilation model, but it also raises questions about the premises of multiculturalism in this age of globalization, where “new forms of identity and belonging go beyond multiculturalism” (Castles 2002: 1157). The simultaneous occurrence of transnationalism and new immigrants’ heterolocal integration is not confined to the United States, but is found in every corner of the world where immigration movements take place. According to Zelinsky (2001), while America was the only settler country to receive great numbers of immigrants, currently, the growing number of diverse ethnic and cultural groups within the national borders is unparalleled throughout the world. “The material and mental confrontation of diverse worlds at a global scale, this ever-growing interpenetration of people, things, and perceptions, is a unique, unprecedented feature of contemporary life” (Zelinsky 2001: xii). The heterolocalism model is the alternative to both the assimilation and the pluralism models, because it is contemporaneous with the recent phenomenon of transnational communities with diverse cultural and racial backgrounds (Zelinsky 2001: xiii).
2.3.2. The Alternative Model of Heterolocalism

After reviewing the standard theories of assimilation and pluralism and finding both seriously wanting on the current American scene, Zelinsky (2001) proposed his new sociospatial model of heterolocalism, “that describes the geographic and social behavior of certain recent immigrant groups” (Zelinsky 2001: xiii). The globalization age characterized by “increasing mobility; growth of temporary, cyclical and recurring migrations; cheap and easy travel; constant communication through new information technologies” has resulted in the growth of international emigrant communities (Castles 2002: 1157). Transnational communities, due to major advances in information and transport technology, adjust their lives to two or more societies and develop transnational consciousness, identities and informal networks which transcend national borders (Castles 2002).

Transnationalism and heterolocalism are connected as simultaneous phenomenon and theoretical models. A late 20th and early 21st century phenomenon, “heterolocalism is a function of the profound restructuring of the relationships within a globalizing society among people, places, and social and economic entities” (Zelinsky and Lee 1998: 281). Consistent with the emerging theoretical paradigm of transnationalism, the heterolocalism model describes:

the process whereby newcomers, who enter an area, quickly adopt a dispersed pattern of residential location-all the while maintaining a cohesive ethnic community through telecommunications, personal visits, and other methods, across the range of geographical scales...the concept implies that the animation of an ethnic community at the turn of the twenty-first century no longer requires geographical clustering (Wright and Ellis 2000: 205).
Heterolocalism, as new as the occurrence of transnationalism and transnational immigrants, appears to be the immigration theory that best explains the current features of immigrants, millions of whom “have began shaping a novel form of action-space whereby ethnic groups can inhabit two or more countries simultaneously...[a behavior that] has begun to redefine the meaning of ethnic identity” (Zelinsky 2001: xiv). Recent immigrants’ cross-cultural-geographical behavior could redefine the meaning and shape of their incorporation into the host culture, and the relationship with their original cultures.

Heterolocalism is the integration model that is compatible with the interesting phenomena of simultaneous origins, cultures and locations that feature the contemporary ethnic scene and immigration behavior in the United States and the world. The phenomena of heterolocalism and transnationalism, the simultaneous origins, cultures and locations of current immigrants, “share a common property: a propensity to leap over boundaries, whether territorial or cultural” (Zelinsky 2001: 124). In a transnational age, this non-conventional model can help explain how recent immigrants cope with living simultaneously in two cultural milieus. It also explains how they establish unique identities and lifestyles by creatively interweaving the two cultures. Castles (2002), thinks that because most members of transnational communities fall between the dilemma of return or assimilation, they

*negotiate their ways between complicated choices of return, assimilation and community formation. These are not exclusive options, and individuals and groups find creative ways of simultaneously adapting to and changing their social environments. The human agency they develop*
applies not only to overt political or social action, but also to strategies for everyday life...Their life strategies bring together elements of existence in both national and transnational social space (Castles 2002: 1158).

Two main attributes, among others, distinguish heterolocalism from other models. These attributes are:

- The strong ethnic community ties maintained via telecommunications, visits, internet and remittances despite these communities’ lack of spatial propinquity.
- Although some of its partial signs can be detected in earlier periods, heterolocalism is a time-dependent phenomenon. Its full development is possible only under the socio-economic and technological conditions of the late 20th and early 21st century (Zelinsky and Lee 1998). In this age, the socio-economic situations of most of the recent immigrants are different from those of the early waves.

Several national sources indicate that “many of the New Americans are skilled, well-educated occupants of the higher-status occupational niches back home, and generally upwardly mobile” (Zelinsky 2001: 128). In addition, recent immigrants have more knowledge of the culture and language of the United States than their early counterparts; they know better “what to expect at the destination because of the universal penetration of American-made or-influenced movies, television, and other popular media of entertainment and information...in a sense [the newcomer] disembarks with assimilation already in progress” (Zelinsky 2001: 128)
As part of the two new flows of immigrants, namely Muslims and Africans, to the United States, the transnational perspective is especially relevant to the Somali immigrant experiences due to the history of colonization and westernization in Somalia.

The classical assimilation postulations would lead to assume that Somali immigrants, especially those who have lived in the United States for relatively long periods, would cut cultural and social ties with their original land. In contrast, the classical pluralism assumptions would lead us to expect Somali immigrants to cluster geographically and culturally and isolate their families from the mainstream cultural and social contexts.

The transnational perspective encourages researchers to examine how both “traditional” and “modern” cultures may be modified and reshaped in immigrants’ lives via cross-generational reinterpretations and new emphases. The transnational perspective encourages exploration of how immigrant women pass on to their families the original culture endowed with new cultural values relative to gender roles and ideologies significant in the American context (Papanek 1994). This study examines the extent to which Somali immigrants bring together gender practices of both the Somali and the American mainstream cultures. It analyzes the extent to which Somali immigrants’ reconciliation of two different cultures through Islam could be an indication of their transnational/heterolocalist pattern of integration into the larger host society.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

This study employs qualitative research methods to provide a detailed account of the day-to-day lives of Somali immigrants, and the ways they interpret and contextualize Islamic gender texts to respond to, and give meaning to, integration experiences when negotiating cultural differences. Generally, qualitative research means “any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification” (Strauss and Corbin 1990: 17). Qualitative research uses a “naturalistic” approach to understand phenomena in context-specific settings, where “the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest” (Patton 2002: 39, as cited in Golafshani 2003: 600).

Linda Matthei and David Smith (1998) emphasize the importance of qualitative methods to understand transnationalism in the context of ethnographic insights which quantitative methods cannot capture. “The immigration experiences can no longer be safely ensconced in macroscopic generalizations…distinct voices of class, gender, and ethnicity need to be heard” (Matthei and Smith 1998: 273), which requires that actual immigrants and their narratives should play a more active role in the analyses. This dissertation collects extensive and comparative data from immigrant Somali women and men in Columbus, Ohio, through personal, open-ended interviews with respondents.
3.1. *Why Qualitative Analysis?*

Qualitative methodology has been criticized due to a poor understanding of its features (Adelman *et al.* 1976). Such criticisms include the devaluation of results achieved from small samples, which are viewed as limiting the generalization of the results (Myers 2000). A common measure of “validity” in quantitative research is the generalizing of findings to wider populations. However, this criterion is deemed to be of little, or even no, importance for many qualitative researchers (Golafshani 2003). The main reason is the difference in the types of situations and phenomena qualitative and quantitative researchers investigate. Generally, qualitative research focuses on the meanings and experiences of the “whole” person or localized culture, while quantitative research tries to fragment and delimit phenomena into measurable or “common” categories that can be applied to all subjects or situations (Golafshani 2003). Margaret Myers (2000) argues that “while qualitative studies are not generalizable in the traditional sense of the word, nor do they claim to be, ...they have other redeeming features which makes them highly valuable in the education community” (Myers 2000). Trustworthiness, representation and transferability are among the alternative qualifying criteria adopted by qualitative researchers (Denzin and Lincoln 2000). *Trustworthiness* refers to the honesty of the researcher in conveying the data as told by the study’s participants. *Representation* indicates the genuine role of the study’s participants in representing themselves and their cultures, by largely basing the analysis on their accounts. *Transferability* is the ability to transfer the analysis results to similar situations.
Using qualitative examination is suitable when there is a need to gain a deeper, natural and more comprehensive understanding of any phenomenon where little is known (Strauss and Corbin 1990). This allows researchers to grasp, describe, interpret and express many details the quantitative methods obscure behind numbers and measurements (al Faruqi 1981; Hoepfl 1997).

Qualitative methods allow researchers to obtain a more authentic representation of the topic under study. Under the title, “The Shortcomings of Western Methodology,” Isma’il al Faruqi (1981) describes how, being impressed by major achievements in the natural sciences, western researchers have tried to impose the same methods of quantification on human science topics.

_{However, unlike those of natural sciences, the data of human behavior are not dead... (in the sense of being immune to the disposition of the observer), but alive. They are not impervious to the attitudes and preferences of the observer. They do not reveal themselves as they really are to each and every investigator. Attitudes, feelings, desires, judgments and hopes of men and women tend to shut themselves off to the observer devoid of sympathy for them} (al Faruqi 1981: 12).

Al Faruqi (1981) maintains that imposing natural sciences models on human behavior has limited and obstructed western studies from any profound analysis of non-western phenomena. For example, claiming “objectivity” when exploring non-familiar human subjects and behavior has prevented western researchers from really understanding, let alone sympathizing with, or appreciating, what they study and find.

_{Western social scientists impudently declare their investigations objective. But we know that they are biased and that their conclusions are of limited significance...Anthropology was the most daring of all, since its objects – the ‘primitive’ societies of the non-Western world – were silent data,}
incapable of raising a critical finger at their masters. Theory after theory was erected to force the data into a mould, the categories of which were part and parcel of the Western world-view. The Western mind was still a long way from realizing, with the breakthrough of phenomenological axiology, that understanding the religions, civilizations and cultures of other peoples required an opposite bias, empathy with the data, if the data were to be understood at all


The study of Islam, Muslim cultures, transnationalism/heterolocalism, and Muslim immigrants’ integration in the West are still relatively new topics to explore in western academics, hence the appropriateness of using qualitative strategies in this study. This study uses basic statistical processes in presenting certain data, such as informants’ background information and how they respond to structured questions, in Tables to be used for comparative analysis. After transcribing taped interviews, I used the Microsoft EXCEL computerized statistical software which offers shortcuts for coding, sorting, retrieving and integrating the collected data.

3.2. The “Emergent” Themes

The emergent, as opposed to pre-determined, nature of qualitative research design needs to be emphasized. Although a qualitative study’s proposals should identify primary questions to be explored, the researcher must be flexible, and prepared to modify these in line with the emergent themes arising during actual research. “Because the researcher seeks to observe and interpret meanings in context, it is neither possible nor appropriate to finalize research strategies before data collection has begun” (Hoepfl 1997).
Oriented by the emergent nature of qualitative research, this study started with several developed assumptions. However, some of these earlier assumptions were replaced by subsequent ones, whose significance emerged from the participants’ accounts. At the beginning of this study, the major aim was to compare Somali men and women in their adapted patterns of integration. Nevertheless, during the interviews, the main emerging theme highlighted by the respondents was how the understandings of Islamic gender principles affected, and are been affected by, their ways of relating to the larger society. “Gender” emerged in the participants’ accounts as a factor that intersects with Islam and integration rather than being the most influential variant determining the form of integration for men in relation to women.

Gender is one variable, among others, that influences the integration outcomes of immigrant men and women. For Pessar (2007), recent studies on gender and immigration have challenged earlier feminist studies that present essentialized notions of universal male or female subjects. “By refusing to privilege gender over other, equally important structures like race, ethnicity, class...migration and refugee scholars have contributed to ongoing and lively debates over where and whether broad generalization about female and male subjects are justified” (Pessar 2007: 262). An illustrative example is where immigrant women of color who work as domestic laborers in American middle-class homes, “usually felt little, if any, sisterhood with their female employers, whose ‘liberation’ was greatly facilitated by the availability of this vulnerable, low-paid, and racialized workforce” (Pessar 2007: 263).
3.3. **Data Analysis and advancing Participants’ “Voices”**

This study uses grounded theory methods in collecting and analyzing data. Basically, grounded theory methods include systematic inductive guidelines toward building middle-range theoretical frameworks that explain the collected data (Charmaz 2000). While quantitative research seeks causal determination, prediction and generalization of findings, qualitative research seeks instead illumination, understanding and transferability or extrapolation of findings to similar situations (Hoepfl 1997). The main goal of qualitative research is building theory, rather than testing of, or mere description of, existing theories (Glaser and Strauss 1967).

Qualitative inquiry focuses primarily on describing and interpreting subjective meanings and theory building by discovering patterns and connections in collected data (Fossey *et al.* 2002). These processes require creativity, “for the challenge is to place the raw data into logical, meaningful categories; to examine them in a holistic fashion; and to find a way to communicate this interpretation to others” (Hoepfl 1997: 6).

Units of analysis in this study are narratives of individual men and women. The essential idea of the grounded theory approach is to read and re-read a textual database to discover or label categories and their inter-relationships (Borgatti 2008). A researcher’s ability to perceive concepts and relationships is termed “theoretical sensitivity” (Borgatti 2008).

There are three basic objectives when analyzing participants’ accounts:

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To gain insights into how Somali immigrants negotiate gender practices, between those reserved from the original Somali culture and those adopted from the new American mainstream culture, within and outside their families on a daily basis.

To analyze the extent to which Somali immigrants’ understanding of Islamic gender texts, not identical to either culture, has influenced, and is been influenced by, the negotiation process.

To gain insights into how the resultant gender perceptions and practices reflect Somali immigrant families’ transnational/heterolocal integration and reconciliation between the two cultures.

Two ethnographic techniques were utilized to collect data to present as many perspectives as possible. These techniques are the individual interviews and participant observation. I used participant observation to become familiar with participants on a more personal level. I visited many of the participants’ houses and participated in several of their social gatherings. Field notes were taken and recorded immediately after interviews and social engagements.

After the original tape-recording interviews were fully transcribed to be coded and organized. Detailed data obtained from the interviews and field notes were coded and analyzed “line-by-line,” referring to initial coding that proceeds by examining each line of data and then defining and categorizing emerged concepts and themes for comparison (Charmaz 2000). Codes are “tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study. [They] are attached to
‘chunks’ of varying size – words, phrases, sentences or whole paragraphs, connected or unconnected to a specific setting” (Miles and Huberman 1994: 56).

On coding the data, a list of over thirty themes were developed and coded by hand, but the scope of this study does not allow using all of them in the analysis. Themes are presented in Table 1. During the analysis I had to exclude many of the themes to stay within the timetable of this dissertation, and therefore chose the themes most relevant to the research inquiry. Themes eliminated, such as racism, civic engagement, residential location, entertainment and social interaction with non-Somalis, were no less significant than those included. By establishing connections among the included themes, this dissertation examines the argument that Somali immigrants utilize the Islamic gender thought to negotiate cultural differences they live in, and, by so doing, they exhibit signs of the transnational/heterolocal pattern of integration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender identity</th>
<th>How femininity and masculinity are perceived and defined</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender roles and relationships in the family</td>
<td>Whether and the manner by which domestic labor and decision making are divided or shared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender financial relations</td>
<td>Patterns of the financial relations (income earning and providing for the family) between men and women (autonomous, dominance, partnership)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wives’ careers</td>
<td>Whether wives work outside the house and whose decision it is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opposite-sex relations</td>
<td>Gender relationships outside the house or outside the network of close relatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gīthād</td>
<td>How immigrants practice the personal interpretation of Islamic gender texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s education</td>
<td>Attitudes and behavior toward women’s and girls’ education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Arranged marriage’</td>
<td>Attitudes, definitions and practices related to choosing future spouses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hijāb</td>
<td>Islamic women’s attire when in public; attitudes and practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman’s legal rights</td>
<td>The status of woman’s legal rights, including her economic independent entity and keeping her last name after marriage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inter-marriages (between Somalis and ‘Americans’)</td>
<td>As an indication of a strong integration into the new society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attributes to maintain from the Somali culture</td>
<td>Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Group/extended-family orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strong neighbors’ relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conservative sex relations (sexual morality)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Faith and spirituality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Giving and generosity in spite of having very little</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

82
Attributes to adopt from the American mainstream culture

- Respecting and compassion for the elders
- Covering and modesty
- Pluralism and diversity
- The value of hard work
- Respect for time and punctuality
- Law and order
- Freedom and tolerance
- Privacy
- Parents’ interest and investment in children’s education
- Inculcating self-esteem and self-reliance in children

Table 1: Themes Identified

Ethnography studies, such as this dissertation, basically privilege participants' perspectives. Thus, such a study “should be evaluated on its ability to clarify the ways other people understand their world” (Geertz 2008: 30). When reporting qualitative research analysis and conclusions, reports should be advancing the “voice” in the text; that is, the respondents’ words that illustrate the themes being interpreted (Hoepfl 1997; Darlington and Scott 2002). Essential to good qualitative research is whether the research participants’ subjective meanings, actions and social contexts, as understood by them, are clarified and authentically represented through “trustworthy” interpretation of their
narrative, that guarantees the “presence of [participants’] voice in the text” (Hoepfl 1997; Fossey et al. 2002).

3.4. **The Researcher’s Role**

To gain credibility, and before conducting qualitative research, researchers must be fully aware of their position in relation to the topic studied and the participants involved in the study, and should communicate this position clearly to any reader. Clarifying the researcher’s position helped me to reflect on my reactions and biases, and to become more “objective” and transparent during the research.

The researcher must be qualified, both professionally and personally, with the necessary skills and the ability to conduct a qualitative inquiry (Hoepfl 1997). The researcher should be characterized with “theoretical sensitivity,” when referring to the researcher’s personal quality and awareness of any subtlety of meaning in data, or “to the attribute of having insight, the ability to give meaning to data, the capacity to understand, and capability to separate the pertinent from that which isn’t” (Strauss and Corbin 1990: 42). Sources of such theoretical sensitivity include professional literature, professional experience and personal experiences.

My previous research on Muslim Yemeni-American women’s integration into the American mainstream provides the required “personal experience” and “theoretical sensitivity” in undertaking this study. Moreover, my position as a Muslim, Arab, married and educated woman helped to establish the necessary “rapport” (Fontana and Frey
1994) during unstructured interviews with both men and women, who invited me into their homes and introduced me to their lives and to other members of their families.

My role as an analyst needed to be redefined throughout. Although the analysis appreciably relies on participants’ accounts, the role as an interpreter requires more than just conveying their words to a reader. The inter-subjective method of research, based on the dialectical relationship between the participant's subjective account and the analysts' subjective understanding of them, was used throughout (Unger 2005). Balancing between the two is also a serious task. I have been concerned with the “authentic representation” of participants, so that they do not find themselves misrepresented when reading this dissertation. Before asserting any claim, I have ensured the interpretation is in agreement with the initial commitment to allow participants’ voices and ideas to be heard and known.

3.5. The Sample and The Interviews

In qualitative studies, a sufficient depth of information must be gathered to completely describe the phenomena under study (Fossey et al. 2002). To deeply explore the opinions of participants, qualitative sampling is concerned with the richness of information and a fixed minimum number of participants is not required. This study's sampling frame was the population of Somalis found in major Somali/Muslim institutions in Columbus.

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39 “Intersubjectivity is a concept that denotes the act of according meaning between two or more subjects [researcher and respondent] and establishing the objectivity of a claim made in research” (Unger 2005: 3).
To recruit participants, I used the snowball sampling technique, in which initial participants identify others, drawing from as many “start points” as possible to ensure the sample represents as many diverse segments of the population as possible (Fossey et al. 2002). Participants were recruited from mosques, Somali Qur'anic schools (duqsis), The Ohio State University, Columbus State, Sunrise Academy, International Academy, and The Somali Studies International Conference in Columbus, Ohio (2007), and several community-based organizations, mainly the Somali Community Association of Ohio and the Somali Women and Children’s Alliance.

An inherent problem with the “snowball” sampling technique is that it may create a group of participants that have much in common, which prevents generalizing the results in the traditional quantitative sense, but the study’s results may, nevertheless be “transferred” beyond the sample to many similar contexts. *Transferability* refers to the “degree to which the results of qualitative research can be generalized or transferred to other [similar] contexts or settings” (Trochim 2006). The degree of transferability very much depends on the researcher’s inherent honesty and a thorough description of the research context and assumptions central to the research (Trochim 2006). The study’s final analysis, based on detailed personal quotes of participants, can be transferred to settings where gender issues within Muslim immigrant communities in the United States are concerned.

The sample was confined to those who immigrated, or descendents of immigrant families, from Somalia, and have lived in the United States for a minimum of three years.
Earlier studies of immigrants (Massey et al. 1987; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Straight 2003) also use the three-year-residency criterion as an indicator of long-term settlement and for measuring change. The Somali community is a young immigrant group; 1989, the year of civil war in Somalia, was the critical year for large numbers of Somalis to emigrate; many of them to the United States.

Data was primarily obtained from thirty-eight face-to-face, in-depth interviews with Somali immigrants in Columbus, Ohio (nineteen wives and nineteen husbands, but not married to other participants) ranging in ages from twenty-two to sixty-five for women and from twenty-four to fifty-three for men. Women participants have 44 children, while men have 67 children. The number of children born in the United States is 26 for women and 42 for men, or 60% and 63% respectively. Each interview lasted between two and two and a half hours. Open-ended conversation builds rapport and obtains participant confidence, which are the keys to successful interviews. Interviews took place throughout the year 2007, with Columbus, Ohio chosen for the sample as it is home to the second largest Somali population in the United States.

Once a contact name was obtained, the initial contact was made through a phone call to the prospective interviewee, introducing the researcher and the project, and mentioning the individual who provided the contact information. Three women and one man agreed first to be interviewed, but never returned my later calls, which was an implied refusal to participate. One male participant decided to stop the interview in its middle for undisclosed reasons. If the participant agreed to be interviewed, I made an appointment
for an interview. Issues of anonymity and terms of confidentiality were stressed. The participants’ identities and distinguishing characteristics are concealed in this dissertation and no names were required. F.# and M.# are used before or after each quote. The letters F and M refer to the participant’s gender, while the following number refers to the order in which they were interviewed. Respondents were clearly informed that if, at any point, they became uncomfortable they could stop the interview. I met the participants at times and places which best suited their needs. Unless the respondent objected, the entire interview was taped. Interviews were mostly in English. A few participants preferred to use Arabic in the conversations which is my first language. From the interviews and field notes, a large volume of data, not only in quantity, but, more importantly, in its quality and richness, was collected.

The steps followed before, during and after conducting the interviews, are:

- Designing the questionnaire
- Obtaining IRB approval to conduct the field study
- Contacts with Somali immigrants in Columbus, Ohio
- Interviews and tape recording
- Transcribing interviews
- Entering data of closed-end questions in EXCEL
- Line-by-line reading and extracting themes (coding)
- Identifying themes related to research questions
- Identifying links between the themes
- Composing from these links the features of the heterolocalism pattern of integration, and examining the extent to which Islamic gender perspectives are used to facilitate heterolocalism.
3.6. **Questionnaire**

Interviews were the main source for gathering extensive data together with detailed descriptions. Many studies advise social researchers to attend to the importance and credibility of respondents’ subjective narratives about their own experiences (For example, Denzin and Lincoln 2000). To attain the goal of a “rich, thick description” (Geertz 1973), a detailed questionnaire was developed to probe issues that indicate gender practices and the integration patterns of Somali immigrant women and men. A “thick description” is a term that refers to richly described data in which the researcher provides a detailed and clear account of field experiences. This information helps the reader judge the appropriateness of transferring the findings to similar settings (Holloway 1997). The interview questions, given in Appendix A, were semi-structured; with some of the questions pre-determined and closed-ended, especially those related to personal background. Other questions were open-ended which entailed adding a few probing questions depending on the subject discussed. Semi-structured interviews allow one to probe individual experiences and to ensure sensitivity to participants’ language and the privilege of their knowledge (Fossey et al. 2002).

The questions were designed to examine the means through which immigrants forge, and maintain, transnational/heterolocal ties, and to explore the attributes of American culture these immigrants seek to adopt and the means of adoption. The questionnaire was divided into several general sub-sections, including personal background; marriage and family; residence and neighborhood; religion; civil and organization engagement; external signs of integration, such as food, clothes, language, inter-marriage, friendship and social
relationships, and occasions of celebration; and current, as opposed to pre-immigration, attitudes.

3.7. **A Note on the Problematic Usage of Terms**

The definition or usage of certain western context-related terms which do not have the same connotations in a non-western context has been problematic in this study. Throughout the writing process, terminology has been a challenge. Part of the confusion can be traced to the problematic application of contradictory sharp dichotomies, such as traditional/modern, public/private, religious/worldly, masculine/feminine to non-western societies (Rauf 1995). Words such as “modern” and “traditional” are phrases connected to particular western historical, social and ideological experiences and discourse that are not necessarily universal. Using these terms in other than their original contexts suggests distorted meanings and causes ambiguity, confusion or misunderstanding. In her article, “Islamic Female Sexuality and Gender in Modern Feminist Interpretation,” Elizabth Shlala Leo (2005) argues that “gender” and “patriarchy” are among the “modern,” or, to be more accurate, western concepts that have been unquestioningly utilized in western scholarship when studying Muslim women. Such terms have been used “without ample consideration of periodization or problemization” (Shlala 2005: 129).

In particular, before writing about gender in the Somali culture, one of the Arab and Muslim cultures, I find it important to be aware of the distinction between the implications of the term “traditional” in a western sense when talking about non-western social contexts. A western connotation for a traditional person or society, as opposed to
modern, refers to the difference between two cultural and historical contexts. Each is associated with particular social and economic norms and ideological characteristics. In a definition that reflects the western, liberal enlightenment discourse, when communities dispelled their old religious and agricultural norms and styles, they moved and progressed toward modernity (Johnson 1995: 49). For Somalia, as for other Muslim countries, special historical and social contexts should be considered. In these societies “traditional” patterns of gender interactions and relationships, women’s participation in public life and women’s hijab styles were more “liberal and modern” in many earlier historical periods than in later periods (Abu Shuqqah 1990; al Ghazzali 1991), and more so in rural or Bedouin communities than in urban societies.

There is one vital difference between the two “traditions.” While the traditional gender relationships of the west would be considered backward by today’s western standards, the “traditional” gender relationships of the old/rural Somali and Arab cultures would be considered, by the same western standards, as “liberal” and “modern.” It was common for women to pursue various roles in society, provided chastity and family life were secure, a responsibility that is shared by the entire extended family. Opportunities for women’s commercial and social contacts were more familiar and socially accepted, than in the present, and women played important roles in fields/farms, markets and public/political settings.

Only in the nineteenth century were western ways of social life introduced as models for people to follow to reach “modernism” and “liberation.” Western ideologies
accompanied western military, political and economic hegemony in Arab countries (Rauf 1995). Foreign modes of thinking about gender issues, emerging and developing from different contexts, began to claim superiority over “traditional” indigenous ways. Social problems women suffered from, which were mostly a part of the disappointed conditions of an entire society, have been used to justify the claimed absoluteness of western “ready and perfect” solutions and the assumption that “liberation for Arab women has to follow the same... line as the American and European women’s movements” (Duval 1998: 46). Women’s questions began to be advanced in Arab societies partly as a result of unfair local cultural gender norms and practices, but mostly as an outcome of outside influences following the historical colonial encounter between the West and Arab countries in the nineteenth century (Rauf 1995). Consequently, these terms are, many times, in quotation marks to remind the reader of the problematic nature of use.

Another problematic aspect in this research is the complex nature of the topic. To give the reader a comprehensive idea of the intersectional nature of this dissertation, that links Islam, gender and integration in one inquiry, I present the theoretical and cultural background in Chapter 1. This early description of the three fields’ theoretical assumptions might be seen as out of place and belonging more to the literature review, but I preferred to provide, as early as possible, an adequate theoretical and cultural explanation to clarify interconnected perspectives as the basis of this study.

By analyzing the narratives of Somali immigrant men and women, this research examines how Somali immigrants’ understandings of Islamic gender principles interact with their
gender practices; it seeks to also examine immigrants’ ways of relating to the wider society, and identities generated from the interaction between interpreting Islamic gender texts and negotiating gender practices between two different cultures.

The study aims to find general conceptual perspectives about the intersection of Islamic gender thought, daily gender practices and the Somali families’ ways of living in multiple cultural and social domains. A summary profile of participants is outlined in Tables 2 to 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Years of marriage</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Years in USA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F.8</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.10</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Youngest of</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.13</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.14</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Last two of</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.15</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>One</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.16</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.17</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>widow</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Youngest of</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.18</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.20</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Last two of</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.23</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>one year</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.24</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.25</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.26</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.27</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.28</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.30</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>divorced</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.32</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.33</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>divorced</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.34</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>divorced</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>42</td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>4 (Total)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Born in USA</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Years in USA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Background Information ~ Female Participants
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Years of marriage</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Born in USA</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Years in USA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M.1</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.2</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>3 of</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.3</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.4</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.5</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>4 of</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.6</td>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
<td>married</td>
<td>3 of</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.7</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>One</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.9</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>One of</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.11</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>One of</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.12</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>One of</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.19</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.21</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.22</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.29</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.31</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>divorced</td>
<td>One</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.35</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.36</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.37</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>one year</td>
<td>married</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>67 (Total)</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Background Information ~ Male Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Husband’s Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F.8</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.10</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>high school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.13</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.14</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.15</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>PhD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.16</td>
<td>high school</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.17</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.18</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.20</td>
<td>high school</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.23</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
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<tr>
<td>F.24</td>
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<td>Bachelor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.25</td>
<td>R.N. nursing</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.26</td>
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<td>F.27</td>
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<tr>
<td>F.28</td>
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<td>F.30</td>
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<td>F.32</td>
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<tr>
<td>F.33</td>
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<tr>
<td>F.34</td>
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<td>Bachelor</td>
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Table 4: Educational Status of Female Participants and Husbands
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<th>Participant</th>
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<th>Wives’ Education</th>
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<tr>
<td>M.1</td>
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<td>M.2</td>
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<td>M.6</td>
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<td>M.7</td>
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<td>M.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>M.28</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>high school</td>
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Table 5: Educational Status of Male Participants and Wives

Due to the nature of “snow-ball” sampling, this study’s sample became composed mostly of immigrants and a few refugees. Somali immigrants of the “first wave” migrated to the United States during 1980s for the purpose of seeking high education. Since the war started in Somalia in 1991, many decided to stay “temporarily” after graduating until the situations get better in Somali (which unfortunately have not at the time of writing this dissertation). This explains the high levels of education for many of the participants.
CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS

4.1. Introduction

In the previous Chapters, theoretical assumptions in three fields are reviewed: Islamic sources/texts on gender and family; gender and immigration, and the transnational heterolocal model of immigrants’ integration. Some common gender practices and notions in the Somali culture are also presented.

In this Chapter, I explore, by analyzing the accounts of the study’s participants, the intersectional relationships between Somali immigrants’ understanding of the Islamic gender tenets, their everyday negotiations of gender practices within their families, and the resultant transnational heterolocal pattern of relating to the American mainstream.

Participants’ accounts describe their gender attitudes, relationships with their spouses, and ways of socializing their children and how all of these are influenced by the original culture, Islamic gender perspectives and the new culture. This chapter revolves around the participants’ gender perceptions and practices within the home. Chapter 5 continues my analysis by examining respondents’ accounts of gender relationships and concepts outside the home, mainly courtship patterns and sexuality.
This chapter is divided into two sub-sections. Analysis in the first section reviews how participants view gender/sex identities and characteristics “appropriate” to female identity. The second section focuses on participants’ accounts of gender roles and relationships within the family. This includes domestic labor, wives’ paid work, financial gender relationships and decision-making power. Under “decision-making power,” sub-titles of “arranged marriage,” wives’ employment, women’s covering (hijab) and change in marital decision-making power are discussed.

4.2. Gender/Sex Identity

Lipman-Blumen and Tickamyer (1975) maintain there are three basic usages of the term “sex role” in literature. These are: “position, referring to normatively appropriate expectations for males and females; behavior, referring to what males and females are and do; and relationships, detailing the process of role taking” (p. 303). Theorists have altered the term “sex” to “gender” to refer to identities and roles related to masculinity and femininity. “Sex is a biological fact; gender, though based on biology, is a sociocultural-sociological-psychological fact” (Bernard 1971: 16 – as cited in Lipman-Blumen and Tickamyer 1975). Gender identity refers to the individual’s awareness of self as sexually a male or a female and appropriate status and behavior, or “what is societally defined as sex-appropriate behavior” (Lipman-Blumen and Tickamyer 1975: 303).

Among features that commonly define “traditional” femininity in the west are the female being passive, noncompetitive and self-sacrificing. Girls are discouraged during
socialization from developing a self-definition of assertiveness and independence (Lipman-Blumen 1984). This perspective can be found in Parsons’ (1955) functionalist dichotomizing of family roles into instrumental and expressive, performed respectively by male and female members. Parsons (1955) maintains that the function of assuming the instrumental roles by husbands and the expressive or socio-emotional roles by wives is functional to prevent competition between the two sexes.

In the Judeo-Christian creeds,⁴⁰ the dominant religions in the West, feminine identity has been characterized by negative attributes linked to “original sin.” Eve was depicted in the Old Testament as the temptress responsible for Adam’s fall and was cursed threefold; “not only is she banished forever from the Garden of Eden..., but henceforth she is to bring forth children in pain and sorrow; and finally...she must submit eternally to the authority, as well as the sexual domination, of Adam” (Lipman-Blumen 1984: 72).

Power struggles between men and women constitutes the image of gender relationships in the Old Testament. These images convey the message that the only proper relationship is one of ultimate male power over women and female subordination and economic dependence (Lipman-Blumen 1984). The message from the Old and New Testaments “is the necessity of an unquestioning patriarchal order between the sexes. Men rule, women obey; men exercise authority, women follow their direction... [and should be] passive, obedient, asexual, and accommodating” (Lipman-Blumen 1984: 74). As a result,

⁴⁰The aim of this study is to explore the ways Somali immigrants understand and interpret Islamic gender texts while negotiating gender perceptions in the new culture, part of which is the Judeo-Christian perceptions of gender.
according to Jean Lipman-Blumen (1994), the focus of many gender theorists has been on dichotomous “dominant/subordinate” gender relationships.

In the original Somali culture, females are typically valued less highly than males, regarded as intellectually incapable, and a Somali proverb says, “Knowledge cannot come to reside in a bosom that has contained milk” (Kapteijns 1994: 217; Bryden and Steiner 1998: 27). Participants reject this cultural image of female identity, especially when compared to the Islamic principle of gender equality in self-worth and origin. M.37 distances himself from this underestimation of girls’ intellectual abilities, based on which their right of education is violated. M.37\textsuperscript{41} stated:

\textit{There is no difference between girls and boys, except physically. For me, my girls and my boys are the same. Back home there are differences; if somebody has only daughters, people would say, ‘Oh, he doesn’t have boys.’ Sometimes girls [in Somalia] don’t go to schools, or they go only to elementary and then don’t go to high school; they get married and discontinue their education. But for me, I like for my girl the same that I like for my boy.}

The same meaning was echoed by M.21 when he argued that the biological difference between the two sexes should not prevent absolute gender equality in obtaining education to the highest possible levels. He supported his argument by providing his understanding of the Islamic teaching when he said;

\textit{Maybe because of biological differences each should have certain tasks. For example, I can’t be a mother, nurse, and give birth to babies. But in regard to education and intellectual capacity, I don’t think it is limited to anybody. I don’t believe in that. I don’t think that Islam says women have

\textsuperscript{41} F. and M. refers to the participant’s gender. The following number is the ordinal number of the interview.}
to stay there or not do that. God gave all people talents; the talent to produce, the talent to work, the talent to gain knowledge.

Participants introduce a point of view, in which women’s identities and roles as wives and mothers are highly exalted. Women’s identities and roles are highly ranked, first because of how they are represented in Islamic discourse, and secondly due to their actual influence on other family members within and outside the family. When I first attended the Somali women-only *halaqa* to recruit participants and to observe their discussions, the presenter was narrating several *ahadith* that hold women, particularly mothers, in high regard, such as,

... ‘The best among you is the one who treats his family in the best manner. And I [the Prophet] am the one among you who treats my family in the best manner’...A man once consulted the Prophet Mohammad about participating in a military event. The Prophet asked the man whether his mother was still alive. When told that she was alive, the Prophet said: ‘Then stay with her, for Paradise is beneath her feet.’ ... A man asked the Prophet, ‘O Messenger of Allah, who among the people is most worthy of my love and respect?’ The Prophet replied, ‘Your mother.’ The man asked, ‘Then who is next?’ The Prophet answered, ‘Your mother.’ The man asked one more time and received the same answer. Only when the man asked the question a fourth time did the Prophet say, ‘Your father.’

Another woman from the *halaqa* commented, “*Our men and kids should be educated about this!*” When talking during the interview about how women are entitled to equal

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42 *“halaqa”* is an Arabic term that, in this context, refers to a group of people sitting together in a circle to discuss Islamic texts and discourses, and how they affect, and are affected by, social life.

43 *“hadith”* is a narrative relating deeds and utterances of the Prophet Mohammad.

44 Texts are explained in Arabic first and then translated by the presenter into Somali. I took the English translations of these *hadiths* from: http://muslim.families.com/blog/the-mother-in-islam And: http://newsgroups.derkeiler.com/Archive/Soc/soc.culture.iranian/2005-08/msg00345.html
rights and honor, F. 24, a mother of four, an interpreter in a hospital and married to a white American, said,

*They told us in the halaqa that a man came to one of the Prophet’s companions and said, ‘I took my mother to the hajj [pilgrimage to Mecca], and I carried her all the way to Makkah in the desert, and during the hajj walking, did I return what she did for me?’ The Prophet’s companion said, ‘no, not even for little pain when she delivered you.’*

Women attending the *halaqa* showed a tendency to use Islamic texts to affirm their legitimate entitlement to positive images within and outside of the family, higher education and just gender relationships.

### 4.2.1. Gender Appropriate Characteristics

During the interviews participants were asked to explain what features they thought a successful woman would embody. Participants were asked to choose the first or first two qualities for a successful woman from a specific set of qualities, namely competitiveness, assertiveness, self-sacrificing and care-taking (Straight 2003).

Participants did not accept the possibility that to be successful, a woman should be competitive or the only one who is self-sacrificing. The vast majority thought both these characteristics are extremes. Coming from a culture that prioritizes group interests over the individual,’ they did not see the justification for an individual to be competitive, especially for personal material gains. Self-sacrificing is seen as a feature expected from

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45 Here, and elsewhere, brackets mark text that has been inserted by me for clarification.
both men and women for the good of the whole family or community. The two other qualities, care-taking and assertiveness, had most approval among the participants.

Examples of participants’ descriptions about woman’s identity in relation to the mentioned characteristics follow. Interestingly, the following quotes show that five female interviewees did not even comprehend why and with whom a woman would compete. They could not view competitiveness beyond competing for self-spiritual perfection, awards in games or Qur’anic recitation competitions for children. An illustrative conversation between me and F.8 follows:

F.8:  Competitiveness is not even an issue; why are you competing? In the family?

Me:  Could be, or within the society.

F.8:  Competitiveness is not something I understand. I don’t think I was ever in competition with anybody, except with myself to be better than yesterday.

Me:  So, you never compete with anybody?

F.8:  No, unless I am in a game, but in real life no.

F.15:  The last I would choose is “competitiveness.” Who do you compete against?

F.24:  We should compete to keep the kids educated in Islam and dressed according to Islam. This morning, there was a muhadarah in the masjid [mosque]. Readers of the Qur’an competed. The winners got rewards.

F.27:  Competition is not good I think, because if you believe in yourself and what you are doing, like helping others, you don’t need to compete with others; if you have confidence, you don’t need competition.

F.18:  I don’t know competition for what. I will talk about myself: the only thing I will compete for is how to win jannah [paradise] insha’a Allah; that will be my priority; any other thing I can compromise.
“Self-Sacrifice” was similarly an unpopular trait among participants, except when equally required from both genders. This meaning is clear in the following quotes, chosen to represent the general trend in the interviewees’ accounts:

F.8:  I think if you put “self-sacrifice” and “care-taking” together and call it a duty: duty of a mother, duty of a wife, duty of a sister, I would choose it as a number one priority. But, that doesn’t mean the husband will just demand and demand; he will have his own duties too. And I expect when coming into the marriage both know what duties each has. I never worked when my children were little. I had my degree and everything I needed for work, but I never went out seeking a job, because I felt my real duty was to raise my children. But I don’t see that as sacrificing myself, I didn’t sacrifice, I invested in my future. Because I see them as my 401K plan [As your what? I asked] as my retirement plan, they call it my 401K plan (laughing). So, I have four children; that's my 401K plan, and I put into them all of my effort, all of my time.

M.38: Self-sacrifice is too extreme, unless you mean she sacrifices for her family in which case yes, and the same for the husband [sacrificing for his family].

M.31: She needs to sacrifice a lot of things for her family, just as the husband needs to do.

“Care-taking” and “assertiveness” had similarly high approval rates in contrast to the other two features, as illustrated in the following accounts. Care-taking is seen as crucial for the woman herself and for her family. Assertiveness is considered a necessary quality for a Somali woman in the new environment, to claim her Islamic identity, and, within her local community, to assert her rights and entitlements prescribed by Islam.

F.15:  I think “assertiveness” is first. You need to be assertive when Islam gives you specific rights. Some people in the community might try to sabotage things and make you do things that are not according to Islam. It is very important for you to say, ‘you know what? I don’t have to do this, because it doesn’t say in Islam that I have to do it.’

M.21: Care taking is the first and the center, because it means responsibility, and it is connected to the others [qualities], because if you carry out your responsibilities, you will be confident and assertive.
M.3: (A father of four girls) The most important quality for a woman is “assertiveness” to know her environment and to make her decisions based on how she feels and to avoid peer pressure and other people making decisions for her.

While F.8 was promoting the idea that a woman should be assertive, she voiced the problematic nature of doing so in cultures with contradicting images for a successful woman. F.8 expressed her confusion by saying:

Assertiveness? Probably in this society. (Sighing) See, this is one of the western values I am struggling with. These are assertiveness and aggression, because when one becomes like that, all of the sudden you are labeled with a bad name: ‘oh she wants to be like a man,’ or something. I am not talking about Somali women now. I am talking about within the western culture. When American women go off and become tough, corporate leaders, and are assertive, they are not going to look at them and say, ‘Oh look how nice! She is running that.’ They would insult her. There is such hypocrisy and such double-sidedness in this, because if you stay home and take care of your family, they would say, ‘Oh you’re such a weakling.’ So, you never win in this society. At least in our society, you know where you belong and you are respected and honored in that role and you know and respect yourself in that role.

F.27: Care taking is the most important, because if you help others even at the expense of yourself, God will help you. That’s what we believe in.

M.31: Care-taking is first, if that means taking care of herself and her family. “The home is the mother.” The mother holds the family together.

These narrations indicate that the qualities of “assertiveness” and “care-taking” are the most preferable for a woman for several reasons. These are to protect her rights and identity within the community and the wider society, to hold the family together, to deserve God’s help, and to gain confidence from performing her role in familial mutual obligations. “Self-Sacrifice,” however, is important for both genders to achieve the overall goal of the family’s well-being.

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46 A common saying in Somali, Yemeni and possibly some other Arab cultures. The saying indicates that the home without a mother and a wife is nothing more than a residence in which family members sleep and eat.
4.2.2. Gender Roles in Agreement with Characteristics

To probe participants’ perspectives on gender identities, and how these shape their perspectives on gender roles and relationships, they were asked whether they supported certain statements. The following two statements obtained the highest level of conformity among the respondents: “girls are best suited to nurture children emotionally and physically” and “when boys get married, they should be the breadwinners of their families.” The vast majority of participants thought the two statements were true and nine of them attributed each to God’s creation of both genders’ identities. Even those who expressed more “liberal” views in regard to women’s rights to equal education, career opportunities, husband’s participation in the domestic labor and freedom of choosing future husbands were careful to assert that for the specific duties of taking care of children and providing for the family, “traditional” gender specialization should prevail. F.30 who used to work as a diplomat representing Somalia in international realms agreed with the first statement despite the fact that she was too busy to spend enough time with her son when he was young and a Philippine maid used to take care of him instead. In her words, she confirmed, “Agree, absolutely. Fathers are very important and they have their role, but mothers are the nurturers. They are the one who teach you the language, how to talk, how to walk, everything. I think God gave us special gifts.”

47 However, while agreeing, many added exceptions or comments to the statement. For example, when discussing the first statement, many said that fathers also have to provide care, but mainly it is the mother’s responsibility. That is what F.14 argued for when saying, “the child needs both, but nobody can do like the mom. She is the closest person to the child.” On the second statement, they agreed that it is the husbands’ duty to provide financially for the family. Nevertheless, in a country like the USA, where life is expensive, wives should step in and help financially.
While there was a semi-unanimous agreement about the legitimacy and necessity of husbands’ participation in household tasks, especially if their wives work outside the home, there was a strong rejection of allocating child care obligations, in particular the emotional care, to the fathers. That objection was linked to the nature, or gender identity, of men and women God made, and to the special biological relationship between small children and mothers. Examples of participants’ reactions to the statement “girls are best suited to nurture children emotionally and physically” follow, indicating the particularity placed on women as spiritual nurturers of children, and the created nature of each gender.

F.14: The child needs both, but nobody can be like the mom.

F.15: Being a mother myself, I think that is true, because when you have a child, Allah gives you this hekmah [wisdom in Arabic], or I don't know what I call it. I mean, as soon as she [her daughter] turns at night or coughs, I am like up awake looking what is going on with her and my husband is sleeping. It is not that he doesn't care about her or something; it is just that rahmah [mercy in Arabic] that Allah instilled in a mother. So, I think they are much better in nurturing kids than the men are.

F.34: Many children can manage without a dad and become educated, strong, and successful, but without a mom, always they become down. That shows you how they need their mother more than the father. They need the father, of course, but the mom really builds the self-esteem and the good quality of the children.

M.4: Both can do that, but girls Allah subhanaho wa ta'alah [may God be glorified] gave them the specialty to nurture.

M.12: Naturally, girls are more closer to be care giving. I am not saying males don’t give care, but girls are more.

From these accounts several conclusions can be drawn. First, attributing the nature/identity of men and women to God’s creation prevails. God’s creation here refers to the biological differences between the two sexes and the spiritual view that women have more mercy than men do. Secondly, “traditional” western dichotomous notions of
assertive and competitive males versus care-taking and sacrificing females are alien to the participants in this study. Rather, the most prominent assumptions that determine assigning the gender-related features are: prioritizing groups or families’ interests over individuals, the need to preserve Islamic identity in dominantly non-Muslim surroundings and the need to assert rights and entitlements in a local community affected by some inherently unfair gender-related cultural practices and notions.

4.3. **Gender Roles and Relationships**

For Lipman-Blumen and Tickamyer (1975), even though it was found that some features considered feminine in one society were treated as masculine in another, in general, there is a considerable, cross-cultural regularity in assigning different roles based on sex. Although the tendency for specialization by sex “varies in form and degree over time, place, and group, it appears to be an universal social fact” (Lipman-Blumen and Tickamyer 1975: 304). Despite a variation in types, role differentiation on the basis of sex is a “prominent feature of all societies” (Levy 1996: 206).

In modern societies, like the United States, gender roles are described as more “egalitarian” (Duffett 2007), in which women and men’s roles inside and outside the house are becoming increasingly similar or identical. Gender role equalization has become a dominant shifting social trend in western societies, including the United States, where changes in the economy, the women’s movement of the 1960s and 1970s, and

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48 I use the word “identical” instead of “equal,” since the former describes more neutrally the modern movement toward demolishing distinctions between men’s and women’s roles. Whether that movement produces justice and satisfaction for both genders, which is implied in the latter term, can be disputed.
advances in birth control, legalization of abortion and laws against sexual discrimination in employment have all transformed gender roles, relations and ideology (Spain and Bianchi 1996). For example, the past fifty years have witnessed a stable increase in American women’s paid labor-force participation rates (Duffett 2007).

Despite its universal effect in classifying roles, sex as a differentiating variable is distinguished from its role as a stratification factor (Lipman-Blumen and Tickamyer 1975). The difference is explained in the following quote,

_Allotting certain tasks to women and complementary ones to men creates a structural interdependence between the sexes. Such interdependence itself is neither undesirable nor an inevitable precondition for inequality...The crux of the problem is that every society values men’s contributions and resources, their activities, privileges, even their responsibilities, more highly than women’s_ (Lipman-Blumen 1984: 6).

Sex differentiation _per se_ does not necessarily lead to sex stratification, or to social inequality between genders, unless this hierarchy is created by social and cultural ideologies. Stratification theory, from a functionalist viewpoint, states that certain roles are highly rewarded because they are more functionally important to the survival of a system than others are. However, this rule does not apply to sex role stratification. In any society, males’ roles are considered higher and more valued than females,’ only because they are performed by men (Lipman-Blumen and Tickamyer 1975). Unfortunately the universal ranking of sex-based roles is constantly and invariably biased towards males; roles and related tasks carried out by males are more highly respected (Lipman-Blumen and Tickamyer 1975).
Devaluing women’s unpaid roles in western thought is embodied in two branches, functionalism and classical Marxism. From a functionalist point of view, Parsons describes the housewife role as a “pseudo occupation.” Similarly, Engels’ Marxist analysis characterized women’s domestic labor as an “unimportant extra” (Lipman-Blumen and Tickamyer 1975). Historically, devaluing women’s unpaid roles in the American family has grown since the Industrial Revolution, during which “men came to be associated with the values of the industrial world – money, production, and power” (Lipman-Blumen 1984: 106). The materialistic and capitalist ideals of the Industrial Revolution have dominated social life, positioning women’s labor, which does not generate money, into an inferior role.

For Lipman-Blumen (1984), a revised ideology that redefines the value “traditionally” placed on one sex’s identity and roles can correct power relationships, so that gender-role differentiation does not dictate one gender’s inferiority and powerlessness. In confused times of rapid social change, power resources can undergo serious re-evaluation whereby people, faculties and social arrangements previously undervalued can be redefined as vital to resolving urgent problems (Lipman-Blumen 1994). For example, some feminists argue that women have a powerful social role: “females conceive, bear children, and feed them from their bodies, and have always taken responsibility for maintaining them – that is; maintaining the entire human race” (French, 1994: 15).

From an economic viewpoint, feminist theorists declare that women’s domestic labor, though not paid, contributes in at least two ways to the economy. First, by bearing
children women produce the next generation of workers. Secondly, “by tending to the emotional, physical, and social needs of their husbands and later their working-age children, women restore the vitality of the labor force” (Lipman-Blumen 1984: 24). In the West, only after “contemporary feminist scholars reclaimed the importance of housework, both in women’s lives and the social economy, was the contribution women have made through their unpaid domestic labor truly recognized” (Lipman-Blumen 1984: 126). Economists started to calculate women’s unpaid domestic and community labor in the GNP, and lawmakers started to include these in women’s financial entitlement after divorce (Lipman-Blumen 1984).

4.3.1. Gender Roles in the Somali Immigrant Family

Islamic societies, including the Somali, view motherhood as the most prestigious role of women (al Faruqi 1991). In the following sections, I discuss how Somali immigrants view gender roles and relationships on domestic labor, decision-making and wives’ careers. Before examining how gender roles have been affected in the Somali immigrant family, it is useful to have an idea of what these were like in the past Somali society.

According to F.32, one of this study’s key female informants, who has a PhD and works as the Executive Director of a community services organization, women’s “traditional” roles in Somalia vary in different regions. F.32 explained by saying:

Women in Somalia generally stay home, but this is different from one region to another. Women along the river area are active farmers. I worked with them for some time for a project. If you go to the field, you will see people who are working are mostly women. Many women in the cities go to school, also have their professions, teachers, nurses, a few
were ministers and go into politics, and a high percentage work in offices. Then you have nomadic women and they really work hard; they go out to bring water for the family, prepare and sell milk, and take care of their houses, so they are really busy. Then you have women, specifically along the coastal area, who stay home, but they do business at home too, like, some of them sell tomatoes or vegetables, or cooking sweets to sell them, but they are not far away from their homes.

There is an apparent conflict between the above quote and several others that indicate that women in the original Somali culture were exclusively responsible for homes and men for outside home tasks. For example, F.8, the schoolteacher, living in the United States for twenty-five years, narrated an event when she explained to a relative, visiting from Somalia, why her sons, instead of daughters, were cleaning the kitchen:

*I remember one time my brother in law came over and it was late in the night. My husband was making coffee for them and I was grading papers and my two sons were cleaning the kitchen and he [the visitor] thought I have four boys, and somebody said no they are two boys and two girls, he was like, ‘why are the boys cleaning the kitchen?’ I said because they are younger, the girls are sleeping.*

In commenting on men’s participation in housework, F.27 said, “*even in Somalia we, brothers and sisters, used to help and that was different from other families. Because my mother had some work outside the house, and we had to help her inside the house.*” F.30, the ex-high ranking diplomat, indicated that, thanks to domestic labor, neither her husband nor she did any work inside the house. “*But, in general wives are the ones who work at home, even if they work outside, they still have to work inside.*” F. 17, a mother of three and a teacher, lamented the old days when she had the luxury of staying home, decorating her hands with henna, by saying, “*back home my husband would go to work*
and I stayed at home cooking and putting on henna (she laughed). I didn’t worry about paying rent, bills for heat, electricity or anything.”

Opposing views on Somali women’s common role can be seen in light of the nature of women’s “work” in Somalia, especially in the nomadic and rural areas; compared to the modern practice of women’s employment. Somali women’s roles outside the household are not identical to those of men. Women take care of the sheep and goats, while men take care of the camels and travel to the city to bring or take commodities, according to F.34. In addition, the Somali woman’s work has not been enforced by capitalistic development, and it does not alienate her from her domestic roles within the house, nor oblige her to share the financial responsibility of the household. Most participants indicate that in Somalia the house is the woman’s domain with no financial obligations on her whatsoever. F.17 stated: “Back home we believe that men should go outside to work, women should stay at home and train their children and take care of them. But things here are different.” M.1 compared the dominant trend in the original culture with the different pattern in the new society when he said, “Here, wives go out to work. In Somalia, they prefer mothers to stay home. Alhamdullellah, we as a family, I go out for work to meet my family's financial needs and my wife stays home and takes care of kids.”

In general, the old expectations are applied by Somali men in the diaspora and are taught to boys in the Somali community. In the new society, and following the “traditional”

49 For more on women’s roles in African agricultural labor, see Boserup, Ester (2007). Women’s Role in Economic Development. Earthscan.
gender role division, the participants indicated that husbands bear full responsibility for tasks outside the house, including taking children to health appointments, children’s school visits, after school activities, shopping, \textsuperscript{50} taking trash out, and, of course, working to provide financially for the family. M3 believes “\textit{boys should be trained to be responsible not only for themselves, but for their families’ well being, especially financially}.” Issues of domestic labor, wives’ paid work, and financial gender relationships are explored in more detail in the following sections.

4.3.2. Domestic Labor

“Traditionally,” in Somali culture, although many women work outside the home, husbands are seldom involved in the house chores. F.34, the young divorced community activist, hoped that the situation of men shunning housework would change. She described Somali women’s work in nomadic regions:

\begin{quote}
They take care of the entire household; they build the house, take care of the family, of the sheep and goats. [What do the men do?] They take care of the camels, and go to the city bring or take things, but the bigger responsibility was on the women. [Do men help inside the house since women also work outside?] No, no...that’s the sad thing, but we hope that will one day change.
\end{quote}

From analyzing participants’ accounts, it appears that providing financially for the family is still viewed as a husband’s exclusive obligation, while taking care of the house and the children is still viewed as the woman’s first priority. “The home is the mother” \textsuperscript{51} as M.4

\textsuperscript{50} Most of the participants maintained that wives write out lists of needed items for the husband.

\textsuperscript{51} The explanation of this proverb is in footnote 46, page 104.
affirmed, and “the more you [wife] stay in your house, the more it becomes blessed,” as F.18 said.

The influence of the original cultural pattern on gender division of domestic labor appeared in many participants’ attitudes. F.10, the pharmacist, who graduated in Italy and has been living in the United States for seven years, did not agree to the statement that “boys should participate equally in the housework after getting married” by saying, “I don’t want my son to cook and clean. It is good that he does his bed and clothes but not to come to the kitchen and cook; helping but not doing everything like women do.” F.26 echoed the sentiment in saying, “Not that they have to; not compulsory but if they see something in the house, they will do it, but not equally.” F.14 thinks “the girl, since she will be a mom tomorrow, has to learn how to cook, how to clean, how to handle a home.”

The help of extended family members or cheap domestic servants made it possible for women, in the original culture, to combine outside and house work. Even when mothers stay home, being surrounded by helpers enabled them to enjoy staying home and allowed men to avoid sharing domestic responsibilities. When asked whether her ex-husband would help in the domestic labor in Somali, F.30 said, “no, he didn’t and I didn’t either. In our culture, we are so lucky. Without abusing them, we provide domestic employment to poor people who need work. Yeah, I didn’t do a thing, not even tea.” F.17 remembers being among so many family helpers, which cannot be compensated for after migrating
except by God’s help; “I would get a lot of help. Now it is difficult, because I am the only one, but alhamdulellah,\textsuperscript{52} Allah will help me.”

In the diaspora, not only do Somali working mothers struggle to combine the duties of inside and outside work, but stay-home mothers also no longer benefit from the relief of having extra helping hands in performing household chores. A few enjoy the privilege of living with some members of an extended family who accompanied them in migrating to the United States. An example is \textbf{F.27}, who said, when asked about her husband’s help,

\textit{He helps, but not that much, because he has no time. Before my mother and my sister came to live with us, he used to help a lot even in cooking. When I had my first son before my mom came, he cleaned, changed diapers, everything. But now he sees a lot of people in the house, so he thinks I am okay (laughing).}

Despite the clear gender division on domestic labor within the Somali family, this classification is not rigid if new conditions necessitate adjustment. Being in the new culture of the United States,\textsuperscript{53} and becoming interested in the original teachings of Islam, unfettered by Muslim cultural practices, most participants exhibited an attitude change. For example, there is partial consensus that men should undertake house chores, especially if wives work outside the house. \textbf{F.24} pointed out the two factors when saying:

\textit{I prefer boys to work outside and girls to work inside, but in this country if they have to, they have to share. You know, what you have to do, you have to do. Also, if the women can’t do their house work, because of any reason like nursing, being pregnant, men should help. They told us in the halaqa last week that men should help even when wives stayed home, especially}

\textsuperscript{52} Arabic expression meaning “Praise be to God” or “Thank God.” It is a common expression to comment on both happy and sad situations.

\textsuperscript{53} Where general attitude and life conditions accept, promote and even require wives’ work outside the home.
when they have the period, breastfeeding, when she delivers a baby, or she is sick. They [men] should cook, clean and do everything.

F.30 did not approve the preciseness of dividing housework between husbands and wives “equally.” However, she thought, “they just should help, and that help should be appreciated by the wife, even if he does little. It takes the woman out of her stress.” M.22, whose wife got a high school diploma from Somalia and is completing her studies in Columbus, said when asked about helping in domestic labor, “Yes, I do when my wife is busy studying. Most of the time, I am away from home [has two-shift job], if I am home, I even cook. Men cook at restaurants, why not at their homes?”

Women finding paid jobs, involvement in study programs, separation from their extended family and acquiring Islamic knowledge, like learning of Prophet Mohammad’s help in domestic labor, have all weakened stigmatizing men’s involvement in house work and have modified the traditional cultural convention that housework is only the women’s responsibility. According to F. 10, moving to live in the United States has changed many cultural perceptions of Somali immigrants. “So, when I say husbands should help wives, we didn’t have this idea in Somalia, where there were many people to help. I didn’t need my husband’s help,” she explained. This opinion was echoed by M2, who indicated the most notable change in his family life after settling in America is the need for him to participate in household chores, though his wife does not work outside the house. M2 said, “I never thought I would cook or clean. Back home my wife would get help from many family members and we didn’t worry about that.” Somali women who used to work outside the house in Somalia, and, before emigrating, had the extended family’s help,
never needed their husbands’ help. But, being far from extended family’s help has required men’s increased involvement in household chores and care of children.

Unlike the modern fast-paced life style, where families consume pre-prepared convenient foods, Somali families used to spend much time preparing food. Both genders now employed outside the home has motivated men to share inside tasks to maintain a similar life style as they previously had. “And many Somalis now do this. She is a human being. If he just waits for her coming from work to cook, this is unfair,” F.17 maintained. Although not to the same degree for all participants, men’s and women’s changed attitude on tasks within the house was repeatedly referred to in the accounts. F.24 explained when she said, “Somali men change when they come here, because back there you have your family to help- grandmothers, aunts, sisters- you have a lot of help, but here the couples have to help each other.” M.36, whose wife does not work outside the house, explained his attitude about change when saying,

Back home, women do not work outside, and if they do, they do businesses from home; they stay home and men do the hard work outside. So, it was unusual for men to participate in the house chores, the work was kind of clearly divided, but here where everybody is doing the same job outside, inside job should be everybody’s job.

M.38 viewed the change as being logical and humane by saying, “in Somalia ladies do not work [outside] most of the time. But here, my wife works eight hours a day and I work eight hours, when we get home, we both are tired, so it is not fair to stay and wait for her to prepare things for the two of us.” M.37 pointed out how separating from the extended family has motivated him to help his wife in house chores by saying, “Here my wife
needs me all the time; she is always busy. Back home she used to get help from our relatives; kids would go to neighbors’ and relatives’ houses and were being taken care of. But, here me and her only, so I have to help her a lot.”

Moving to live in the United States has modified Somali men and women’s attitudes toward participating in domestic labor. However, two points should be considered in this change. The first point is that domestic labor is still viewed as the woman’s responsibility, and men, in extraordinary circumstances, have had to “help.” This opinion was expressed in the words of F.18, who appreciates her husband’s support which compensates for the absence of extended family help, when saying, “Without him, I wouldn’t be able to live in the U.S. where we don’t have the help of our family. It would have been very hard.” Nevertheless, she was careful to end her opinion by adding:

It is still my primary job, especially if he is working and he lets me stay at home, that’s a big ni’mah [bounty in Arabic]. Not many women get that. So I will handle the house. And I accept it just to please Allah. I will teach my daughter to do that. It is a simple thing, and if she misses it, it will be a hard thing for her and her family in the future.

F.18 considered for a woman to be a full-time mom at home is not only her first obligation, but also a “large bounty” from Allah that needs to be appreciated by running the house properly and being satisfied. F.18’s account supports the sense of self-fulfillment staying home generates, but does criticize the demand for equal participation by men in household chores. When asked if she supported the statement that “when boys get married, they should help equally in the house chores,” she said,

Helping, yeah. When there is a need, he should step in. But don’t divide it that way; this is my job and this is your job. I think this is a low thinking
when the woman says ‘why do I have to do that.’ This is just a waste of time. If he can do something, go ahead, step in, do it, and don’t say [she is addressing the man] ‘no, this is not my job.’ And for the woman she should appreciate that help and know that basically it is her responsibility.

The second point on attitude change is that where wives do not work outside the house, most of the men indicated that they do not, or only occasionally, help with housework. The reasons are often that men work most of the time and they do not have time left for helping in the house chores, they are kept for the “heavy work tasks, like major cleanings,” or wives themselves do not allow them to, lest they mess up things. M.11 said: “I know how to cook, but my wife does not allow me to, but, if she is busy, she tells me what to do, and I do accordingly.” One exception is M.6 when he maintains that although his wife does not work outside the house, “she is very active in the community and whenever she is outside, I take care of the housework, and I cook every weekend.”

Distinguishing Islamic principles from Somali cultural practices was a dominant tone in the narratives of participants, especially women of the halaqa. F.24 agrees “culturally,” as she emphasized, with the idea that “girls only are responsible for the household chores,” because as she explained, “that’s something in my culture, where only women cook and clean.” Referring to Islamic texts, most participants agreed that, when having time, men should participate in the household chores. Female participants, more than males, referred to the example of the Prophet Mohammad, who would help with domestic labor, to support the demand for men to participate in household chores. F.14 argued that,

*In our culture, they teach men to be arrogant and think that women should serve them all the time. This is in our culture, but not in our religion. In*
Islam, the Prophet, peace be upon him, would help and serve his family and participate in the housework.

To counter “traditional” cultural stereotypes, some men referred to Islam to legitimize their involvement in household chores, like M.31, who lives with his old parents after separating from his previous spouse, and cooks and cleans for his mother. He said:

Since my mother is old, I am partly responsible for most of the house chores. I am the only one living with them. So, I take care of them...some people in the Somali community when seeing a man doing things to help his wife in the house chores, they say, ‘oh, my God! She did sehr [magic, in Arabic] on him; she is smarter than him,’ while in our religion, the Prophet used to help his family in their work.

Citing Islamic texts to legitimize their entitlement to their husband’s involvement in housework appeared in many of the women’s accounts, mainly by those who attend the weekly, women-only educational halaqah in the masjid. For example, F.15’s explanation of her perspective on domestic division of labor, when saying:

I would say that everybody should help out, because back home you have a lot of people helping, but in this country everybody is going to school, or working. So, if you are going to make girls work at home and still go to school and all that, and have the guys not doing anything, it is not really fair. And we've learned from the sirah⁵⁴ that the Prophet, salla Allah alaih was sallam⁵⁵ helped in the house. When Aisha, his wife, was asked: ‘What did the Prophet used to do in his house?’ she replied, ‘He would keep himself busy serving his family and when it was the time for prayer, he would go for prayer.

F.15 thinks that moving to live in the United States has empowered Somali women for two reasons. First, back home people were not very well educated in Islamic principles

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⁵⁴ Sirah is an Arabic that in the Islamic context means the Prophet Mohammad’s life history.
⁵⁵ An Arabic phrase usually used by Muslims after mentioning the name of the Prophet Mohammad, and meaning ‘Peace be upon him.’
that granted women their rights. After coming to America, many Somali women, and men, become more interested in learning more about their religion as a way of searching for an identity within the larger mainstream (See Roald 2001). Second, discovering that many values promoted in Islam are normally practiced by the American mainstream was another reason for women’s empowerment in the United States. In F.15’s words, this is how the two processes interweave:

In Somalia, people were not educated in the true Islamic sense...but, people started to know a lot about Islam. And because they now live in a society that practices many things in the sunnah\textsuperscript{56} that we forgot, you know; a lot of things that we, Muslims, used to have traditionally, but we kind of let go and forgot about them, like men helping in the house. It is something that the Prophet, upon him be peace, did, but men back home probably wouldn’t like to touch like a plate because they thought ‘oh, I am a man, I am not supposed to do females’ or whatever. But they come to this society and they see, oh, I don’t have a choice, because women are probably working, going to classes, then what is he going to do? Let the house and dishes dirty? He can’t, he has to help.

Not only if women work outside the home, are they, under Islam, entitled to their husbands’ help on the housework, but many participants think that the same should be practiced when wives choose, and can afford, to stay home. When asked if he agrees with the statement that “when boys get married, they should participate in the housework,” M.1, whose wife does not have a paid job, said, “boys should participate in the housework whether or not their wives go outside for work, although in our culture mothers only do the house work.” M.1’s viewpoint matches with most of the participants

\textsuperscript{56} sunnah is a primary source of shri’ah taken from the sayings, actions and approvals of the Prophet Mohammad, or it is an example from the Prophet Mohammad.
who were cautious to differentiate on many topics between Somali culture and Islamic teachings.

Participants’ answers to the question whether husbands participate in housework are summarized in Table 6.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wife’s Participation</th>
<th>Reasons for no participation</th>
<th>Kinds of Help</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wives</strong></td>
<td>Husbands work and have no time, wives stay home. Wife does not allow husband, especially to cook. Wives do not trust the quality of their husbands’ help; “don’t want to take the risk.” Female relatives live with them and no need for husband’s help. Used to help, but when kids grew up, the children helped instead.</td>
<td>Heavy work tasks. (major cleaning, taking out trash). Outside tasks (shopping, driving family members to appointments, schools, hospitals, after school activities, school meetings). Cooking, especially on weekends Laundry and dishwashing Helping children with homework Preparing children for school Taking care of babies (changing diapers, feeding).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 said their husbands help a lot. 7 said sometimes (on weekends, when wife is sick or too busy, do only heavy work tasks, especially cleaning or repairing). 3 said their husbands never help.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Husbands</strong></td>
<td>5 said they help their wives, 11 said sometimes they do, and 3 said they never help.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 said they help their wives, 11 said sometimes they do, and 3 said they never help.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Husbands’ Participation in Domestic Labor

Comments on husbands’ participation in domestic labor:

**F.23**: Oh, yeah, masha’a Allah, he does [help].

**F.24**: Oh, yes. Alhamdulellah, masha’a Allah.\(^{57}\) He helps a lot.

**F.20**: Yeah. He started helping after I joined school.

**F.15**: Even though I don’t work outside the house, he does help.

**F.26**: Sometimes he helps. If he comes home before me, he does whatever he can; he cooks, cleans, and washes dishes.

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\(^{57}\) Expressions, like *masha’a Allah*, or *alhamdulellah* are used when expressing admiration or an impression of things seen or heard.
F.10: He knows how to cook, but he doesn’t have time.

F.14: He helps when I am not here. But, he helps more with things outside the home. He returns from his work before I come. So, he feeds kids and helps them do their homework.

F.25: (married to an African-American) Yeah, yeah. [What kind of help?] Oh, my goodness. I just carry the baby for nine months, then he would take care of them and me. He would get up in the night if they cry, do for them the milk and rock all night even if he needs to go to work in the morning. So, he is very supportive. But mostly I am the one who cooks every day. I am the strict one who educates the kids, their manners and everything, raising them the right way.

4.3.3. Wives’ Paid Work/Employment and Financial Relationships

Women in the original Somali culture generally stay home and do not work in the western sense of “women’s outside employment.” Women in cities who work outside the household do so for payment and the nature of their work is similar to that of western women. In the Bedouin and rural regions, women work outside the home, but not for payment. Rural and Bedouin Somali women mainly work to fulfill the family’s basic economic needs. When Somali women work outside the home, there is still a division of labor based on gender both outside and inside the house. Somali families now live in the American mainstream, in which the dominant attitude, mainly individualism, the demanding consumerist life style, and the modern capitalist concepts of what valued work is, obligates women’s paid work. In 2000, some 77% of American women between 25 and 54 years of age were in the workforce (Porter, 2006). Previous studies find that since immigrant wives have acquired paid jobs, power relationships, as a result, changed in favor of women in their families (See Margolis 1994; Goldring 1996). In this section, I

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58 For more on women’s roles in African agricultural labor, see Boserup, Ester (2007). Women’s Role in Economic Development. Earthscan
discuss how Somali immigrant families deal with, and perceive, wives’ new role of working outside the home and how financial relationships, as they reflect the decision-making power, are affected by that change.

Before examining the participants’ narratives, it is useful to have a summary of income and occupation data, as in the following two tables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Husband’s Occupation</th>
<th>Wives’ Income ($1,000)</th>
<th>Contribution to household income.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F.8</td>
<td>teacher</td>
<td>teacher</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.10</td>
<td>pharmacy technician</td>
<td>businessman</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>about 40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.13</td>
<td>office manager</td>
<td>computer technician</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>about 50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.14</td>
<td>language interpreter</td>
<td>teacher assistant</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>about 80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.15</td>
<td>housewife</td>
<td>teacher</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.16</td>
<td>teacher assistant</td>
<td>teacher</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.17</td>
<td>teacher (widow)</td>
<td>businessman</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.18</td>
<td>teacher</td>
<td>teacher</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.20</td>
<td>nurse assistant</td>
<td>taxi driver</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>about 50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.23</td>
<td>case manager</td>
<td>taxi driver</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.24</td>
<td>interpreter</td>
<td>retired</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>about 50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.25</td>
<td>teacher</td>
<td>computer programmer</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>about 30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.26</td>
<td>store owner</td>
<td>community organization</td>
<td>not stable</td>
<td>not stable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.27</td>
<td>housewife</td>
<td>taxation employee</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.28</td>
<td>store owner</td>
<td>physician</td>
<td>not stable</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.30</td>
<td>community activist (divorced)</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.32</td>
<td>community organization manager</td>
<td>teacher</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.33</td>
<td>Professor (divorced)</td>
<td>professor</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.34</td>
<td>interpreter and community activist (divorced)</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>not stable</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7: Occupational Status of Female Informants and their Husbands

59 The questions mark mostly indicates that respondents refused to answer the question.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Wives’ Occupation</th>
<th>Husband’s Income ($1,000)</th>
<th>Contribution to household income.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M.1</td>
<td>accountant</td>
<td>housewife</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.2</td>
<td>accountant</td>
<td>housewife</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.3</td>
<td>social worker</td>
<td>teacher</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>about 70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.4</td>
<td>with the State of Ohio</td>
<td>librarian</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.5</td>
<td>teacher</td>
<td>teacher</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.6</td>
<td>information desk</td>
<td>housewife</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.7</td>
<td>teacher</td>
<td>librarian</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.9</td>
<td>school administrator</td>
<td>housewife</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.11</td>
<td>independent contractor; private company</td>
<td>interpreter</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>about 60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.12</td>
<td>teacher</td>
<td>social worker</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>about 60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.19</td>
<td>engineer</td>
<td>housewife and student</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.21</td>
<td>legal intec</td>
<td>victim advocate</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.22</td>
<td>case manager</td>
<td>housewife and student</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.29</td>
<td>factory worker</td>
<td>housewife</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.31</td>
<td>public relation director: community organization</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.35</td>
<td>teacher</td>
<td>housewife</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.36</td>
<td>school administrator</td>
<td>housewife</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.37</td>
<td>rental agent</td>
<td>housewife and student</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>about 80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.38</td>
<td>program director: community organization</td>
<td>teacher assistant</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8: Occupational Status of Male Informants and their Wives

M.4 remembers how in Somalia although many women work, “even if they do, men have to work hard to maintain their families, because the dominant concept there is that men are responsible for their families and leadership of the house rests on them.” The accounts of the participants indicate that the original perception, that men are the breadwinners of the family, does still hold, at least ideally. Although sixteen out of
nineteen women surveyed and eight of the wives of nineteen men who were surveyed have paid jobs, (a total of 24, 12 of whom have part-time jobs), men were, nevertheless still viewed as the only person responsible for providing for the family. All the women and men interviewed agreed with the statement “when boys get married, they should be the breadwinners of their families.”

Most of the respondents showed great flexibility on men’s involvement in housework, women’s participation in the labor market, and shared power of decision-making. Nevertheless, on the notion that men only should be the financial providers, all participants expressed strict adherence to the original culture. F.8 explained, by saying:

Agree strongly...They should be able to take care of their wives. They should not, and I am talking for my sons, should not marry anybody if they cannot take care of their household. They should not be saying to their wives, 'you take care of the electricity bill and I'll pay the water. Let's work together.' No! They should be able to pay for everything.

M.7, who sometimes shares the household chores and whose wife is a librarian, distinguished between women’s new role in the labor market and their right to keep the traditional entitlement to their husbands’ money when he said, “here both work [outside] so they should help each other inside the home. But, for men as the only breadwinner, this should be the same [as back in Somalia]. For us, I don’t use her money and she does not spend from it on the household.” On the other hand, in exchange for the complete entitlement to his wealth, M.7 believes his wife “has to take care of the internal [housework] things; that's her job, because she is not paying anything.”
Citing Islamic texts reinforced the argument of men’s obligatory financial responsibility and made it non-negotiable. Participants’ views indicated that Somali culture agrees with the Islamic principles on this aspect. F.23 explained her views by saying, “Because of my religion, yes. They should be the breadwinners, and girls’ income should be her own, for personal use. If she wants to spend on the household, that’s her choice.” F.16, the 23 year old, born in the United States and married to a white American, said:

_Ours is not a typical double-income American family. You know, in Islam, it is the husband who should take care of financial things. I mean, I might spend sometimes voluntarily like small groceries or gas for the car, but not as an obligation to pay for like bills or anything like that, alhamdulilelah [thank God]._  

Islam again is cited when M.31 thought of his financial responsibility as a “divine responsibility.” F.26 repeated the same meaning, in her words, when saying: “According to Islam, he shouldn’t ask for her money, but if she wants, she can give, and the man should understand the Islamic way; not to ask his wife. He has to provide everything.”

F.15 agreed with the statement that boys should be the breadwinners, “because Allah has put on them these responsibilities to take care of their families. There is no responsibility on the woman to take care of the family. In fact, even if the woman works, her money is her [her emphasis] money.” F.33, who is divorced from her American husband, said, “Islam doesn’t preclude women from earning money, and the Qur’an says, ‘To men is

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60 For a more complete review of the economic position of women from Islamic principles, see al Faruqi, (1991), from which the I cites: “A woman before and after marriage has a separate legal status that should not be affected by getting married...This separate legal personality prescribes for every woman the right to contract, to conduct business, to earn and possess property independently. Marriage has no effect on her legal status, her property, her earnings, - or even on her name” (p. 27).
allotted what they earn and to women is allotted what they earn. But it tells us that it is the men's responsibility to provide.”

The wife’s income is viewed as absolutely “her” income, as several of the women emphasized. Wives’ participation in the household financial responsibilities is considered a favor from the wife in the exceptional economic need her husband cannot altogether meet in the demanding new life. M.22, whose wife is a student and a housekeeper, thinks that “if the wife wants to help, that’s fine, but the responsibility of taking care of the family is the father’s.” F.8, the schoolteacher, married for 25 years since she first came to the United States, put it this way when asked, “how much does your income contribute to the total household income”:

My income doesn’t contribute at all to the household total income. My income is my [her emphasis] income. There is nothing budgeted, but I spend whatever I wish...we have a joint account and that's his money. My husband's income is in the middle. Both of us use it. And then I have my own account and that's not joint. So for the household stuff, I use ours which is my husband's account to buy whatever I want. But my salary is for my individual use. That's how things are separated.

F.23, the newly married case manager, answered the question of how much her income contributes to the household expenses by saying:

Anything that I want he provides for me. So, basically, I don’t spend that much on any need, because I am covered by my husband, and my income is basically for anything that I need for my extra personal things. I spend a little bit on unexpected expenses in the household needs. And I send money to my relatives back in Kenya [to where they fled the war in Somalia].

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61 Qur’an: 4:32.
Looking at the issue from a different angle, F.30, the 65 year old ex-diplomat, who has been in the United States since the civil war started in Somalia in 1991, explained why the traditional way of financial gender relationships, that places financial obligations on men, persists in the Somali immigrant family, despite changes in gender roles, when saying:

*In general, Somali men are very proud, and they want to make sure that they [her emphasis] themselves look after their family. So, they let the wife use whatever she makes as what they call here ‘pocket money,’ for her shopping, to give her relatives back in Somalia, or whatever, and even gives her more on top of that. But, it depends on the husband's income; if he doesn’t make much money, it is not logical for her to spend the money she wants and he struggles...Here in this culture I don’t think that the burden should be on the men. I think it should be shared.*

While recognizing their rights in their husbands’ financial responsibility, women maintain an independent economic entity by using their money, from work or other resources, and spending it on whatever they wish. Women’s autonomous economic character has contributed to their being able to maintain strong ties with extended parental family members, either in Somalia or in the diaspora. In particular, those who have steady income jobs are capable of supporting family ties by several means, one of which is sending regular remittances from their own incomes to devastated relatives in Somalia or refugee camps. Even F.20, who has a part-time job from which she gets a small income, has found a way to support her relatives from her limited earnings: “*me, my sister, and my brother take turns to send money to our relatives in Somalia. So, I send like once every three months.*”
F.24’s husband (who is a white American) has always wanted her “to stay at home and relax,” because his retirement salary is sufficient for them. The main reason for her getting paid work outside the house is her commitment to send remittances to her family back home. F.24 said:

*I have many family members back home, so the money I make mostly goes to help them, especially my mom who is old and sick and under these conditions in Somalia, they really need our help; without us, you know, they don’t have any other help.*

This is similar to many other cases, where the husband’s income is sufficient for their nuclear family’s expenses. Yet, the wife has decided to seek extra income and take financial responsibility motivated by helping extended family overseas.

Although a woman’s income is, ideally, *her* income, which she can spend on her personal needs and send to her family in Somalia or the diaspora, eleven women in the study, excluding the two divorcees and the widow, do actually contribute to the household expenses from their incomes. That contribution, however, is neither calculated nor pre-conditioned for her working. Women themselves choose to assume paid work that is a necessity for a family’s survival in the new environment of the United States, where “*life is very demanding*” as F.13 told the me. Apparently, the economic status of F.13’s husband has not provided her with the luxury of choosing to keep her income. She said, “*I spend all my income on household...life here forces you to spend more because of the way of living; mortgage, bills, and others.*” In a defensive tone, M.38, whose wife contributes to the household expenses, told me “*this is America and it is very hard for a*
household to depend only on one income. It is not that she has to do, but she wants to contribute.”

**F.34’s** view matches that of **M.38** when she said:

*If he is not capable, you are the other half and should support him by any means you can to bring money for the family, like going out to work or doing business from home. If he goes through difficulty, and you say, 'you are the man, you should provide for me’ and stay there waiting, you are making it too hard for him.*

The concept that “women’s paid work is necessary for their sense of well being” was mostly rejected, and only 3 out of 19 women agreed.

**F.8** expressed her opinion as follows: “I don’t think so. I don’t agree with that. Not for their well-being. I think taking care of their family is necessary for their well-being. I don’t think that working outside the house defines you as a person.”

**F.23** affirmed: “You can still stay home and be very happy and satisfied. I would want to stay home.”

**F.24** thinks that if needed, a wife “can work and gain money from business in the house and be happy also.”

Echoing this point of view, **F.10** disagreed with the statement in saying: “No, if the man has money, why should she go out and have a hard time in working... If my husband has money, I would have stayed home.”

**F.34** criticized some “sisters” who, after coming to America, live a comfortable life by staying home, but “they go out just because other women do; they say, ‘other women work outside, why not me? I am in America.’ It is a mentality that you behave differently
back home and when you come to America, you change.” F.34 believes there must be a “good reason” for her to go outside to work. Otherwise, she thinks: “If my husband was capable of providing me with everything I need at home, and I don’t feel like going outside for work, then why would I do that?”

F.33 thinks that the mere fact that a girl has a special talent to benefit her larger society is a sufficient reason for her working outside the home. She provided the example of her daughter, who “loves human rights issues. She is very passionate about that. So, I encourage her to pursue that and to go with it.” Other reasons the participants mentioned that influence women’s outside work are: to survive in the new society, especially if husbands’ income is inadequate, not having very young children to take care of, having a talent or a desire to contribute to the larger society’s public interest and having someone from the extended family to take care of children while the mother is out.

A husband’s inadequate financial ability was the reason for F.14, a mother of six and an interpreter with a good salary, to be the only woman in the sample who is the principal provider for the family. She leaves her home at seven in the morning until six in the evening. She also works on weekends if her job requires this. I met her in her house after she came home from work. Being exhausted from the long work hours did not make her forget the Somali cultural tradition of being as generous as possible with guests. While serving me tea and homemade cake, she spoke in a fatigued voice: “I am the breadwinner here. My husband couldn’t find a better job than he has now. So, he works, but his income is not very good.”
Many women expressed a wish to stay home if the husband’s income could afford providing for the family. Women voiced a concern that being absent from the house for long hours would negatively affect the children, and would exhaust them from the additional responsibilities. When asked “who decided about your working outside the house,” F.14, said, after a sigh: “I don’t think he would like me to stay home. For me, if he can financially take care of the family, I would like very much to stay at home and be a full-time mom.” When asked whether she agrees with the statement about paid work’s necessity for girls’ well-being, she said:

If the husband can handle the home’s expenses, I would like her to be a mom, especially when the kids are young. When the children grow, maybe she needs to go outside for work and social life. She gets new experiences from outside. She would know many things, which would help her family, but if her children are young, the first thing the kids need is their mother at home. When they are growing, they need things that nobody can give them except their mom, like feeling warm, and secure.

Most of the participants expressed the opinion that in children’s early years, they need to be close to the mother most of the time. Many considered taking care of children is serious and rewarding, if not more so than holding a paid position outside the house.

F.15, who decided not to work outside the house until her daughter reaches the age of school, stated that her husband has a full-time job, but with laughter she added: “Mine is a full-time job too!”

F.17, a widow and a mother of three, who has lived in the United States for 18 years, and works as a teacher, said: “When I had small kids I didn't throw them into day care. When
your kids grow up with you, you give them love that will last forever. Emotional nurturing helps kids to be emotionally strong.”

F.25 said: “After getting married, I didn’t work. I stayed for several years to take care of my kids and educate them and make sure you are doing things right.”

F.32, a PhD holder and the manager of a community organization put it this way:

If you have small children and you can afford staying with them, there are many scientific studies that show over and over again that the best thing you can give your kids is time. So, if the person can really afford staying home with children that would be the best.

Although the general trend was in favor of women staying home unless economic need demands them working out, many thought that women have to be qualified to assume a profession and be ready for unexpected circumstances. Examples of these circumstances were described by F.28, in saying:

Some husbands lose jobs and some Muslim women living in this country got divorced, and families suffer a lot to pay the rent, the bills, and to have enough income to survive. Back home they might not need it, [because of the support they would get from extended family], but here I think it is necessary for girls to be educated and then work outside the house to have income.

Based on the group-oriented perspective, women’s work outside the home is seen either as a necessity to help a husband’s insufficient income, or as a source of social expertise to know what is going on in the world and to know how to deal efficiently with children. Hence, working outside the home can have a positive impact on children when they are grown up. It provides the mother with the needed social experience to deal with them and understand what they go through in public life. Therefore, paid work for women is not only thought about in terms of women’s individual’s fulfillment. Rather, family and the
children are in the center of reasoning women’s outside work. It is worth noting that many of the women in this study are highly educated, and thus could find work easily.

4.4. **Decision-Making Power**

“Power” refers to “the process whereby individuals or groups gain or maintain the capacity to impose their will upon others, to have their way recurrently, despite implicit or explicit opposition, through invoking or threatening punishment, as well as offering or withholding rewards” (Lipman-Blumen 1984: 6). According to Jean Lipman-Blumen (1994), power relationships are almost ubiquitous. “The most casual observer will note that almost all relationships, from child/parent, to student/teacher, to worker/boss, to wife/husband, to minister/congregant, are structured as power relationships” (Lipman-Blumen 1994: 114). Social historians find that throughout history, there has been a power differential between men and women, based on biological and environmental reasons. However, the underlying base for this power differentiation is gender ideology that generates the dichotomous polarization of active versus passive, and independent versus dependent individuals (Lipman-Blumen 1984). “Traditionally” in western societies, power resources for men are different than those for women. Thus, women are socialized to rely on certain resources, like wit, beauty, sexuality, nurturance, dependence and passivity. Men, on the other hand, are taught to be independent, aggressive, competitive, strong and active to pursue institutional (educational and occupational) achievements (Lipman-Blumen 1984).
Power relationship between women and men is determined by three factors: their control over resources, their contributions to other partner’s and to family’s welfare, and the culturally perceived significance put on these contributions (Lipman-Blumen 1984). Feminists argue that by societal measures, women’s contributions are less valued than men’s. Moreover, in acknowledging women’s contributions, they are not rewarded by resources translatable into economic power and public status (Lipman-Blumen 1984).

In the following section, I further discuss gender power relationships within the Somali immigrant family, as described in the accounts of women and men taking part in this study. Participants were asked to talk about who decides on certain things, like their own marriage, their children’s marriage, wives’ paid work, wives’ and daughters’ covering in public – if applied – and whether they felt more or less power in general decision-making after migrating to the United States.

4.4.1. Arranged Marriage

In the Somali culture, most of the participants agreed with M.31 that, for the majority, one of two situations are normally found: The first is when the youth introduces the person they want to marry to the parents, to ask for their permission to marry. “If the father or the mother says, ‘that guy is bad, or I know this and this about him,’ it is up to the whole family to discuss the final decision,” as M.31 related. The second is when the parents suggest a person for their son or daughter who will decide whether to accept the suggestion.
Some participants, however, indicated that some in the original Somali society do force their girls to marry men they do not wish to marry. With no exception, participants opposed that kind of marriage, an opposition **F.23** described when she said:

> If your parents think that he is good, you might think he is not. And especially for us, Muslims, we preserve ourselves for that husband. We don’t engage in pre-marital sex. So, I think we should be given that choice, because after preserving yourself, you want to have somebody unique and special.

Significantly, when I asked participants whether their own marriage was arranged and whether they intend to arrange for their children’s marriages, most started answering by first questioning the very definition of the term “arranged marriage” as it is used in western discourse. “Arranged marriage” was frequently redefined to refute the widespread attached meanings, mainly parents’ forcing girls to marry, and to emphasize the importance of both individual choice and family input. **M.31** was referring to this when he said:

> Well, see that’s a tricky word. The term ‘arranged’ here in this society is a big misconception. It is always wise to consult your parents and relatives when you are about to decide whom you would share life with. This is a life-long commitment, and the parents have been with you taking care of you, watching you as you are growing up. So, when you become an adult, and because of their experience, it is very important for you to listen to what they have to say.

**M.12** thought that “arranged” “is not very good choice of a word, because what Americans think of arranged is different than what we have. It was our families who chose. But, we had the full choice and we opted for the families to act,” he explained.
Based on their modified definition, most of the participants did not oppose “arranged marriage” as long as families take into consideration individuals’ desire.

**M.37** explained: “You know? Arranged marriages are not bad either; it depends on the cultures. *In the Somali culture, many arranged marriages are good and end up in nice situations.*”

**M.31** commented: “*If their parents pick for them someone they like, saying, ‘we have seen so and so for you, would you like to?’ and the final decision is with the girl and the guy, then I have no problem with it.*”

**F.34** echoed this perspective when she said: “*If the parents suggest and the daughter or the son accepts, then why not?*”

Born in the United States to a Somali immigrant family and married to a white American, the twenty two-year old **F.16** narrated her story:

> We met first at the same school that we both worked at in the summer. I was looking to get married, and so was he. And one of my Arab friends is married to his friend. His friend was trying to help him in finding a Muslim wife, and his wife (who was also my friend) thought I was an ideal candidate. So, she introduced us formally to each other in their house. We spoke to each other, and we kind of clicked right away; we had the same interests and were very compatible. Then, I spoke with my parents afterward, and my parents were very open-minded and supportive. And we got married a couple of months ago.

Though “arranged” by their friends, **F.16’s** marriage was only conducted after her family’s approval. Although the majority of the participants disputed the use of the term “arranged” to suggest “forced” marriage, they strongly approved extended families’ involvement in either recommending or confirming the individual’s choice of the spouse.

**F.26** refused to call her marriage “arranged” and explained how she knew her husband by saying, “*He would work in Saudi Arabia, and called me several times to ask me whether I*”
agree to marry him. I said, ‘Come and see my family first,’ then he came to my family. They asked me. I said yes.”

Participants wished to retain the “supervising” role of family in their children’s marriage, so that they benefit from their elders’ wisdom, support and experience. Moreover, some associated the children’s, especially girls, ignoring family’s role with their becoming lonely and a vulnerable target of a spouse’s potential harassment, after being detached from family support. F.24 narrated a story about her friend, whose daughter wanted to marry a certain man. The parents refused, because they thought the man was not in a good situation in life and he did not deserve their daughter. F.24 related:

So, my friend didn’t want her daughter to marry him, and he all the time tells the girl that ‘your parents don’t want you to marry because they want you to stay at home cook and clean, so just come with me.’ And he has no money. The girl once called me and said, ‘can you lend me $1,000 and after I get married my husband will pay you back?’ I said, ‘no, if he wants to marry you, he should get the permission from your family, and he has to pay you everything and get you a house and furniture. You have to do the marriage arrangements with your family and don’t just follow your heart. Sometimes your heart takes you a wrong place. Just think.’

Family’s involvement, according to F.24, might protect children from taking emotional decisions they would regret in the future.

When talking about their attitudes toward their children’s marriage in the United States, most participants’ “hoped” that they would be involved by suggesting and giving advice. Nevertheless, they emphasized that the children’s decision should be the final. This is
what many indicated, like **F.25**, when saying, “*Insha’a Allah [God willing] they will decide about it, but I wish, I would be involved.*”

And **M.4** who said: “*We hope that when the time comes, somebody would approach their parents to ask for their permission.*”

**F.8**’s teenage children who were born in the United States needed to be persuaded of the possibility that their mother would “arrange” their marriage. She relates: “*I try to convince them that that’s the best way. I tell them who else loves you as much as I do? Don’t you trust me to choose the best person for you?*”

**F.24** described what she would do if she ever suggested a person to marry her daughters: “*first I will tell them, ‘Hey there is a man asking to marry you; he has this level of education, he is so and so.’ Then I’ll give them the chance to talk and to get to know each other and decide.*”

The general trend on “arranged marriages” is inclined to keep the parental family’s roles while stressing the individuals’ right to initiate the marriage by choosing the partner, or to accept or reject the parents’ proposal. The following table presents the most common explanations why participants refused to describe their marriages as “arranged.”
Table 9: Respondents’ Explanations as to whether Their Marriage was “Arranged”

Male Participants

M.21 “Not really. My brother knew her and told me that she was a good girl. He introduced us to each other.”
M.2 “We knew each other before marriage; we were neighbors and relatives.”
M.3 “We met in a friend’s house.”
M.4 “I and my family arranged for my marriage. It is more family connections.”
M.7 “I knew a lady who knew my wife and told me that there was a good girl for me to marry. The lady then invited both of us to her house, and we met there.”
M.9 “Her cousin was my close friend, and he introduced us to each other and arranged our marriage.”
M.19 “We knew each other from school. I talked to her father, who asked her and she agreed.”
M.22 “Our families knew each other. When we thought of getting married, we told our families and they were okay with it.”
M.29 “Her brother was my friend and knew that I was separated from my ex-fiancée. He told me, ‘don’t worry there are many other good women.’ I asked him, ‘Do you have a sister who will marry me?’ So, he invited me to their house and introduced us to each other. Then we spent one month contacting each other until we agreed on marriage.”
M.35 “We met before marriage through our families. So, it is 50/50 (laughing) half for them to choose and half for me to decide.”

Female Participants

F.8 “We met at the college here in the U.S. when we both were studying.”
F.13 “We met through friends.”
F.14 “We came from the same family and we knew each other before getting married.”
F.15 “I hadn’t known him personally before marriage. He went to school with two of my cousins then I met him officially at my cousin’s wedding two years before we got married.”
F.17 “We were neighbors, and we knew each other before getting married. Also our families knew each other and were satisfied with our marriage.”
F.18 “Not really. I knew him as a relative, and it was my choice.”
F.20 “No. no. we are actually relatives, so we knew each other before getting married.”
F.23 “No, no. our family knew each other and we knew each other for so long prior to being a husband and a wife, we were like friends. After going to school, we started talking to each other. We contacted each other by phone, and we just went ahead with the decision after our families were okay with it.”
F.27 “Back home we were students in the same high school. When the civil war started, we moved to Canada, then to Switzerland. When he heard that I was living in Switzerland, he tried to get my telephone number to contact me. He did and told me that he would like us to meet again and get married. My family agreed and said that’s your choice.”
4.4.2. **Wives’ Employment**

From the beginning, the decision for a woman working, not working or having a part-time job outside the home was viewed by many as not being a free choice that couples have in the new society.

**M.21**, who has six children and whose wife has a more stable job than he does, thinks that, “*it is not a matter of decision or choice. The economic situation of this country forces both husband and wife to work, especially if you have a big family.*” Although sometimes the wife starts suggesting and the husband takes the initiative, in other cases, the vast majority of the participants said the final decision on wives’ paid work was a joint matter for the well-being of the family. **F.20** who works part-time said, “*We discussed it together and decided that I work different shifts than his. So, when he goes I stay with the kids, and when I work he stays with them to look after them and help them do their homework.*” When **F.18**’s husband was sick, the couple decided that she had to work to secure the family financially for four years, after which he became better and could resume working. Now, as her husband has a job, **F.18** works as a part-time teacher.

When asked about their attitudes on situations where the husband can provide for the family and the woman wants to go out to work for an individual aspiration, most participants thought the decision then “*depends on the agreement between a wife and her husband,*” as **M.11** pointed out. Twenty-two participants expressed the same opinion, repeating the word “agreement,” referring to the marriage contract, in which the two spouses can dictate their desired conditions, in the light of which critical events of their
marital life will be determined. A financially capable husband’s wife, who believes that she has a public talent and wants to either benefit society with that aptitude or just achieve an individual goal by assuming a paid job, can dictate her work as a condition in the marriage agreement. Below are two tables including comments about wives’ employment and whose decision was it:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wife’s Initiative</th>
<th>Husband’s Initiative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F15 “I breastfed her. I decided to stay home with her.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F25 “I decided to stay home with my kids until they were at fifth grade. Now I have a part-time job, but <em>insha’a Allah</em> [God willing] one more year when my youngest daughter gets to the middle school, I’ll work full-time.”</td>
<td>M1 “Her job at home is enough for her.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 10: Women Who Do Not Have Paid Work: Whose Decision and Reasons**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Joint Decision (or marriage agreement)</th>
<th>Wife’s Initiative</th>
<th>Husband’s Initiative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F30, F.25, F8, F14, F16, F17, F18, F20, F23, F24, F26, F33, F34, F27 (Both decided to be able to help relatives in Somalia. M2, M3, M4, M5, M6, M7, M9 (Both decided, one or more of relatives live with the family, which made wife’s going out to work easy and without much trouble for the children)</td>
<td>F28 “I decided because I like earning money for myself, and he agrees.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F10 “I got my pharmacy degree from Italy. I decided to work with that degree, and he agreed.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F13 “I decided and he agreed. We didn’t have a problem.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M12 “She decided and I agreed.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F.25 “He suggested very strongly that I come and work here [in her children’s school, where she used to volunteer].”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 11: Women with Paid Work: Whose Decision and Reasons**
4.4.3. Women’s Covering (Hijab)\footnote{Hijab is the common term for Muslim women’s headscarf in public. However, in the Qur’an, the Islamic source regulating this practice, the term used is khimar which denotes a covering cloth worn by women. Hijab in the Qur’an has a different meaning (Roald 2001).}

Women’s covering, a common practice in Somali society, is found in Islamic texts dictating that when a woman has reached puberty she should cover the whole of her body when in public, except her hands and her face. Part of the covering clothes is the Muslim women’s headscarf, commonly referred to as the hijab. Muslim cultures have a variety of women’s covering styles. Many women in Muslim societies cover to follow cultural traditions set by social rules; others do so as an act of obedience to Qur’anic command.

Hijab has been “an obsession of Western writers from early travelogues to more recent television docudramas, serving as the symbol par excellence of women as oppressed in the Middle East,” according to Arlene MacLeod (1992: 537). Uneducated, oppressed, submissive and exotic are the four major themes through which Muslim women, especially those who wear the hijab, are commonly represented in western media (Falah 2005; McCafferty 2005: 39). From the viewpoint of many westerners the practice of covering is imposed on Muslim women by their male relatives. “For non-Muslim writers, the veil is variously depicted as a tangible symbol of women’s oppression, a constraining and constricting form of dress, and a form of social control, religiously sanctioning women’s invisibility and subordinate socio-political status” (Watson 1994: 141).
To explore the Somali immigrant family’s perceptions and practices of covering, its impact on relating to the American mainstream, and the extent to which it can be an indication of “power,” I asked the participants several questions.

1. Whether they, or their wives and daughters in the case of male participants, cover.
2. Who decides about this?
3. What is their role in their daughters’ stance on this?
4. What do they think its impact on interacting with the American mainstream is?

Women in this study cover, except for two, one of whom is F.30, the ex-diplomat, who as she related, “never wore the hijab in my life.” When talking about the issue of covering in Somali families, M.31 objected to confining the notion of “modest clothes” to women only. He thinks that even men in Islam have to “dress decently” and that in a western context, like the United States, labeling Somali women’s cloths as hijab or confining it to a certain cultural style is misleading. As long as a woman protects her body, by any means, from being sexually attractive for undesired looks, is the point. In M.31’s words:

And here comes the influence of different cultures, whether it is a dress, a skirt and loose blouse, whether it is the Somali big burqua type of hijab, I don’t think it really means a whole a lot. The main point is that a girl’s body is covered by loose garments, so that the shape of her body is not defined. How should the shape or color of these garments, that’s up to her.

When asked about the decision to wear the hijab, all of the women who do said the decision was theirs alone. F.25 did not think about covering until she got married to an African-American who converted to Islam. F.25 related:

I grew up in Italy and studied in a girls-only Christian nuns’ school... Actually, my parents never told me anything about hijab... My husband
was a new Muslim and we learned together after getting married. I was grown up and decided for myself.

F.14 did not wear the hijab when she was young in Somalia, since her mother “was not well educated about religion.” In addition, the political atmosphere in Somalia discouraged covering at that time, when “there was a communist regime allied with Russia and in schools we weren’t allowed to put even a scarf on our heads; only pants and shirts...I wore the hijab after I got educated about its importance in Islam.”

On parents’ influence over their daughters’ decision and style of covering, the main idea participants’ accounts reveal is that covering is crucial for a Somali woman’s dignity and good practice of Islam, but the individual woman’s right to choose if and when to wear it is stressed. F.8 who has two teenage daughters said, “I explained to my girls its importance in Islam and how it protects a woman’s body, but I never suggested to them wearing it. They came to me and said, ‘I am doing it.’ I said, okay!” If a girl is left to choose freely between covering or not “she will know then why she is wearing it [if she decides to] and it would be from the heart. I don’t like her to wear it just as a fashion,” as F.14 explained. She believes that her daughter’s decision to cover should be out of persuasion and choice. Neither F.33, the university professor, nor her two teenage daughters cover. She had a conversation with the daughters who asked her why she did not cover, after comparing her to other female relatives who do. F.33 narrated:

I said, ‘well, I am being a poor role model, so don’t look at me. You have to make your own decision about the hijab, because it is a requirement; the Qur’an tells us that we need to. May be I am weak for not wearing it, because I want to fit in, but my weakness should not be determining your
decision.’ I hope that when they will be older, they will make better choices.

The hijab might be the most critical factor that makes a Somali woman “visible” in the mainstream, and thus contributes to her position as a minority member. The following section discusses this potential impact of hijab, or the veil.

4.4.3.1. Hijab and Discrimination in the Mainstream

A common theme identified in most of the western media when discussing Muslim immigrants, especially veiled women, is the one that connects wearing the hijab with the theme of “Muslim immigrants as not belonging” (McCafferty 2005: 62). Heather McCafferty assesses the final impact of such media interest by maintaining that:

while increased coverage of the Muslim community is a positive step forward as it indicates that this community is just one of many that make up the American…general population, the content of the articles remains focused on how this community is different from the rest of the nation. Repeatedly the reader is informed on how physical appearance in the form of dress sets Muslims, and more specifically…Muslim women, apart from the rest of the population. (McCafferty 2005: 62).

F.32’s college-student daughters, “with all that post 9/11 Islamophobia,” do not cover, lest they be stereotyped and confined to the dominant, negative media images about Muslim women. “Young women are discouraged from practicing their religion because they do not want to be different; they do not want to be labeled as Muslims,” she continued. However, F.32 hopes “they will one day,” as she commented. Being a visible sign of Muslim identity, in the post 9/11 era, covering in the American mainstream might represent a challenge for Somali women. M.31 thinks that Somali women, more than Somali men, would be “visible” and thus exposed to racism and discrimination due to their clothing style. He explains:
For us [Somali men], many might identify us as African-Americans and that’s it. But, for our sisters, it is easy for some to classify them as foreigners, or non-white, non-Americans, even if they were born here. They would be identified by some as people of different culture, who are bringing different things to the ‘American way of life’ [did the quotation marks with his hands]. A lot of Americans are okay with that, but many others don’t like that. So, some of our sisters experience harsh words. Some experience a mentality where the person thinks that she cannot speak a word in English, or that she never went to school.

F.32 was describing the settings of a conference about “diversity and citizenship” that she attended when she said, “you feel that people make judgments on your appearance and that you have to defend your belief all the time and argue with them and say, ‘No, that’s not the case’.” The problem after 9/11, according to F.32, has many sides, mainly, “the lack of understanding of Muslim women’s choices, juxtaposing of Islam and terrorism, and also seeing visible Muslims which kind of confuses North Americans.”

Not only are covered women potential targets for misconceptions and stereotypes, but in some cases victims of discrimination in the workplaces. F.34, who used to work with some agencies that provide services for refugees and immigrants, said:

We used to get so many complaints, especially, from people who just came to the country and don’t speak the language and had really hard time at work. Like, many worked in warehouses and they always get discriminated against, because of the way they wear...They were not allowed to pray or wear the hijab if they wanted to keep the job.

As a direct example of discriminating behavior against covered women, I present the story M.38 narrated about his wife:

She was born here, she is an American, and she speaks English fluently. Last summer she went to Europe and when she was coming back there were in the airport two lines; the citizens’ line and the foreigners’ line,
and this lady was trying to pull her from the citizens’ line to the other one, and would say, ‘hey, lady you need to go to the other line.’ And my wife was like, ‘how would you know that I am not a citizen or a foreigner?’

The potential impact of covering on women’s interactions with the mainstream was included in my conversations with participants. The majority agreed on the thought that covering should not be compromised in the new culture. Moreover, many felt that, except for a few “uneducated” people who give them “strange looks,” many people from the mainstream either ask them politely about it or even show them respect for “your covering and how you commit to your faith and belief,” as F.23 put it.

I asked F.15, who has a bachelor degree in science, if she ever felt her cover hinders her involvement in normal relationships with people outside her community. Since she does not work outside her house, F.15 told me that her experiences in interacting with people outside her community are limited. From her limited interactions, she had a positive impression, though. She said, “Once in a while you might meet people who might think that because you wear the hijab, you don’t speak English, so they would try to talk very slowly and very loud. But, nothing more than that.” She related a funny instance that happened because of her three-year old daughter’s wearing the hijab:

My daughter insists on wearing the hijab when we go outside the house, or when a male guest comes to visit, trying to copy me and stuff. And once we were going to the library, and her small hijab was wet, so she insisted to wear mine. It was too long for her almost till her knees, and I tried to convince her not to wear it, but she insisted. I thought people might think that I let her wear it. And when we went, many laughed and said that she was so cute with it.
M.6 told me that once when he was walking with his wife, who wore the *hijab*, some women passers commented that her *hijab* was beautiful. M.29 said that the only hard time he and his wife had because of her *hijab* was at the airport when they first came to the United States: “They asked her to take off her hijab and they took a picture of her. We were shocked and amazed by that.”

Some women said they receive polite questions from some people about why they wear the *Hijab*. Women think of such instances as good opportunities to educate people around them about the meaning and heterogeneity of this Islamic practice that has long been misunderstood in western contexts. F.14, the interpreter in a hospital who received some curious questions from some of her colleagues, said: “I tell them this is our religion tells us to protect ourselves and our bodies. I tell them also that some Somali and Muslim women don’t wear the hijab.” F. 24, another interpreter in a different hospital, said, “I give the staff presentations about what the hijab means for us, Muslim women. I tell them what they need to know about Somali patients, why they dress like this, why they need to pray in specific times….”

It was interesting that some participants thought that the self-perception Somali women have would largely determine the mainstream’s reaction toward their covering. Thus, F.23, the 24 year old who has a business degree, articulated her opinion by saying:

*I believe that the way you take yourself, other people will take you. So, if you are really comfortable, and you know the reason why you are wearing it; it doesn’t bother you, then it doesn’t bother the people around you. I know why I am wearing it, and I am very happy with it. When I would go to school with my hijab on, my non-Muslim American friends would say, “*
‘Oh, wow, I really love the scarves that you wear.’ Some would ask me where I buy them from. With hijab, I feel that I respect myself, and I don’t have to follow the media or popularity or what other people are thinking. I am my own personality. I feel that because of my hijab, nothing dirty comes on my way, you know like when girls go somewhere and guys or teenagers like, ‘ooohh!!’ and they have trouble. Nothing like that happens to me, because I am covered and there is nothing they can see about me. From the inside I can feel other people want to be the way I am, because they are insecure; they have to confirm to the media; they are forced to dress in a certain way and show themselves. They can’t go out until they spend hours, you know doing stuff to please men, and the men they are pleasing are not even their husbands or close to them; who are not even important to their lives. For me, no one can ever guess how my hair looks like; how my body looks like. So, they just avoid thinking of that and respect you. At the end of the day, I feel that I am free; I don’t have to do what other people want [her emphasis] me to do. I do what I [her emphasis] want to do.

Covering, for Somali immigrant women in this study, is both a manifestation of a free and educated choice within their families and an assertion of their identity in the mainstream. Its influence on relating to the larger culture is determined by both the women’s internal perspective and the mainstream’s ability to understand and tolerate difference.

4.5. More, or Less, General Decision-Making Power?

In the previous sections, I discuss decision-making power based on gender for specific aspects within the Somali family, such as financial decisions, arranged marriages, wives’ outside home employment, and wives and daughters’ covering. In this section, I describe participants’ accounts on decision-making power in general within the family. Many participants of this study maintained that traditionally in the Somali culture, decisions were overwhelmingly taken by men of the family, “except for some families, like mine,
where our decisions were jointly made,” as F.30 indicated. However, she continued that, the “burden” of making decisions, just like the financial responsibility, in the new culture should be shared, and not only be on the men’s shoulders. Many participants, men and women, expressed the opinion that decision-making is a burden more than a privilege. For example, when M3 was asked whether he felt more or less power within marriage in the United States than in Somalia, he said:

Back home, men have more power and more say in decision making, and they were the only breadwinner in the household. All of the responsibilities fall on them. But here we both leave the house and work, so the responsibility should be shared and becomes on the family as a whole instead of on one person.

“The on-going negotiation,” as the basic characteristic of power relations (Lipman-Blumen 1994) was constantly manifested in informants’ narratives. In most of the familial issues, most of the participants maintained that they “shared” with their spouses, and they supported the same attitude for their children’s marital life in the future. F.23 explained by saying: “For making the decisions, both should act as partner to come up with the best decisions.” M.12 summarized power relations between him and his wife when he said, “I suggest and she suggests and we compromise.”

When commenting on the statement, “When boys get married, they should be the breadwinners of their families and they should make major decisions,” F.10 said, “spending for the family, yes, but making decisions, no. Together.” Similarly, F.17 thought husbands have to be the breadwinners, “but, for making decisions, both should share; he should ask his wife’s advice: ‘what can we, not I, do’? Dictatorship is not
good!” M.22 thinks that“when it comes to taking decisions, both should be responsible, but when it comes to being the breadwinner, most of the responsibility relies upon the father.”

Most participants indicated that deciding about financial issues is a shared effort. In some cases, though, women had the complete control over their husbands’ salary to manage the household budget. An example was M.21 who leaves deciding about financial issues to his wife, since she is “smarter” in managing money. F.14 also manages the household finances and thinks that women should be in control of budgets, since “men cannot control money wisely.” Another comment is from F.23, who explained:

From the beginning of our marriage, he gave me access to all the money like to manage it, and I was like you know I am not that good in managing money, even though I have a finance degree. He was like, ‘just manage it; I want you to feel comfortable.’ So, if he needs anything, he comes and asks me, and I keep the record of everything.

However, many said that husbands should have final responsibility when deciding on major issues. As F.28 explained: “men should consider the wife’s opinions, but they still bear the first responsibility. [Even if the wife works and has her own income?] Yeah, I mean for us, if I am not happy with it, he won’t do it.” M.38 believes that:

Men should be making major decisions but also after consulting with their women. [Is it like ‘shawrohun wa khalifohun?’ a proverb that means, ‘consult them, your women, but do not follow their advice’] [while laughing, he answered,] no, no, not that one; that is the kind of culture in my country, but women are smart and should be consulted. The best example is our Prophet- salla Allahu alaih wa sallamv- who consulted his wives even in public and on political issues.63

63 He is referring to the time when the companions of the Prophet Mohammad disobeyed him in a political event and he consulted his wife Umm Salama and then followed her wise and effective advice.
Balancing between the two sides of shared decision-making power, and that the final decision, especially in major issues, rests with the man was problematic for some of the participants. Some managed the conflict by arguing that assuming decision-making is a burden more than a privilege. **M.11** emphasized the dialectical link between democratizing marital relationship and husbands assuming the leadership in the family when he said, “Of course they should work together, but the man has the final say. So, he should be more responsible and provide for the family and be responsible for the consequences of decisions. That final say comes with its responsibility.”

Even in cases where women hold higher career position than their husbands, some try to maintain the traditional “pride” of their husbands. **F.20**, the 43 year old, mother of 3, and who has lived in the United States for 7 years expressed her stance when asked whether she has more decision-making power in her household due to the fact that her income is more stable than her husband's, by saying:

*I [emphasis is hers] make myself in a less power situation because I want to protect my family. My husband lost much of his power after he came to the U.S. He used to have a high position back in Somalia in the ministry of finance. He used to have much more money than I have. Now he is a cab driver. I try even more than I did in Somalia to make him feel that he is at the top. I give him that, because I don’t want him to feel that I know he has less power.*

In the literature review, I noticed that some studies concluded that immigrant wives in the United States gain more power because they became income earners. In this study, many
women disputed the new environment’s material definition of “power.” F.34 narrated a conversation between her and a Somali woman immigrant:

_I was talking with a sister that when the couple gets married, in Islam it is the man who pays the mahr [dowry], and takes care of the marriage financial things. And she was like, ‘I am an independent person. I can pay for the marriage. Why would he pay for me and control me?’ She thinks it’s about control; it’s about power. I told her, ‘but, that’s a good thing for you; it is not a bad thing. He pays for you to show you that he loves and cares for you; how valuable you are to him, and how much he wants to please you. He is not doing this because he buys you, because she says that when he does this he is buying her. That should give you pride.’ She didn’t agree._

Arguments of redefining the wife’s new “power” based on income earning or assuming new leadership roles in her family also appeared in other participants’ accounts. Although she is the breadwinner of the family, manages the household budget, and has the final say on children’s discipline and other family issues, F.14 does not feel she is more empowered. F.14’s account illustrates the confusion of applying a western material and competitive-based notion of “power” within the household to her situation when she said:

_Working outside is a source of income, but it doesn’t give you more power. I feel that I have less power, though I make more money; more than my husband makes. I don’t know, but the culture back there gives you as a woman a privilege. When they get married, women ask for whatever they want; I want this I want that [asking for material possessions as part of the marriage arrangements], and men do what pleases their women. Here when they get married, men and women take turns doing things; the woman is asked to take responsibility of everything the man does. To be equal, she is asked to do exactly what he does._

Identical gender roles, such as joining the labor market, earning more money or assuming leadership roles in the family, are not viewed as the source of Somali women’s contentment. By analyzing how not only hers but her husband’s gender roles have
changed in the United States, \textbf{F.14} presented an indication that empowerment cannot be viewed as a monolithic concept and is, in fact, context specific. Her assuming the upper hand role in her family has not really provided her with a sense of self well-being or satisfaction, as she elaborated:

\begin{quote}
Even there I was working and money would go to the household. But there you feel that women are respected and spoiled more. Also, men here feel that they are less respected by their families, because they have less responsibility. They are not the only breadwinner, and everybody in the house is as busy as they are. The man runs in a direction, the woman in another direction, and the kids in a third. And he does as any other member of the family does and earns the same or even less. There, when I was working, I used to come back home two hours before my husband comes. Now, he comes three hours before I come. So he feels that he is not like before anymore; his responsibility is less, his income is less, his respect in the house is less, and he does not have the ability or even the desire to spoil or please me as he did when I used to come back home before him and wait for him. There were helpers in the house, and when he comes, the house is clean, his food is ready, and he is ready to spoil me too. There, the man is a man and the woman is a woman.
\end{quote}

The idea that women’s empowerment derives more from women being honored, spoiled and being able to demand material possessions by dictating them on the marriage contract calls into question the generalized western notion of empowerment. \textbf{F.14’s} yearning for the old days when she was “spoiled” by a “responsible” husband might motivate gender and immigration thinkers to reassess definitions of women “empowerment” and “self-fulfillment” which western feminism seeks to universalize.

Other participants, however, had a different perspective on the sharing of decision-making power within the Somali immigrant family in the new culture. When analyzing the transformation in decentralizing the power of decision making, \textbf{M.21}, for example,
looks at the change, within the new cultural circumstances, in a more positive and comprehensive manner. He related:

Of course, I don’t have much influence as I did before. And there are many reasons. I believe the more you upgrade the knowledge of your household people or partners, the less you will become powerful in decision-making. But I don’t mind it. I am very liberal in that because the way I see it is that if you empower your woman or if you empower your kids here, you are helping them to distinguish what is right and what is wrong. So if they reach a level to challenge you and your decisions, that’s all right. But you know I am still the father and I have some power! (laughing)

Finally, re-allocating responsibilities and roles in the Somali immigrant family might cause some disturbance in the “traditional” familial relationships. During her work in a refugees and immigrants organization, F.34 experienced some cases where Somali wives were influenced by their “material empowerment,” like gaining an income source, to make radical changes within their families. The most prominent example was the woman who benefited from social services and could then buy a house, and who then asked her husband to leave the house. Women in the study attributed these changes in some Somali families not to the increase of wives’ financial positions, but more importantly to “outside cultural influences that weakened familial relations and the traditional respect for men,” as F.34 indicated. She associated such changes with the increasing number of divorces and single-mother families in the Somali community. F.24 considered a woman’s level of religiosity would determine whether she will “abuse” her new material power, in saying,

In Somalia, men have a lot of power, but here [in the United States] government gives women money and houses and some think they can live without their husbands. Not all of the women, religious women still have respect for their men, even if she has more money; she brings the check and shares with her husband. But some young women when they see the money and life here, they change.
In general, the link between financial independence and decision-making power was not clear in participants’ narratives, and the analysis yields the conclusion that there is an agreement on the notion that husbands must be the financial providers. Nevertheless, domestic decision-making is a joint matter between wife, husband and members of extended family was the dominant explanation given to questions of who decides what.

The dialectical link between demands for sharing power and keeping husbands’ leadership responsibilities was assumed from participants,’ especially women’s, voices of their attitudes and experiences in the new culture. Many comments have important implications for redefining the dominant concept of gender equality. Many women believe they have more power in being able to ask for material possessions and get them versus being required to assume responsibility of the same things that men do.

In this dissertation, participants’ accounts on gender identities, roles and relationships do not correspond with “modern” western feminine features. Nor do their accounts support many of the “traditional” Somali gender hierarchical perspectives. Rather, a cultural heterolocalism can be identified in the participants’ integration behavior that continuously crosses the cultural borders of two cultures to select from both. Manifestations of heterolocalism can be found in many of participants’ choices. For example, rejecting “competitiveness and self-sacrificing” and choosing “assertiveness and care-taking” as the most important characteristics for a woman to be successful, insisting on maintaining the husbands’ responsibility in providing for the family while emphasizing wives’ economic independence, stressing the role of the family in

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64 See Chapter 1 for details on “traditional” Somali gender perspectives and practices.
“arranging” children’s marriages while assuring the individuals’ rights to decide about it, all indicate the hybrid behavior of the heterolocal pattern.

If heterolocalism in its spatial meaning refers to immigrants’ crossing of tangible boundaries to create new community networks, heterolocalism in this study can be seen in participants’ social and cultural behavior that crosses cultural boundaries to generate new hybrid identities, perspectives and behavior. Participants have been adopting from the American mainstream culture notions that emphasize women empowerment and economic autonomy whilst insisting to preserve from the original culture family’s centralized position. One method of connecting the two cultural sets is the women-only group (halaqa) in which women re-discover and interpret women-empowerment principles in Islam and discuss how to benefit from these principles that are in agreement with many in the mainstream. Twenty-two of the thirty-eight participants cited Islamic gender texts to assert women’s rights; that they are equal humans to men, and that their identities as women and their roles within the family are influential and should be highly valued. Most of these twenty-two participants who referred to Islam to prove females’ prestigious identity and familial roles were women, especially those who regularly attend the halaqa – (9 of the 19 women). These women stressed Islamic gender education as the source of their empowerment and self-esteem in both their community and in the wider society.
CHAPTER 5

GENDER RELATIONSHIPS OUTSIDE THE FAMILY
AND SOMALI IMMIGRANTS’ INTEGRATION

5.1. Gender Relationships and Courtship Patterns

In the previous chapter I described Somali immigrants' notions and practices of gender relationships within the family. In this chapter, I examine the Somali immigrants' ways of simultaneously relating to both their original and the new mainstream cultures on gender relationships outside the family. I also explore the extent to which Somali immigrants’ understanding and practice of Islamic family and gender principles have mediated between the two cultural polarized ends. Finally, I analyze how the new generated hybrid family and gender notions and practices indicate features of the transnational/heterolocalist pattern of integration.

In the United States, during the 1960s and 1970s there was a shift in the sexual culture and practices of many Americans. At that time, for example, the new trend

...made abstinence before marriage seem passé, and encouraged unmarried college couples to engage in sexual relationships described as ‘promiscuity with affection.’ To many adults, young people’s libidos seemed out of control, and the vestiges of ‘Victorian sexual morality’ seemed to flicker away with each passing year. (Morrow 2006: 3)
Although two thirds of the American population believed pre-marital sex was always wrong in the late 1960s, less than a third of the population believed this was true fifteen years later (Petersen and Donnenwerth 1997 as cited in Schalet 2003: 7). Later, however, the majority of the population has accepted the reality of premarital sex, but remains “deeply ambivalent about its morality” (Schalet 2003: 7-8).

In Muslim societies, such as in Somalia, practices of gender separation in public places is one among others, including modest dress, veiling, self-effacing traits “that are employed to undergird sexual morality... [These practices are based on] fear that social interaction between unrelated men and women would therefore lead to illicit sexual intercourse and chaos in the community of believers” (Doumato 2009).

Although such a strict attitude toward gender interactions does not apply literally to the general Somali society, pre- and extra-marital sexual relations are considered “disgraced and shocking,” as M.31 described. Sex mixing is limited in public, as in educational settings where boys and girls “study together, but boys sit in a different side than the girls,” as F.13 said. Many Somalis believe that regulated sexual relationships are the reason behind the absence of many social and health problems in Somalia.

F.30, who represented Somalia in the WHO (World Health Organization), stated that “in Somalia we had only three cases of AIDS in 1990 and even these cases were people from outside of Somalia.” She attributed the remarkably small number of AIDS cases,
especially if compared to large numbers in other African countries, to confining sexual relationships to marriage only.

**F.30**, the ex-diplomat, was divorced from her husband, due to her long absences away from Somalia, and the husband thus desired a second wife. **F.30**’s husband was “liberal” and supportive of her political and career ambitions. Yet, and since sexual relationships are firmly rejected outside the marriage framework, he decided the only solution for being separated from his wife for long periods was to marry another. She recounted

> My husband never interfered in what I wore or did. He was an educated, liberal Somali. He was okay with me traveling and attending conferences around the world. I would be traveling for several weeks for international conferences, and he stayed in Mogadishu. He didn’t mind. But he did mind when I traveled to Switzerland to work in the United Nations, because that was a long separation, although I was going back and forth and he would come to visit, he didn’t like that, and that’s why we divorced; he wanted a second wife. He wanted to stay married to me but to have another wife in Mogadishu, while I stayed in Switzerland, and I refused.

In my conversations with participants, I aimed at learning how their perceptions and behavior concerning sexual relationships are being shaped between these cultural differences. Analyzing their accounts indicates that many participants oppose symptoms of what they viewed as sexual permissiveness in the United States. Yet, participants criticized what they considered as rigid gender separation in some Somali community institutions, mainly mosques, and considered it contradictory to Islamic teachings.

Significantly, when describing aspects they reject adopting from the mainstream culture, many linked sexual freedom with materialism, consumerism or/and alcoholism, all of
which were at the top of aspects from the American mainstream culture they reject. For example, several stated that either they have no TV in their house, or they impose strict rules for their children when watching TV. **M.5** explained the purpose of this family policy when he said, “My wife and I agreed not to have a TV in our house, because of the sexual and consumerism mentality it develops in kids’ minds.” **F.28** compared: “Back home, we never had TV movies and commercials all the time. I think teenagers are influenced a lot from the TV. They know about sex more than what we knew when we were at their age or even older.”

When indicating what they do not like in the American mainstream culture, the following quotations are examples of participants’ reasoning:

**M.31**  “one thing that I am not very fascinated with is this concept of freedom; even if this means getting money from pornography. There is actually an entire industry; billion-dollar industry.”

**M.12** does not like “this unlimited moral [sexual] openness. Many lines are easily crossed. Also I don’t like too much value they put on money; if you are wealthy, you can do anything.”

**M.22** does not like “alcoholism, free sex mixing, nakedness, gambling. I don’t know if these are things that I am stereotyping about Americans or that it is really true, but my assumption is that most of them do drink alcohol.”

**M.35**  “I don’t like the expensive and materialistic life style, immoral nudity and sexual relations, and consumerism; being so occupied with albatn wa alfarj65 [stomach and loins].”

**F.16**  “I don’t like this culture of alcohol, extra-marital sex, and the negative influence of popular culture, like the horrible messages of the TV shows, music and celebrities.”

**F.15**  considers among the disadvantages her children might suffer in the United States is that they “would pick up aspects of immorality, like gay marriages, pre-marital sex...”

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65 A common saying in Islamic texts to refer to a human life that lacks spirituality and centers around fulfilling temptations that are animal-like needs, namely eating and having sex.
M.38 ‘I don’t like when people do whatever they feel like doing, like gays, lesbians, boyfriend, girlfriend. We should stay away from these things not only for religious reasons, but for social and moral reasons also.’

F.30 hopes that Somalis in the United States would retain original cultural attitudes that firmly prohibit extra marital sex and alcohol. She followed that wish by relating her impression about an event she attended,

I went to a conference about sexual health. Everything they preached was ‘Take caution; make sure that the man has condom for protection.’ I wanted to get up and say, ‘Just don’t do it! Stay away from that kind of thing.’ Why are the intellectuals advising people just to take caution while engaging in all what they call sexual freedom? So, I hope Somalis will keep their cleanliness and stay as clean as they used to be in their country.’

Following the participants’ personal attitudes about sex relationships the next section gives their thoughts on educating their children about sex issues.

5.1.1 Disciplining Children’s Sexual Behavior

Only four of the participants do not have children (three women and one man). The remaining participants have a number of children, ranging between 1 and 6 children. Several questions in the survey were around parents’ ways of raising their children and dealing with cultural conflicts children experience between homes on the one hand and school, media and the wider society on the other. Women and men in this study were asked about their ways of dealing with issues of sex relationships in their children lives. These included, among others, dating and standards of regulating sexual life aspects and whether they are different for boys and girls. When asked about advantages and disadvantages their children would experience growing up in the United States, many referred to children being exposed to “the immoral [sex, drugs,...] behavior of teenagers in the middle and high schools,” in F.20’s words, as one of the main disadvantages.
Examining the notions and practices of sexual relationships outside the Somali immigrant family has yielded important results at the individual level. In addition, analysis has produced a vital explanation for the impact of youths practicing unacceptable sexual behavior on weakening their affiliation to the community, and, thus, the potential involvement in illegal activities, mainly gangs and drugs.

M.38 considers sexual notions and relationships as the most difficult challenge for Somali youth and as the primary determinant for engaging in illegal activities:

_They go to high school where boys and girls date, and a lot of peer pressure. They have this [sexual] desire which Allah created in every human being and the society is accepting it. So, some end up doing it. Some come back [to family and community], but others the more they indulge in that behavior, the more they try to stay away from the community who sometimes abandon them. And that's why we have a number of Somali youth in jail. It started with doing such haram things. After they do this, they think they can't go back; they are not educated about Islam and tawbah [repentance]. They only know what they did is a hundred percent unacceptable in their community. And the culture without Islam doesn't have mercy on them. The community starts to put shame on them. So, they detach themselves from the community and get close to some of the gang members who lead them to drugs._

Analysis in this section is around participants’ accounts on dating and family regulations for children’s sex relationships. I asked the participants whether they believe their children should date. Few rejected the notion entirely, or immediately, while the majority first distinguished between dating in the Somali and the American connotations. Thirty-two interviewees started by first defining dating, as they agreed if it was practiced in the Somali manner. Three factors determine the category of dating: the primary intention of
establishing a dating relationship, families’ involvement, and the existence of sexual practices.

Children’s dating is accepted only if it is established with the possibility of a later marriage, under family supervision, and does not permit sexual contact. **F. 14** explains:

*I would like my kids before marrying someone to meet them. They can't get married without knowing them. But, dating in our culture is different than dating here. In our culture, they date by talking on phone, visiting each other, but not living with each other or having sex.*

Redefining the term of dating prior to indicating their position towards it was repeated by others, like **F.30**, who said, “*Dating that involves sexual activity as practiced in the west, no. But going out with somebody to have dinner or bring them home so they get to know each other, I don’t mind. That’s what I myself did.*”

**M.12** said, “*I don't agree with the American concept of dating. We have our own practice of dating which is called ‘cotche,’ or 'the initial contact' before the boy approaches the girls' family [to ask for her hand, if they both agree to marry].”*

**F.10** expressed the same opinion when she said, “*If dating means meet and talk to know each other, that's okay, but not to have sex.*”

**F.32** agrees that her children can date:

*but not in the western way, because all these body and sexual contacts are haram [Islamically forbidden]. I tell my daughter that as long as she respects her religion, she can see a person and bring him to our house. I have no problem, as long as he has an intention for a long-term commitment. Not like, ‘let me try you, and next time I will try another one.’ In Somalia the first question you ask when a guy wants to talk to you is, ‘what is your intention?’ that was number one question that I asked my husband when we got together for the first time. He said,*
‘This is the first time we are talking!’ I said, ‘then go back and check your mind, and when you know what you want to do with me, then we can talk again.’

In addition to the primary purpose of dating, participants consistently stressed family involvement. F.33, the university professor who was married to a white American said, “In our culture, contacts are family contacts. Families would arrange the meetings, and you get to know the person in these meetings, because you and they intend to marry. The goal is always marriage and is not dating for dating sake.” As her daughters are now in their teens, F.33 has been careful to make more contacts with the Somali community, so they “get to know young men with whom they will match nicely insha’a Allah [God willing].” Then, while lowering her voice, she continued, “That was my hidden agenda when I was walking around this conference halls and workshops’ tables” [She laughs].

Finally, the participants’ accounts placed much emphasis, attributed to Islam, on declining any sexual contact while dating. F.34 articulated her point of view by saying,

First, it should be practiced within limits; No sexual contacts, because that’s haram. Second, some people date and date and date and they don’t end up getting married; they lose interest, especially men after getting what they wanted physically. It is a risk, especially for the girl. I mean dating is about getting to know each other, right? So, you don’t have to spend like a year or two dating; then it is not about knowing; it is about something else.

66 The interview took place in the “Somali Studies International Association 10th Triennial Conference,” August 2007, The Ohio State University.
“Raising teenagers here is dangerous,” that was F.20’s comment on the relationship between children, especially teenagers and parents. Participants pointed to several mechanisms, the application of which would make raising them in the United States less “dangerous.” These include focusing on spiritual enrichment through joining Qur’anic recital and study groups, educating or “guiding,” in F.30’s words, children by engaging in conversations with them and helping them, if possible, to get married early.

When asked why she considered it important for her children to attend the duqsi, where children recite, memorize, and study the Qur’an, F.27 pointed to two reasons; first learning the words of Allah to be “close to Him,” and secondly, knowing the permitted sexual behavior for Muslims. She added, “It is important for kids to learn Qur’an to know that they are Muslims. When they go to school they know about boyfriend and girlfriend, and see it as normal. So learning Qur’an helps them to understand that this is not from their religion.” F.26 tells her sons, “Allah loves young people who try not to do haram sex [Islamically illegitimate sex] and they will get into His shade in that final hot day [day of judgment].”67 When encouraging them to guard their chastity, F.27 talks with her sons “about Allah, aliman [faith] and alakhirah [life after death].” Referring to spirituality’s impact on sexual abstinence in the participants’ accounts was not confined to Islam, but Christianity’s sexual view was seen in agreement with that of Islam. F.33 told her children that guarding one’s chastity as a fruit of faith is not something limited to

67 Refers to a saying of the Prophet Mohammad that “There are seven whom Allah will shade in His Shade on the Day when there is no shade except His Shade: [among those] a youth who grew up in the worship of Allah...’ since it is in youth that a person is most vulnerable to the temptations of life” Saheeh al-Bukhari (English trans.) Vol.1, p.356
Islam, and that the free sex practices they see sometimes in the wider society does not reflect what Christianity commands. Believing that Islam shares common values of spirituality and sexual virtues with other religions was a factor behind F.13’s encouragement to her children “to be friends with people from different religions as long as they have good manners and conducts.”

Educating and engaging in dialogue are other methods participants practice to heal results of cultural conflicts in their children’s sexual lives. F.27 advises Somali parents to do like her; and “talk with them and tell them [children] to be patient and wait until they are married.” F.17 said, “Kids go to high school and Allah knows what they learn and see there. I try to help and teach them what is good and what is bad, what is halal [Islamically permissible] and what is haram, and listen to them.” F.33 related:

> I had heated conversations with my daughters about that, because they were born and grew up in this culture where arranged marriages or intentional are not understood. They see 13-year-old American boys and girls dating...I told them, you are too young to date; wait till you get older, and more mature to choose wisely. So far, luckily they are following the no dating. By the time they get to do it, I am sure that they will behave in a way that does not contradict our culture and values.

Helping children to get married early was a hope many participants expressed, if not actually done. F.20 wants to help her sons “get married after high school.” F.32 told her college son, (who is “tall and handsome,” and thus receives many invitations from many girls to date, as she told me), “go and marry a Somali woman and settle down, and I am ready to pay the costs of your marriage.” Several others encouraged and helped their
children get married, and some even allowed them to reside with them until they can financially separate with their nuclear family into another residence.

In addition to the previous means through which parents fulfill their parental roles on educating their children about sexual life, many reported they set specific rules in the family, like determining a specific time their children have to be home, identifying criteria for choosing friends and encouraging them to abide by “modest” clothing. My next question to the interviewees was whether applying discipline standards is equal for girls and boys. Seven of the participants said they differentiate between girls and boys on sexual discipline, so boys have “some flexibility,” as F.13 stated. They attributed the difference to girls being delicate, not able to defend themselves or the possibility of them becoming pregnant. M.22 said, “In front of Allah, it is the same sin for both [if either engaged in extra-marital sex], but the consequences for my daughter is different than for my boy. It brings more problems [becoming pregnant].” F.14 was one of those who did not support equal discipline. She said,

My sons go with their friends to movies, or to their houses, but I don’t like my daughter to be that open and go to people’s houses. [What's the difference?] Okay, if she goes to a house where there is a boy, it is very easy for him to make a relationship with her without me knowing about it. But, if my son goes to a house, it is impossible for him to date their daughter, who is protected in her family’s house. I see that from my sons' experiences with their friends whom they visit. They [her sons] never meet their friends' sisters. When I ask them, 'do you know how many sisters they have?' they say, 'we don’t know. They have girls in the house, but we never talk with them.' When the girls go to a house, they know the whole story of that family; they would talk with this and with that. If something bad happened to her [sexually abused or attacked], it is very difficult for her to go out of the situation. I don’t feel comfortable putting my daughter in such a situation.
Between those who supported equal standards and those who advocated different ones, there were four of the participants who reported that they set the same rules for both, though they worry more about girls “for obvious reasons,” as F16 put it. M.38 would set exactly the same rules, despite being more anxious for girls. He explained the difference by saying, “if both did wrong, the boy would come back empty handed, while she would come back with an additional burden [if pregnant].”

Interestingly, those who backed the equal treatment followed the common pattern of the narrations throughout this study analysis, namely relying on their understanding of Islam when expressing their views. Practicing equal treatment for boys and girls in the light of Islamic teachings in regard to sex relationships was an example of referring to Islam.

F. 15 said, “If we look at the Islamic principles, yes I agree [to equal standards]. Why should they be different? haram sex is haram for both.”

F.30 “For both should be the same, because the pitfalls are the same. For example, sexual diseases, giving birth to illegitimate children and not taking care of them. And according to our religion, a sin is a sin for a boy or a girl. And the punishment is the same.”

M. 11 “They should be the same, because that’s how it is in our religion, even though in our culture it is different. They let the boys and did not let the girls.”

M.5 “If boys and girls are treated differently, this will send the wrong message to both: haram for girls, but not haram for boys and this is in contradiction with Islam which makes unacceptable sexual behavior haram for both genders.”

M. 9 “Culturally, there are certain things that boys can get away with and girls can’t. But, the standards have to be the same...zina [Islamic term for illegitimate practice of sex] is zina whether done by a boy or a girl.”

In addition to retreating to Islamic teachings to practice and advocate equal discipline for girls and boys, some used the principle of communal responsibility to argue for that equality. M.11 criticized his original culture's practice of imbalanced discipline standards
by saying, “They used to say in our culture: you are a girl, but he is a boy, when allowing the son to do things that are not allowed for girls. But they should think that your boy is doing the bad thing with another family’s daughter.” Putting oneself in others' shoes was repeated by several, like F.23, who said, “I will hold them to the same standards. I will control both dating and staying late outside the home. If I don’t want my daughter to date, why would I allow my son to date other Muslim’s daughter?”

Others attributed gender equality in sexual discipline to changes in surrounding conditions, which make both girls and boys vulnerable to similar threats. M. 3 explained these aspects when he said,

> In Somalia, boys are free to do whatever they want outside. And the discipline, especially in terms of modest clothes, was only concentrated on girls. But, the environment was totally different. Here, whether you are a boy or a girl, you are susceptible to the same things and then you have to be more evenhanded for both in terms of discipline and preparing them for the world.

F.28 considered disciplining, amid that “dangerous” atmosphere, is an equal right for both “You should protect them equally, especially in this country. It is better to keep them under your eyes. They will get influenced, if not to date, then to learn alcoholic behavior.

My son is fourteen years old and I keep him at home.” F.10 said,

> In Somalia, we used to say, ‘a boy is a boy; he can defend himself’. But here boys are in danger just like girls are. So, they should stay at home too. In our country, we never heard about kidnapping kids! Here we hear about this all the time for boys and girls alike.
**F.17** echoed the same sentiment in saying, “*Both should be controlled in this country. I am not going to ask girls to be at home by salat elmaghrib* [sunset prayer in Arabic], but for boys to stay out as they wish, no way!”

The preceding analysis examines participants' accounts on what they refuse to adopt from the American mainstream culture in the realm of sexual relationships, and the coming discussion pertains to what they intend to abandon from their original culture in this area. Participants wish to change sharp or artificial gender separation in some of the community's institution, mainly mosques. And again, while criticizing that cultural practice, relying on the Islamic original view and practices was the main pillar on which they based this argument. **F.8** said:

> In mosques, it bothers me when they separate men and women. This is not how rasool Allah [the messenger of God] did it, because everybody was relying on controlling themselves, you know, your eyes should be looking down not on everybody else. It says in the Qur'an, 'Tell the believing men to lower their gaze...And tell the believing women to lower their gaze...' But, now you see men in the bottom looking up [where the women’s section is], and women looking down, so it didn't work! [She laughs]. If you cannot control yourself, nobody can control you.

**M.4** expressed the same critical view of original cultural practices, when he said,

> We have this challenge of sisters being in a separate hall in the mosque not talking to the shaikh [Muslim scholar], or ask him questions. And then when they leave the masjid [mosque in Arabic], go to malls, hospitals, other businesses and deal with the [male] clerk, doctor, or teacher; they interact with them face to face. The question is, if she can deal with those men, how come she can't deal with the imam [Muslim leader] of the masjid? Why can’t she deal with her own shaikh, with her own community leader, or fellow men and exchange with them information and knowledge

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68 Requiring children to be home by “salat elmaghrib” which symbolizes the beginning of darkness, is a common standard for many Arab families, including the Somali and Yemeni.
without violating one another? It is always a challenge for our community to find a balance between modesty and natural business interactions. In our masajid [mosques], we have to find a way for our sisters to be able to be part of the congregation rather than just hear it from the microphone. And Allahu a'alam [God knows best!]

**F.24** advanced the argument in the direction of legitimizing women in the main hall of the mosque when she said:

> They say that women should be separate in mosques, but if you become educated about the Qur'an and what the Prophet did, you will find that women would pray in the same hall. Also, during al-hajj [the annual Islamic pilgrimage to Macca] you find men and women are all together worshiping. Everybody needs to learn the Qur'an and it is difficult to be separate and learn.

**M.12** argued that “in the Prophet's time, men and women would pray in the same place: men in the front, women in the back, and boys in between.” Thus, the middle ground solution, for him, might be something like a curtain between men and women. **M.31** had a similar opinion of separate but in the same hall. He said, “in the mosques, why don't we do it the way it was at the Prophet's time: the ladies are sitting on this side and the men on the other side in the same room?”

Within the family, gender distinction between social gatherings of women and men, though not as sharp as in the mosque, might hinder strengthening familial relationship among the nuclear family members. This is what **F.15** referred to when she specified values to adopt from the “American” family. She selected, “spending time together, like going to the park. People back home don't do that; women socialize with other women and men with other men. It is not common that a family unit will go out and spend time
“together.” Given the apparently contradictory indications found in participants’ following narratives simultaneously favoring independence and group-oriented relationships, this quote is suitable to introduce us to the problematic reconciliation of both features in the Somali immigrant’s new hybrid character and life.

5.2 **Individual vs. Group Relationships between the two Cultures**

Several open-ended questions in my study were designed to allow the participants to talk about their attitudes and experiences in coping with living on the boundary of different cultural domains. Questions were meant to explore the participants’ positions between these two cultures, particularly in relation to gender and family issues. I asked the participants to indicate the characteristics or life aspects in the original Somali culture they most strive to maintain and those in the American mainstream they would like to adopt. I asked them the same questions on the most hated attributes or life aspects they abandon from the original culture or reject from the new culture. In particular, I asked participants to specify from selected aspects (whether from Somali or American cultures) family values or practices they are careful to preserve, adopt, abandon or reject.

This section is divided into two main sub-sections. The first depicts the most desired family and community values the Somali immigrants highlight and express the intention to maintain from their original culture. These include strong group or family interdependent relations and all that is generated from them, like collective responsibility toward children, hospitality and sharing, sending remittances and respecting elders. The second sub-section describes family and community values Somali immigrants expressed.
an admiration for and wish to adopt from the American mainstream culture. From the open-ended, qualitative nature of the questionnaire, most participants would frequently compare the two cultures regardless of whether the question was about the Somali or American mainstream culture. The overlapping reference to both cultures in most of the accounts in my analysis explains the recurring mention of one under the title of the other.

5.2.1. Aspects of the Somali Culture Respondents Wish to Retain

Seventeen women, out of the nineteen interviewed, considered family and strong community relationships as the first of the characteristics to maintain from the Somali culture. Twelve men out of the nineteen interviewed had the same perspective. In total, twenty nine out of thirty eight put “strong family and community relations,” “group coherence and caring for each other,” “respecting and caring for elders, and supporting and helping each others in times of difficulty,” “the feelings of mercy among families, friends and neighbors,” or “closeness and sharing even the little” at the top of their list for things they most wish to reserve.

Nevertheless, when the communal bond turns into prejudiced “tribalism,” or “feeling that you are superior to another person just because of belonging to a certain tribe,” in F.23’s definition, it becomes the most hated aspect of the Somali culture.
In Somalia, like many other Arab and Muslim societies, relationships within the family, in both nuclear and extended forms, are often strong and deeply interdependent. The family support system there bestows privileges, and demands obligations, from each individual. Moreover, in Somalia, one of the tribal societies, the family protection system extends to include all the tribe’s members.

In M.31’s words, “The mindset of the extended family is being so close to each other. It is not just about me, me... It is about my cousin, my sister in law’s brother, my brother in law’s cousin.”

M.36 appreciated this feature in the Somali culture when saying, “I like the emphasis on helping the relatives and visiting them even few hours during the year if you are busy, or what is called ‘selat arahem’ in the shariah.”

M.38, using the same term of “selat arahem,” described the communal commitment and its effects on Somali lives, in saying:

‘Selat arahem’ [the first feature he wants to maintain from the original culture]. That’s how we survived during the civil war: being responsible for relatives and friends. If something happened to me, I am fully insured. If I am sued by anyone and I have to pay any amount of money, I am insured by not only my relatives, but all of my tribe. The elders of the tribe would go to one by one in the tribe to obligate them to give a helping hand to the one in need.

Participants expressed a great appreciation for the communal identity and interdependence, which has lasted among family and tribe members even though spatially separated by migration. For the last two decades, the most significant force the Somalis have been using to confront conditions of misery and chaos in their country has been based on communal identity and mutual responsibilities. M.29 related,

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69 See Chapter 2 for more details about the importance attached to the family in the Somali culture.

70 “selat arahem” means joining the ties of relations, or treating and supporting relatives in the best possible manner. “in the shari’ah,” he is referring to several verses in the Qur’an, like, “And worship Allah alone, and do not set-up partners with Him in worship, and be kind and good to the parents, and to the relatives” (Qur’an 4:36).
For almost 17 years, there have been no government institutions, no security, no jobs, nor foreign companies for people to work in. However, people have been able to cope, live, and trade and all of this thanks to the help among relatives, friends and neighbors.

F.18 greatly misses being among her extended family members. She stated, “I was raised in a big family and we are all separated now; some in Canada, some in Europe, and some in the U.S. I wish we all will come together again, because sometimes I feel so (her emphasis) lonely.”

In F.34’s opinion, having lost that communal support is a major factor forcing some Somali refugees to be almost dependent on refugee agencies. She explained:

Some women from the new comers, especially from the Bedouin population, don’t speak English, never been to school, some even don’t know how to read and write in Somali. But, back home they could manage and do many things, because they knew everything; dealing with people, where to go, and they used to get help from extended families. Here, they don’t have family, they don’t speak the language, and they don’t know where to get resources from. And it becomes very hard for them.

Communal responsibility for relatives’ and neighborhood children is an important manifestation of the group-oriented Somali culture. F.8 thinks the African proverb, “it takes a village to raise a child” perfectly describes the common collective responsibility in the Somali society. She said, “That’s exactly how we felt back home; you couldn’t do something wrong because the neighbor from the corner of the street would notice and say, ‘what are you doing here? Where is your mom?’ Everybody is in charge of you” (She laughs). Deprived from growing up among their extended families and neighbors was considered by many as the biggest disadvantage not only Somali children, but also
parents would suffer in the diaspora. Parents would be left alone to do a job (bringing up children) that used to be performed collectively. \textit{M.38} advises Somali parents to pay more attention to their kids in the United States because there is no more reliance on anybody else to take care of them. He said, \textit{“They should take good care of their kids, and realize that this is not Somalia where anywhere they go, they are taken care of, whether in relatives’ houses, neighbors or mosques. Here is different and very serious.”}

\textit{F.17} disagreed with the statement that her daughter can marry at an early age, like she, herself did. She explained:

\begin{quote}
Back home when we got married at early ages, we had our families, our parents, our relatives to help us in housework and taking care of kids. But here, if she gets married at the age of 17 as I did, she will find no one to help her. Even me I can’t help her because I have my job.
\end{quote}

From the participants’ accounts, it can be presumed that strong communal relations are maintained to a great extent within the Somali immigrant family and community, unless conditions beyond the individuals’ control dictate otherwise. For example, working couples who have some of their extended family members living with them or nearby have these relatives take care of their children when they are at work. \textit{M.31} said, \textit{“My sister in law brings her kids every day at home, and my mother’s job as a grandmother is literally to look after her grandkids. That is her main job every day.”} \textit{M.3} considers it fortunate that his children did not have to join a day-care center, which he thought of as one of the worst environments a child can grow in. The reason for keeping his children within the \textit{“intimate and natural surroundings of the family and the home”} is that his
mother lives with his nuclear family and his mother in law lives nearby, “so, they take care of the kids when we are at work.” F.27’s mother lives with her nuclear family, “so, she takes care of my kids when I study or go to school.”

The new life conditions often compel Somali immigrants to discontinue what they were used to doing back home, but would love to continue doing. F.13 lamented the old days when family members were always together. She said, “Here, we don’t see each other as we should. We no more have the time we used to have for each other. Everybody is busy. Time here is limited; everything is rush, rush, rush, and suddenly you die!”

Many participants expressed great admiration for the value of hard work in the American mainstream. Yet, if indulgence in hard work for the sake of individual material achievement is at the expense of spiritual perfectionism and family relation building, they hope they and their children would not to be influenced. The passing of time itself is not the same as back home, as F.26 narrated, “There was a lot of time. You come from work and have enough time to see your family, sit with them, and do things for them. Here, you go outside all day, when you come home, you are too tired even to be with your family.” F.33 said, “I don’t like the materialistic, competitive nature of life here, so money takes the central position in people’s life.” F.26, who owns and runs a store, complained of too many tasks she is required to do with no free time left for sitting together with family and friends. She continued:

It is difficult here to find time; busy, busy, busy; running fast, running, and running; you work outside the home and you are thinking about inside [the home]. You need to do a lot of things. Sometimes, wallahi [by God, in
Despite time pressure in the new society, many participants articulated their pride in reserving the quality of strong connections within the Somali community. **F.24**, the interpreter in a hospital, helps whoever patient needs help (even if not Somali) and her services extend, voluntarily, beyond work hours. She said with content and humbleness,

*I will never be tired if somebody needs my help, even if it is seven days a week. My husband asks me all the time, ‘when are you taking a rest? Can you just sit down and have some time with us?’ I tell him, ‘I have time for you during the night, but in the day there are people who need my help. That’s me; I’ll never be tired of helping the community’*

**M.6** stated that his wife does not have a paid job, and with enthusiasm and pride, he continued, “*but, she is very active and well-known in the community. She educates Somalis about their rights in this country, helps them in taking their children to hospitals, translates for them, and drives them there if they don’t have a car.*”

A repeatedly mentioned by-product of closeness and strong relationships that the participants loved and highly appreciated in the Somali culture is “*this character of giving and sharing,*” according to **F.23. F.30** said proudly, “*we don’t have much, but we share what we have.*” When **F.33**, who has been living in the United States for more than twenty-four years, met an old Somali friend, she experienced an embarrassing situation in forgetting Somali traditions. She narrated,

*My friend was wearing a ring, and that happens in Somalia all the time, but I forgot. It looked very expensive and I haven’t seen her in years, I said, ‘Oh, I love your ring!’ She took it out and gave it to me. And I said,*
'No, I am being American. There is no way I take it from you.' She said, 'no, you have to take it.' and she was insulted that I wouldn’t take it. So, they would give you anything you want. ‘Take the shirt off your back,’ as the Americans say. And the Somalis literally do that and I love that.

F.32 described generosity and helping each other as the expected norm in Somali culture:

It is very normal that a relative, a friend or a neighbor calls you from Africa and says, ‘I have some difficulty. Can you please send me some money?’ so we send. I love that in Somali culture; that we are not very rich; we don’t love money and money doesn’t love us; money comes and goes; if I have the last $50 in my pocket and someone else needs it, I won’t think twice before giving what I have to those who need it more. And people say, today I help tomorrow I might get some help, you know.

Participants expressed a strong hope that their children would follow the features of group-commitment, respect for elders, sharing, generosity and interdependence. M.37 is careful to inculcate the value of “selat arahem” in his children. He tells them, “look; now I help my family and send them money. So if I die, or if you get some money, you have to remember your relatives back home.” When visiting another city to attend a conference, F.32 was guided by some friends to a Somali family, whom she did not know, to help her and her husband around the city. She narrated:

They gave us their bedroom. The woman we stayed with would wake up, cook breakfast, tea, and coffee every day as long as we stayed there. The woman’s mother would live close to her, so she would come and bring hot breakfast too for us. Then we would leave for the conference, and when coming back, two different dinners would be there for us; one from the woman and the other from her mother.

As a result, F.32 is very keen to educate her children about that hospitality and encourage them to follow the same path. She further related:

I would like my kids to realize that kind of behavior and values; that you can give your bed to a stranger that you never saw before, and you treat
them with high respect and honor. Some times when we have guests, I take my son’s bed, so that he would learn, you know, that sometimes you have to go and sleep on the sofa and give your bed to an uncle that is visiting.

Sending regular remittances by immigrants to relatives in Somalia or refugee camps has been a crucial result of the strong communal relations. M.4 narrated how during the civil war in Somalia there has been no, or very little, international help for Somali people. However, and due to that “great characteristic of sharing and helping one another,” Somalis are able to survive the very harsh reality. He asserted:

The support that each individual Somali whether in the USA, in Europe, in Arab countries is sending to their families, friends, and neighbors is maintaining life in Somalia. Even the Somalis who are refugees in Ethiopia and neighboring countries if they didn’t get that help, many of them would have died. The budget of the last Somali government is lower than the amount of monthly remittance that the country is receiving today from the people in the diaspora. So alhamdullah [thank God] that sense of duty toward your family and your friends is a great quality in the Somali culture.

The issue of immigrants’ remittances to their relatives and co-tribes both in Somalia and refugee camps in neighboring countries was repeatedly brought up in participants’ accounts to demonstrate the lasting communal bond among Somalis across borders and distances. F.32, and her husband, just like the majority of the participants, males and females, “send in an average $500-600 monthly back home to either extended family members or just neighbors and friends.” Moreover, Somali immigrants insist on committing financially to relatives and friends back home to the point where some have been negatively affected financially. For example, M.5, until the time of the interview, could not buy a house, for two reasons: First, because Islam forbids the payment of riba (interest/usury), which places conventional home financing, in the West, out of reach for
observant Muslims, like many who participated in this study. Secondly, he explained, “because of financial disability. Both of us [he and his wife] have commitment to send monthly allowances to our families in Somalia.” If individualism, or acting on “a belief in one’s radical autonomy from others” is viewed by many theorists as a western, “modern” and capitalist feature (Schalet 2003: 12), then how do Somali immigrants position their communal attitude in the American context?

While explaining their appreciation for the communal identity and responsibilities practiced in the original culture, many participants compared these with the “individualist life style” in the American mainstream culture. M.29 wondered about some American mainstream’s practices, when he said, “I even heard that if they help each other, they write bills, so that the one who was helped is required to return the money to his parents, or if they were parents to their children.” M.7 considered one main disadvantage his children would experience in the United States is “being selfish; everything is ‘me’…Here, first and last is myself.” When asked what family values from the American mainstream he would adopt, M.11 thought that “individualism” outweights positive values in the “American” family. He compared:

I don’t like here when old people live alone and their kids don't see them unless it is Christmas or they invite them occasionally may be once or twice a year. You might see a daughter in college asks her parents for a loan [his voice expressed amazement] we never do that; what I give to my child is not a loan. I am teaching them that when I need them, they will give me and when they need each other, they will give each other...I would never take that individuality attitude. Like, I can't tell my child, ‘okay, you

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71 For more information on the interest or usury (riba) problem facing Muslims who wish to buy houses in the United States, see, Maurer, Bill (2006) “Pious Property: Islamic Mortgages in the United States” Russell Sage Foundation Publications.
are now eighteen, we have taken care of you until now and now you need to go out and find a job.’ No, I will take care of my child and pay for their college and everything as long as I am capable. We work to let our kids know that we are there for them, and that when we get older we expect them taking care of us.

**F.26** echoed the same sentiment while comparing “And the way they treat the parents is not the same [as Somalis do]. Here you see mothers or fathers living alone with no family; their children are here [in the same city] but they are not with them. Back home there is nothing like that.” When commenting on family values in the American mainstream culture, **M.12** said:

> I have the impression about American family as individualistic. They have this practice of children when they are 18 they leave the family, and parents are left alone, and when they or one of them get old, they put them in a care house where government runs it and puts all old lonely people there. I don’t like that kind of family value, and I wish we won’t adopt it.

**F.32** elaborated on the point of comparison by saying,

> I would like to keep respect for elderly. It is a fact that I see in the west this value is fading away. Grandparents who worked very hard should not be doomed just because they got old. I think the existence of seniors’ homes is a sign of cruelty.

**M.22** further compared:

> In the Somali family you are able to live with your grand, grand children...I don’t know; that’s my assumption; it might be wrong, but I don’t see here large families. I don’t see grand parents live with their families; they might take them to nursing homes if they become aged, but in Somalia they don’t have nursing homes; families take care of their elders.

Being compassionate and benevolent children to old parents, or grandparents, is greatly appreciated in participants’ accounts. Equally important was stressing that respecting and
obeying parents from an early age is also expected from young children in the Somali family. F.34 remembers that “people who were older than me, I would call them ‘uncle’ or ‘aunt’ even if they were strangers. So, respect of the elders, which goes back to Islam, is what I value in the Somali family.”

Signs of child “disobedience” observed in the American mainstream and by which some Somali youth are being influenced are deemed one reason to discourage Somali relatives from joining the community in Columbus. F.26 advised her brothers who live in Ethiopia to not migrate to the United States and “stay in their place.” She told them,

> Your children listen to you now. Here they will not listen, and if you are lucky and they listen, they will say, ‘okay,’ but they will not do what you tell them to do...if they were late outside and you were worried and asked them where they were, they would say, ‘why are you asking?’ It is difficult and children are not the same. Back home there is peace of mind.

The Somali immigrant family has to meet the challenge of living in the new capitalist individualist society that “prevents the extended family from spreading its wings except in nostalgia and imagination. Because of the commitments created by the modern society, the traditional view of communal life and solidarity as the basis of the ‘real family,’ the repository of Islamic values (Ibn Khaldun 1982...), is at present for most city dwellers but a remote ideal and frame of reference” (Vergin, 1985: 572).
5.2.2. Aspects from the Somali Culture Respondents Maybe Abandoning

The majority of participants considered strong family and community relations and everything generated from them, like generosity, sharing, respecting elders and sending remittances as the most important feature to maintain from the original culture. They also hoped to influence their children to practice and abide by these communal bonds. However, many voiced critical viewpoints on “tribalism,” the other face of the strong communal identity and relations. F.10 does not like it when “some people don’t see who you are; and only see who your tribe is.” While expressing a similar view, F.32 cited a verse from the Qur’an to strengthen her criticism of the Somali tradition of evaluating individuals based on their tribal affiliation. She stated,

*Allah says that He created us as nations and tribes, so that we get to know each other,*\(^\text{72}\) *but I don’t like that people will be associated or disassociated because of the tribal affiliation; that’s very bad.*

After stating that strong relations are the most beloved aspect to maintain from the Somali culture, M.38 continued:

*And what I hate most about Somali culture is the same thing: the strong tribal relations. If the war happens, Somalis will hate you just because of the tribe you are from. So, you love a person according to how close they are to you and you hate a person according to how far he is from you; how stupid this is! If I will look for a job in Somalia, instead of asking how I am doing in that work and my qualifications, they will look at who I am*

\(^{72}\) She is referring to the Qur’anic verse that says, “Oh human kind! We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another. Verily, the noblest of you, in the sight of Allah, is the best in conduct” (Qur’an 49:13).
Tribalism has two sides; the good and the bad, is a dominant theme in the participants’ accounts about Somali culture. The differentiation is stressed to emphasize the need to keep the good side (interdependence, sharing, respecting elders, emotional and material support) and to abandon the dark side (tribal prejudice). M.12 said, “Some think that their family or clan is better than others; they think of themselves as the only human beings. To help your family or clan, that’s okay, but don’t harm or look down at others.”

One of the acknowledged aspects resulting from tribalism was identifying individuals and their family roots. M.9 explained that traditional function of tribalism in the light of his interpretation of a Qur’anic verse, when he said:

For identity purposes, it is okay. That’s what Islam calls for ‘letaarafu’ that’s important. But if it is used for other purposes, like just because someone is from another tribe will be killed or looked down at, that is what I dislike most.

Similarly, F.34 distinguished between “tribalism” as a bonding and identifying social system, and as a separating force which might lead to civil war. She said, “Tribalism, or to know your tribe, is okay I guess, but to discriminate and put other tribes down, that is really bad. You can see how bad it is because it destroyed our country.” M.36 is eager to

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73 “Tribalism” in Arabic.

74 Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406), the Muslim scholar who established sociology, used Asabiyya or asabiyah in his well-known book, Al-Muqaddimah. The term can mean “solidarity,” but it is often negatively used because it suggests allegiance to one’s group under all circumstances. Aljahiliyah means ignorance, or the feature attached to the pre-Islamic era in Arabia. So, al asabiyyah aljahiliyah means solidarity in its ignorant, pre-Islamic form.

75 A word from the previous Qur’anic verse and it means, “so that you get to know each other.”
transmit the positive notion of tribalism to his kids who were born in the United States: “I like for my kids to be able to know their origin, tribe and ‘nasab’; where they came from and people they belong to without prejudice and discrimination against others.”

Significantly, many participants said that one benefit of migrating to the United States, where a real understanding and practice of Islam can be established, is reducing the hated effects of tribalism and enhancing its favorite aspects. That is what M.38 referred to when he argued that although the Somali community in the United States is still being affected by tribal divisions back home:

\[\text{every Somali feels that he is obligated to help other Somalis. When it comes to help for any reason, they will be there for you. Like if I go to any country in the world, the first thing I do is ask if there is a Somali regardless of their tribes. This will be the way I’ll surely be helped and supported in the new environment. Even in Somalia, if they find you in need, they would help and feed you, but if they confront you in war, they would kill you. Those with knowledge in Islam are totally different; masha’a Allah, they follow the real Islam.}\]

Expressing a clear desire to maintain strong relationships was accompanied by an equivalent dislike of the disadvantages the close relations within the extended family and tribal networks might generate as they are practiced in the original society. These include bigotry based on tribal affiliations, lost privacy, and individuals’ excessive dependence on familial and tribal support that might discourage their struggle for achievement based on personal merit. While the first issue is discussed in this section, the two other disadvantages are analyzed in the coming section. Table 12 presents quotations from the

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76 “nasab” is an Arabic term that means the history of a family’s kinship connections.

77 Masha’a Allah, is an expression of admiration or of being impressed by something.
participants’ on what is most liked about the Somali culture and which they intend to preserve and teach their children and the most they dislike and intend to abandon.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Males</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>F.8</strong> “the importance of family. Tribalism is what I dislike most. People are killing each other because they are in the ‘wrong’ tribe.”</td>
<td><strong>M.7</strong> “What I don’t like is tribalism, because you think that you are better than others just because you belong to a certain tribe.”</td>
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<td><strong>F.10</strong> “respecting the elders and being together and supporting each other, especially in difficult times. I hate tribalism in my country.”</td>
<td><strong>M.9</strong> “the communal relationships, like we have extended families that require mutual support...What I don’t like is tribal affiliation.”</td>
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<td><strong>F.13</strong> “strong relationships in Somali family. One thing I don’t like about Somali culture and wish my kids won’t participate in it is clan fighting. Clan is good to identify yourself: where you are from, but bad when everyone hates the other because of it.”</td>
<td><strong>M.11</strong> “closeness and helping each other. I believe you will never see a homeless Somali because of that support among them.”</td>
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<td><strong>F.14</strong> “strong family relations, I don’t like tribalism.”</td>
<td><strong>M.12</strong> “being family-oriented and closeness. And by family I mean not only your small family but the larger one, and this might be the whole clan...I like also respecting elders and parents...I don’t like clans fighting.”</td>
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<td><strong>F.16</strong> “putting family first before anything, like you know friends, and respecting the elders.”</td>
<td><strong>M.18</strong> “helping each other and feeling real pain when someone else gets into trouble. I admire how family members respect and care for the elders.”</td>
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<td><strong>F.18</strong> “how adults take care of younger people even if not related; they just keep an eye on them; if you do something wrong, they tell you ‘don’t do that’ even though they do not know you. They just feel responsible. I don’t like tribalism...”</td>
<td><strong>M.29</strong> “helping each other. If Somalis didn’t help each other, the situations would have been much worse in the civil war.”</td>
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<td><strong>F.23</strong> “What I don’t like is tribalism. I feel that human beings are equal and the same.”</td>
<td><strong>M.32</strong> “the way people help each other and how hospitable and generous people are. I truly love sharing and that’s what keeps them together.”</td>
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<td><strong>F.24</strong> “people help each other. I don’t like tribes.”</td>
<td><strong>M.36</strong> “the strong and intimate family relations, so the brother feels that his brother’s money is his...I like how the family is connected together and the tribe also. I don’t like being prejudice in that tribal bond.”</td>
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<td><strong>F.25</strong> “how they really care for each other. Even if in disagreement, but when somebody is in need, every one stands beside him.”</td>
<td><strong>M.37</strong> “helping each other; we are like one family.”</td>
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<td><strong>F.26</strong> “I don’t like tribes in Somali culture. If a Somali has a problem with his car in the street, every other Somali seeing him will come to help without asking about his tribe. But, still they have that feeling in their hearts about tribes.”</td>
<td><strong>M.38</strong> “being and living together, even if kids are 18, if they are not married, they still live together with the family...I don’t like what we call ‘qabaliah,’ tribes. That’s why we have problems back home. People value tribes too much or in the wrong way.”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>F.27</strong> “respect and care for the parents.”</td>
<td><strong>F.30</strong> “generosity and helping each other.”</td>
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<td><strong>F.28</strong> “close family relations.”</td>
<td><strong>F.33</strong> “the hospitality and respect for elderly...I don’t like tribalism.”</td>
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<td><strong>F.34</strong> “the love and hospitality. Somalis are the most hospitable and the most giving people.”</td>
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Table 12: Somali Culture ~ to Maintain or Abandon
5.2.3. **Aspects of American Mainstream Culture to Embrace**

The transnational/heterolocal behavior of contemporary immigrants is portrayed as going beyond clinging to the old culture and identity to simultaneously live multiple identities and ways of life. Based on that cross-border perspective, whether tangible or cultural borders, I asked participants about what they liked best in the American mainstream culture in general and particularly in regard to family, and wish to adopt, or are actually adopting. When he started talking about desired aspects from the American mainstream culture to adopt, **M.12** pointed out the human nature of not being able to see positives things in the “other.” He said, “*We tend to think negatively about other cultures, because they are not ours.*” Yet, many of the participants, often motivated by probing questions, could overcome that tendency and reflect on what they deemed as positive in the American mainstream culture.

Many said they like respect for privacy, self-reliance and independence in the American mainstream culture. In the previous section, analysis showed the most favored aspects in Somali culture to adhere to are strong relations, communal identity and interdependence. Before trying to understand the apparent conflict in these two sets of themes, many of which were said by the same respondents, I present **F.17’s** explanation of why her social interactions are mostly with Somalis:

*We know each others’ culture; it is not bothering to call each other any time even late in the evening or early in the morning. Sometimes we don’t even call each other; we just go and knock at the door [she pretended knocking at the door by knocking at the table]: ‘are you here?’ And you come in and drink tea. But American people you can’t go and knock on the door, ‘hi, how are you doing today’ you can’t do that because it is not*
their culture; they will say ‘why is she here?’ But for Somalis, we drink and eat from each others’ houses.

However, “knocking at each others’ doors at any time,” was seen by others, like F.15, as annoying and eliminating privacy and time punctuality. Describing how she appreciates the American mainstream culture where people value their and others’ time, F.15, the twenty-eight housewife, who has lived in the United States for fourteen years, said,

*I love in the American society the importance of time and respect for other people’s time. That is really beautiful and a lot of hadiths, like the Prophet’s sayings peace be upon him, teach us like you keep your word, like you keep your promises and respect others’ privacy.*

Specifying practices of the value of time-respect, while again referring to her understanding of Islam, she continued,

*This might seem funny, but back home we have this habit of coming to visit without telling ahead of time. Even in Islam you should tell people before visiting, but back home people would show up and like expect tea, and food and stuff like that. But people here call ahead of time and say on which day and time they will come to you, like they make an appointment with you. So, we adapted to that kind of behavior and I am irritated by some people who show up at my door when I am in a mess.*

F.16, who was born in the United States to a Somali immigrant family, expressed a similar sentiment by saying, while also referring to Islam,

*I don’t like when people in their homes have their doors opened; unlock. So the home which should be private, as the rasool salla Allah alaih wa sallam [the messenger upon him peace] taught us, becomes public. So people know what goes on in the house.*

According to some of the others, “too much” closeness, might lead to being too curious and judgmental about each others’ news, whereabouts and behavior. F.16 said, “*I don’t
like that the Somali community is so closed and very tight knit, so gossip spreads easily and people talk about each other a lot.” M.11 does not like it when some Somalis neglect the right of privacy, especially when “looking at the negative things of other persons. They neglect that backbiting is haram in Islam. I hope that they would mind their own things,” as he commented. The picture becomes clearer when some compared Somali cultural practices of crossing limits of privacy with the contrasting tendency of not being too curious about others’ lives in the American mainstream. F.23 said, “I like about Americans for the most part that they mind their own business; they just don’t go out of their way into your business.” M.11 also likes the fact “that people here mind their own business and they don’t interfere in other people’s things.”

In addition to admiring privacy and respecting others’ time in the American mainstream culture, many participants expressed their appreciation for the importance of individuals’ achievements based on personal merits. F. 25 stated: “America makes you a strong person; I was daddy and mommy’s girl; they did everything for me. But coming to America, I’ve learned how to do things on my own; because that’s the way they do things here.” M.32 similarly likes the fact that, in the American mainstream culture, “there are hard-working people; they do things for themselves; they don’t depend too much on other people, which might be bad sometimes, but otherwise is a good thing.”

Following their statements on not approving the self-centered trend behavior in the American mainstream, compared to the community-oriented trend in the Somali culture, eleven of the interviewees appreciated independence.
F.14 considers “being trained to be independent and to improve themselves,” as one of the advantages her children would get from growing up in the United States.

M.5 likes the tradition of sending relatives back home remittances; an appreciation that he followed by saying, “but, this makes some in Somalia completely dependents on the remittances and not thinking of working and being self-sufficient.”

M.38 likes the positive results of individualism, or as he put it: “Everybody is at their own, which can be good. In other words, when you do your own, you work hard because you are not relying on anybody, so you work hard in order to succeed.”

Many participants differentiated between rejecting individualism for its negative effect and acknowledging it in its positive implications. For example, there was a lengthy conversation with M.5 to elaborate on how, at the same time, he likes and hates individualism in the “American” family. In particular, he does not like children leaving their families once they are eighteen years old. Nor does he like it when “their elders live separately alone in senior homes that the government pays for and where elders live very hard life and nobody knows about their problems.” M.5 does not like individualism “if it means selfishness, indulging in self-satisfaction, and not caring for the communal interests…” Yet, he likes individualism, “in that it encourages working hard, independence, and work value for each individual.” Subsequently, M.5 summarized it well, “being independent is good, but when you are old or weak and need others to take care of you, to make you ‘independent’ is scary and cruel.”

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In responding to my question of “what are the aspects through which you feel that you have assimilated into the American mainstream culture,” M.38 thought that one of the aspects where he had assimilated into the American mainstream has been “the independent political opinion.” He elaborated, in saying:

> Back home, if you asked me my political point of view, first I might go and ask my uncle, ‘what do we believe about this?’ Like collective opinion for the whole family or tribe...Now, I feel I am more independent thinker. I also became more acceptable to differences between my and my other relatives’ points of views.

I asked M.9 about the advantages and disadvantages his children would experience from growing up in the United States. His response exemplifies a way of reconciliation between the two divergent perspectives toward individualism by emphasizing the mediating role of Islam:

> Children here have more independence; it is easy for them to practice what the Qur’an says, ‘wa la tazeru wazeratun wizr ukhra.’ But, you need to install in them the Islamic values of parents’ obedience; ‘wa qada rabuka alla tabudu ella eah wa belwaledain ehsana.’ That is a command from God; it is not negotiable. Here, it is not easy to install that value in children. Back home, it is an expectation, because respecting elders and parents are not compromised; ‘laisa minna man lam yarham sagheerana wa youqer kabeerana.’

Some participants acknowledged the “American” family practice of instilling individualism, in the sense of respecting and evaluating each individual as unique, in children from early ages. M.2 likes in the “American family how adults listen, talk, and

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78 “Whoever goes right, then he goes right only for the benefit of his own self. And whoever goes astray, then he goes astray to his own loss. No one laden with burdens can bear another’s burden.” (Qur’an 17:15)

79 “And your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him. And that you be dutiful to your parents. If one of them or both of them attain old age in your life, say not to them a word of disrespect, nor shout at them but address them in terms of honor.” (Qur’an 17:23)

80 “He is not of us who does not have mercy for the young and reverence for the old.” (hadith)
answer the questions of their children with seriousness, as if they were adults too.” M.9

likes how children are trained in the family to be “critical thinkers” and that “they can have their opinion and share it with parents: this is what my parents think and this is what I [his emphasis] think.” Yet, he returns to emphasize the importance of parent respect and obedience, as Islam commands, side by side with building children’s individual confidence and autonomy.

For immigrants’ children to be independent is a natural outcome of growing up in the United States. Therefore, they “look at themselves as unique individuals different from other people [mainstream], but also different from their parents, and they want to be evaluated based on that,” as M.4 said. In contrast, avoiding the negative aspects of individualism, like cruelty to elders, disobedience of parents and selfishness, would not be attainable except by inculcating in children Islamic education. While referring to the same Qur’anic verse about individual accountability (Footnote 78), M.4 said that he likes in the mainstream culture

\[\text{what we miss in our cultures; respect for the individual. Here, they value the individual as unique; you are evaluated based on what you do, not where you came from, or who your people are. So I appreciate that meaning of individuality because this is also Islamic ‘Wa la tazuru wazaratun wizra aukhra\}^{81} \text{ everybody has their own qualifications in front of Allah subhanahu wa ta’ala. You are accountable for what you did, not your father or brother, or anybody else. But if you go to Somalia, your qabeelah [tribe in Arabic] is what matters regardless of whatever characteristic that you have and this is a very destructive behavior for individual achievements and individual self esteem.}\]

\[\text{81 Translation of this Qur’anic verse is in the previous page. (Foot note 78).}\]
In the context of comparing the two cultures, F.18 appreciates in the American mainstream culture the opportunity to:

shape your life the way you want, like if you are a hard worker, you will reach the goals that you set. There is no unfairness; you work hard, you get what you deserve. As a woman I think it would have been hard for me to survive there, because the obstacles you face; unfairness are too much. Somebody may be because you are not from their tribe, won’t give you what you deserve.

M.9 responded to the question of what is he most liked in the American mainstream culture by saying: “There is no nepotism; if a person is qualified, they get what they deserve. Networking still plays a role, but your individual criteria and qualifications play the most important role in getting a job, for example.” M.12 appreciates “the value of a human being as an individual here [in the United States].”

In addition to fairness and “getting what you deserve” as an individual, several participants, most of whom were women, stated that social justice (in law) for the vulnerable, including women and children, is a top popular features to be admired in the American mainstream. When she was describing aspects she approves in the American mainstream, F.15 appreciated how “Americans” make just rules, including those affecting the family, under which all people are equal and how they follow these rules strictly. She says, in the United States there is:

a lot of justice like for women, for children, for the poor, and the disadvantaged... and in the eye of the law all are the same. That is something that we had in our history in Islam, but we kind of lost it and forgot it.
Analyzing the previous quotations reveals participants like and wish to retain the group and community-oriented behavior in the Somali culture and reject the self-centered trend in the American mainstream culture. However, within strong relationships, participants criticized the potential prejudice of communal identity. Similarly, they extracted from the hated feature of individualism several positive aspects, like self-reliance, privacy and fairness in evaluating individuals based on personal merits. Assessing both cultures and legitimizing adopting or abandoning certain aspects of each have been largely derived from Islamic teachings.

5.3. Assimilated, Isolated, or Neither?

In the previous sections the analysis examined gender and family aspects the Somali immigrant families adopt or reject from the American mainstream and those they maintain or abandon from the original culture. In this final section I present participants' own evaluations of their general integration status. By introducing these selected aspects that constitute the new hybrid identities and behavior of the Somali immigrants, analysis proceeds to identifying the attributes of the cultural heterolocal pattern in the Somali immigrants' integration.

Before I start analyzing participants’ narrations about their position between the two cultures, a conceptual issue needs to be addressed. From the early stages of writing this study’s proposal I found it problematic to use the term “American culture.” In a multi-
cultural society that was built by immigrants, many of whom advocated the “melting pot” co-existence, is it feasible to clearly define a specific body of notions and practices as the “American Culture”? According to the heterolocalism founder, the “American culture” is something that has been experiencing an on-going formation and development. In Zelinsky’s words, the American culture is “not a static entity but rather a work in progress. Indeed, ever since its infancy, the American cultural system has been mutating and evolving at a pace that is readily observable, and never more rapidly than at present” (Zelinsky 2001: 129). Thus, I modified the term “American culture” to the “American mainstream culture,” with a main reference to the dominant Anglo-Judeo-Christian culture. A statement by M.38 summarizes this argument, when he said, “First, when we talk about ‘American culture,’ I believe there is no specific ‘American culture,’ because African-Americans, Irish-Americans, Asian-Americans, Arab-Americans, Somali-Americans have their own cultures. America is a collection of all these and others.”

“What are the aspects through which you have assimilated into the American mainstream culture?” is the main question under which participants’ accounts are presented in the following paragraphs. When responding to the question, some participants distinguished between the two theoretical concepts of assimilation and integration.

M.3, who has been in the United States for eighteen years, explained,

I don’t consider myself assimilated, but integrated into the fabric of the American society. Integration means that you know where you are, what you can do, and what you can’t do. It means you respect the laws of the

82 Including the contributions of the Natives who survived the historical cleansing, and the African-Americans who immigrated compulsory to the United States.
country, and you know your cultural values. While assimilating means to be part of everything: bad and good, integration is to select what is good in this culture and be part of it.

M.9 articulated a similar definition of both terms when he said,

Assimilation means that you forget your identity and adopt a totally different one. Integration means that you take what is good from both. I think I assimilate into this country and I maintain my Islamic identity. [So, how do you combine both?] My issue is basically what Islam allows for, I have no problem with it. What Islam doesn't allow for, I will avoid it, even if it is from the Somali culture. For example, I will never accept or allow khitan elbanat [girls' circumcision] in my family.

M.12 suggested and justified a similar meaning of integration when he said,

“When we take from American culture, we don’t have to either take it all, or leave it all. Even they, themselves are still debating among themselves many things in their own culture.”

A conversation took place between M.35 and I about the different implications of integration and assimilation. The conversation started with his wish that those Somalis who are isolated “would get out of their isolation and interact with other Muslim communities.”

Q: How about being open to the larger non-Muslim mainstream as well?
A: Well! The complete openness or opening the door ala mesra'ayhi [completely, in Arabic] would lead to the ingerath [extinction or end in Arabic] of the Somali community in the U.S.

Q: So, how would you open the door in front of the larger society?
A: With cautious, calmness and thaqafah [education/knowledge in Arabic].

M.9 too had his fears that the “Somali community will adopt the ghetto mentality, where all the cultural baggage from Somalia, whether tribalism or whatever, flourishes.”

83 A common practice in some areas in Somalia and some other Arab societies.
Others moved beyond defining their way of integrating to explaining the potential contribution they can offer the new society. When envisioning her position between the two cultures, F.30 who has been living in the United States since 1991, said,

*I’ve integrated into the American way of life by the fact that I don’t feel any more that I am in a strange place. I accept the system of the majority of the population, I live in peace with my neighbors. I keep my Somaliness, because I think it is beautiful, and I think that my culture and history would enrich this country. You know, the ‘melting pot.’ We are contributing to the melting pot. We are adding.*

M.21 had a similar opinion of Somalis’ potential vital contribution to the mainstream:

*I am deeply connected to American values, where any person can achieve their dreams. This is a great country. America, the way I see it, is very idealistic in terms of liberal thinking and respect for the participation of human thoughts. America is much better than most countries in the world. It is much better than Arab and Islamic countries where there are totalitarian systems, which doesn’t have anything to do with Islam. And we have to contribute to this system in which you can have an education, free speech and a decent life.*

Somalis’ integration into the host society was viewed in many different ways, among them: to “open up” to the larger culture, strengthening relations with “American” neighbors and friends, inviting mainstream people to the community’s activities, establishing businesses, and re-understanding Islam in the light of the new environment and dilemmas, or practicing *ijtihad*. M.6 enthusiastically explained his point of view saying, “we need to go and tell them who we are and invite them to know us and to know Islam. They are ‘People of the Book.’*84 We have to work with all other communities, Muslims and non-Muslims, to benefit the society.*’ M.35 thinks that he has not “opened

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84 “People of the Book” is a phrase in the Qur’an refers to the Jewish and Christian people. Islam states that the three religions; Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are from the same source and each has its revealed book/scripture from the One God.
up” to the larger society as he should do. He would like to change this and to visit his

“American neighbors, to help them in cleaning their surroundings in the snow time, to
invite them to our community’s activities, to invite them to notify me, politely, if they think
that I behave in a mistakenly manner.”

Building friendships with “Americans” and identifying commonalities is significant, although few participants so far, have actually been able to do this. Among these is F.34 who described her relationship with an “American” lady:

She is my friend, and she is really a nice person. She is a pastor in a church. Whenever we meet, we have these intellectual conversations about a lot of issues. And it is really nice to know that a person from a different culture shares with you many concerns and you both have the same things to worry about in life. Like the other day, we were discussing domestic abuse and that we share similar cases of abuse here and there. Human beings are human beings no matter where you live, so you would relate to some of the things. And she was telling me that this lady was going through domestic abuse in her marriage and she was trying to hold the family together and I was thinking that I knew of a similar story from our community. Many women are like that. No matter how abusive the relationship, they don’t want to get out from that marriage because they believe it will destroy the family. And I felt it was not a culture thing. It was a woman thing, and I told her and we connected in a way I don’t know how to describe it.

Contributing to the economy by establishing businesses was another way of integrating for Somalis. M.37 said, “The Somali community is active doing many businesses, and the American society can benefit from them.” M.38 “Somalis are doing well in this country; they have businesses, they try to combine two cultures peacefully.”

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Practicing *ijtihad*, or interpretation of Islamic texts, has been viewed as a powerful method through which Somali immigrants can integrate successfully into the new society. M.31, who came to the United States fourteen years ago with his family, when he was ten years old, thinks of many Islamic practices differently than the common understanding in Somalia. He continued, “not because my faith has changed. Not because I believe in a different Islam, but because I see new problems that we haven’t seen before, for which we have to come up with solutions.”

For F.18, the obstacle that prevents many Somali immigrants, or maybe Muslim immigrants in general, from creatively re-interpreting Islamic texts to accommodate new conditions is their unawareness of the concept of *ijtihad* in Islam. She said:

> Women’s rights have impacted people’s family life. There is no question about it. And the reality here is different and it depends on the individuals and how they adapt to it. People come to this environment that is just the opposite of their culture, so they get confused. The problem is that most of them don’t really know their religion.

Knowing Islam well and practicing *ijtihad* would help Somali immigrants cure results of cultural confusion and polarization. M.5 elaborated on this concept when he commented on how many of his Somali friends, lately arrived in the United States, think he has changed:

> If there has been a change in my attitudes since I migrated to the U.S. [25 years ago], it would be my new understanding of Islam; that Islam and culture are not the same and Muslims’ practices and understanding of Islam back home are not obligatory for us in the U.S.
Living in the new society will lead Somali immigrants to know Islam better, and that is one advantage their children would have from growing up in the United States, as M.4, who has been in the United States for twenty five years, related. He commented, “and that is interesting to say because in Somalia it is accepted you are in an 'Islamic' culture so you don’t work hard. Here, you have to work hard to show your children the Islamic identity and behavior.”

Two-Way Integration

Rather than viewing integration as molding new immigrants in a “melting-pot,” transnational/heterolocalism theorists are calling to see “beyond the dominant culture” and are proposing a “re-invention...an inclusive, not intolerant, American pluralism...” for a better civic culture and social advance (Zelinsky 1997:157; Rumbaut 2005: 171). Randolph Bourne, the first American thinker who coined the term “trans-national America,” criticized the project of “homogeneous Americanism” and advocated a new cosmopolitan ideal in stating:

As long as we thought of Americanism in terms of the 'melting-pot,' our American cultural tradition lay in the past. It was something to which the new Americans were to be moulded. In the light of our changing ideal of Americanism, we must perpetrate the paradox that our American cultural tradition lies in the future. It will be what we all together make out of this incomparable opportunity...The failure of the melting-pot, far from closing the great American democratic experiment, means that it has only just begun...we have all unawares been building up the first international nation...America is coming to be, not a nationality but a trans-nationality, a weaving back and forth, with the other lands, of many threads of all sizes and colors. Any movement which attempts to thwart this weaving, or to dye the fabric any one color, or disentangle the threads of the strands, is false to this cosmopolitan vision. (Bourne 1916).
Participants view integration as a two-way process, for which the mainstream society's inclusion behavior towards immigrants is indispensable. “Fear of the unknown,” as F.34 put it, is what shackles many Somali immigrants and many in the mainstream alike from communicating with each other. A conversation between F.17 and I illuminates the importance of the reciprocal nature of the integration process. I asked about the extent to which she feels like becoming an “American.” With bitterness she said,

**F.17:** Some Somali people get very happy when they get the citizenship and think they have become Americans. They are wrong.

**Me:** Why?

**F.17:** No one is going to treat me like an American, even if I have the citizenship, because of these two [referring to her black skin and hijab]. And I have my reasons to think that way, but I don’t want to talk.

**Me:** Can I know what prevents you from telling your reasons?

**F.17:** I just don’t feel comfortable. Once satisfied her story is anonymous, she narrated:

_In one of the stores, I was standing in a line in front of the cashier, and there was another Somali woman standing the first in the line. The cashier was talking to her in a very bad way, and the Somali lady couldn’t speak very well English. I moved to the front, and tried to interfere to help both to understand each other. I offered to translate, but then the cashier started yelling at me too. And she told us both that she wanted us out of the store and that we are not allowed to enter this store again. I refused to go out, and told her that it was a public place, and if she doesn’t want us to come, she should write on the store ‘No Somalis are allowed in.’ She went to call the security, but I refused to go out. I called 911, and when the police came, I told him that this lady yelled at us for no reason and asked us not to enter this store again, and this is discrimination. The lady came and grabbed the police officer to her office saying that she would tell him the real story. During that time I and the other Somali lady kept reciting verses from the Qur’an and asking Allah to rescue us from that situation. After getting out of her office, the police officer ordered me and the other Somali lady, who was very scared, to write our names and addresses in a piece of paper and not to come to that store again. At first, I refused, because I thought it wasn’t his right to ask us to do that, but then after consulting with the other lady, we gave them our names and addresses and said that we were not going to come to this place again. We were so angry and I could have gone to the court, but I told myself, ‘Where are you going to? You will end_
up with a white man judge who will tell you not to go to that store again just like the police man did.’ So I kept silent and I just tell whoever I know from the Somalis not to go to that store. Even if we have the citizenship, because of our skin color, and because of that piece of hijab, we are not seen as equal to any American. I am not like them and I don’t have the same rights as they have.

F.34 stated that “after 9/11, media made things even worse” by misrepresenting and stereotyping Islam and Muslim women. She continued:

I believe it goes back to Islam. See what I mean? It is not about something particular to Somalis. Our religion is different, because it is all practice. If someone is a Christian, you can’t tell. If someone is a Jewish, you can’t tell, but if someone is a Muslim, you can tell easily. And it is not only because women wear hijab. Even men are identified easily. We pray five times a day, we don’t drink alcohol, or eat pork, we separate men from women, and we fast every day from sun set to sun dawn during the whole month of Ramadan. Our religion is more practicing than any other religion. If we were just like any other Africans who came to America, I don’t think we would have difficult time like we do now.

F.33 referred to another obstacle to the majority society’s role in embodying the two-way integration when she said:

I love about America the freedom of being who you are. It is a country that in its constitution every man is created equal. It is wonderful. What I don’t like is the same thing: every man is created equal, we are told, but in the social arena everybody is not equal. There are a lot of hidden agendas, institutionalized racism, and you can’t touch it, and if you touch it; if you mention it, then they look at you as being defensive they see you in the wrong...I don’t know what it is, because individuals who speak wonderfully; they totally believe in equality and equity, yet they don’t want to address it when it is happening, because maybe they have to look at themselves and how they are playing a role in that.

It is apparent there are several obstacles between the Somali immigrant population and the mainstream majority of America. To overcome these obstacles of fear, ignorance and prejudice not only do immigrants need to “open up,” but the mainstream also needs to be
more receptive and accepting of differences; to insist less upon assimilation. This is a big challenge for both sides, and the solution is “to get to know each other [immigrants and mainstream], to educate others.” But this is, as F.34 concluded, “not as easy as said, and it will take time and effort.”

Many participants voiced concern over what their children might confront in the future. “Identity crisis,” dilemmas of reconciling the two cultures and potential confrontation of racism and discrimination were among the first concerns to worry about in children's future lives. F.34, whose organization works with youth immigrants, thinks that for them to deal successfully and confidently with such challenges, immigrant children need to know well both their background and the new environment they are growing up in. She said, “If you don’t know where you and your family came from, you will not know where you are going to or what you are going to do and it is so confusing.” The reason is, as she indicated, because both the old and the new cultures have their inevitable input in forming youth characters. “You carry all of these with you. If you can’t see them clearly, you are a confused person.”

In addition to their gender and family notions and practices, participants' narrations suggest that their general vision of their positions between the two cultures do not completely identify with the assimilationist proposal. However, features of the isolationist attitudes cannot be applied to Somali immigrants’ experiences either. The majority speak English fluently, have jobs in the mainstream institutions, work outside the house, including women, have their children in public schools, wear “American”
clothes beneath the hijab or inside the house, and have sound relationships with “American” coworkers or neighbors. Four women are married to “American” men (two African-Americans and two Anglo-Americans), including F. 33 who was divorced at the time of the interview. Most of the participants speak Somali inside their homes, women wear the hijab outside the home, and, on occasions, the traditional Somali clothes inside the home, for men and women, have constant contact with relatives in Somalia and in the diaspora, send regular remittances and abide by the Islamic diet and behavior restrictions, namely abstaining from pork, alcohol, usury and extra-marital sex. Crossing the boundaries between the two cultures has been clear in participants’ accounts.

I conclude with a statement by M.31 through which he wishes, when Somalia restores its stability and security, to cross also the material borders and live in both homes. He said:

I would like to have a family here, and another residence in Somalia as well, not just to visit. I would like to have a business and residence over there. I want to live here, but I don’t want for me and my children to be disconnected from Somalia.

Choosing and interweaving certain gender and family attributes from both cultures and maintaining strong networks with relatives and co-tribes worldwide are the main signs of a transnational/heterolocal pattern of integration Somali immigrants are, uniquely, presenting in the pluralistic environment of the United States.
6.1. **Introduction**

As with all religious and ethnic minorities, the question of integration, or assimilation, is integral to the experiences of Muslim immigrants into America. In explaining the critical role of religion in immigrant communities’ confrontation of the new challenges of American life, Stephen Warner (1998) says: “More than any other institution, the church, synagogue, temple, or mosque provides the social, cultural, and perhaps economic and political, as well as spiritual, core of collective survival” (Cited in Zelinsky 2001: 63). Women and the family are believed to be “central to reconciling the cultural conflicts of...Muslims in the West” (Akhtar 2007: Foreword).

To explore in depth this vital link connecting Islam, women, family and integration, this study’s purpose is to examine two major issues: First, the extent to which Somali immigrants contextualize Islamic gender tenets in integrating gender practices of both the “traditional” Somali and the “modern” American mainstream’s culture. Second, the extent to which Somali immigrants’ reconciliation of two different cultures through
Islam, is an indication of their emergent hybrid identity and transnational / heterolocalist pattern of integration into the larger host society.

Other related themes I examine include:

- The ways in which Somali immigrants’ “traditional” notions of femininity, or women’s gender identity, along with women’s rights have been renegotiated after migrating to the United States and being exposed to “modernity.”
- The extent to which Somali families’ “traditional” perceptions of gender roles and relationships have been redefined. In particular, focus is on gender role expectations in terms of housework and child rearing, domestic decision-making power, income earning and providing financially for the family.
- The extent to which Somali “traditional” gender relationships outside the family, mainly courtship patterns and sexuality, have been reformulated.
- The ways in which respondents’ re-interpretations (ijtihad) of Islamic texts have affected, and been affected by, their choices of adopting, rejecting, maintaining or abandoning certain aspects from both the Somali and the American mainstream cultures.

6.1.1. **Theoretical Background**

The classical assimilation theory assumes that immigrants assimilate by forsaking links to their native lands and cultures. The alternative transnational model of immigration asserts that immigrants’ behavior is not as clear-cut as the assimilation bipolar model suggests.
Many new immigrants are found to build “social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement” (Schiller et al. 1992: 1). Migration in the past, especially to “distant” countries, like the United States, was seen as “a one-way process leading to permanent settlement. Today, people move frequently between countries, and be members of more than one society. If global migration continues to grow, transnational belonging and multiple citizenships [thus cultures and identities] may become much more common in the future” (Castles 2002: 578)

The classical assimilationist model’s failure to explain many new immigrants’ persistent transnational engagement, especially with the help of advanced transport and communications, has led many scholars to forming alternative integration perspectives that account for the transcultural/heterolocal identities and communities (Castles 2002; Zelinsky 2001). This study is part of that theoretical project and broadens it with a focus on the influence of Islam and gender on the transnational/heterolocal behavior of Muslim immigrants, some of whom are the Somali immigrants.

6.1.2. Methodology

In his book, “Postmodernism and Islam: Predicament and Promise,” Ahmed Akbar (1992) argues that western researchers have often viewed gender roles and relations in Islamic contexts by juxtaposing them with the misogynistic, western notions inspired by the ancient Greeks. To avoid such misleading assumptions, studies of the relationship between Islam and women must allow a greater and more genuine space for “other voices
and first person narratives of experience and perception” that provide explanations which “bypass the cul-de-sac of a polarized Western feminist representation of Muslim women” (Watson 1994: 155). Among the “other voices” that should be prioritized in analyses are those of Muslim women themselves who’s “voices provide a vital corrective to the homogenizing tendencies of Western theoretical perspectives on Islam” (Watson 1994: 155). Advancing the voices of Somali women and men is the approach this study applies to reach an understanding of how Islam and gender intersect in everyday lives of Somali Muslim immigrant families.

Drawing from the “grounded theory” method of data analysis, this study explores, describes and identifies patterns found in participants’ accounts on relationships between Islam, gender and the transnational/heterolocal model of integration. Qualitative methods of collecting and interpreting the data are used in this study, based on thirty eight in-depth interviews with Somali women and men in Columbus, Ohio.

6.2. **Discussion**

This study examines, by analyzing participants’ accounts, the intersectional relationships between Somali immigrants’ understanding of the Islamic gender principles, their everyday negotiations of gender roles and relationships within and outside their families, and the resultant transnational/heterolocal pattern of relating to the American mainstream. I divide the data analysis into three main sections. The first section focuses on participants’ practices and perceptions on female identity, gender roles pertaining to
domestic labor, wives’ paid work, financial gender relationships and decision-making power. The second section centers on participants’ perceptions and practices concerning courtship patterns and sexuality, including “arranged marriages” and women’s covering, or hijab, in public. The third section discusses participants’ choices of adopting, rejecting, and/or negotiating certain attributes of both the original and the new cultures, and how Islamic gender and family teachings play a mediating role in this selective process.

Many questions in the semi-structured survey were aimed at exploring gender concepts and practices, and the attitude change of Somali women and men who took part in this study. Participants were asked to describe their gender and family perceptions and practices as manifest in their relationships with their spouses, ways of disciplining their children and gender interactions outside the home.

My analysis of the interviews indicates that Somali immigrants have created unique perspectives and heterolocal ways of living across two cultural and geographic separate domains. In examining their narratives, it is apparent that neither the classical assimilation nor the pluralism concept alone is able to fully explain their experiences and perceptions of their gender and family concepts and practices. Viewing participants’ patterns of socializing their children, neither of the two theories seems to accurately predict the future of these immigrant families’ adjustment in the majority society.
Participants seem to resist the common trends of immigrants to isolate and be inward-oriented in their behavior and attitudes. They also challenge some trends in the wider culture to exclude them. Participants’ do not appear to glorify every practice in Somali culture just because it is their original culture, nor do they reject the mainstream American culture merely because it includes different, sometimes opposite, elements to their ancestors’ way of life. Rather, participants seem to be striving to adopt, or abandon aspects from either culture, for the attainment of their ideal perceptions and practices, mainly women-empowering and family-friendly aspects.

I argue that participants in this study exhibit heterolocal styles of negotiating and forming gender identities, roles and relations between both the dominant American mainstream and the original Somali cultures. While constructing their own course in constantly crossing the boundaries of both cultures, they have vividly brought Islam into play to legitimize their unique paths and to move comfortably back and forth between the two cultural realms. Akhtar (2007: Preface) writes that, for Muslim immigrants, the linkage to Islam is important in any new identity, “It is based on the connection with Islam alone that the recommendation to discard the values of the ‘old country’ in a wholesale manner will have a chance to become acceptable and gain a degree of feasibility” (Akhtar 2007).

Reconciliation of many attributes and behaviors from both cultures has been problematic. The cultural encounter between their original culture, American mainstream culture and their reference to Islamic principles has generated many dialectical, sometimes
contradictory, perceptions about female identity, gender roles and relationships. Therefore, in the following analysis, I discuss in each section the heterolocalist behavior of participants with a note on my view of problematic issues or aspects of tension.

6.2.1. Female Gender Identity and Roles

Many participants consider moving to live in the United States has empowered Somali women for two main reasons. First, in Somalia many people are not well educated on Islamic principles that grant women their specific rights. After coming to America, many Somali women, and men, become interested in learning more about their religion as a way of searching for an identity within the larger mainstream (See Roald 2001). Second, discovering that many values promoted in Islam are normally practiced by the American mainstream is another reason for women’s empowerment in the United States. Participants view America as a country where women can reclaim the equal self-worth and rights bestowed on them in Islam. These were often denied them in their original culture, including the acknowledgment of a woman’s intellectual ability to acquire higher education, their state as an independent economic entity and their entitlement to a husband’s help in household chores.

To regain, and protect, these women-empowering rights most participants chose the quality of being “assertive” as one of the two most important for a woman to be successful in the new society. Women have to be assertive to reclaim many rights they have in shari’ah but which were “forgotten” in the Somali culture. A second reason for
choosing assertiveness is for a woman to affirm her Islamic identity within the mainstream. Women need to be assertive amid the wider society’s immense pressures, like peer pressure in schools, to conform or “fit in,” so as to retain the essential aspects of their identities, for example, the insistence on an education or a career while wearing *hijab*, or limiting gender interactions to non-sexual relationships.

Equally favored was the quality of “care-taking,” as a significant female feature in taking care of herself and her family. Women’s care-taking roles are regarded as essential to maintain the family. A female’s combined identity, assertive and a care-taker at the same time, obtains its high status from Islamic texts participants cited. The dominant American culture’s emphasis on women empowerment and autonomy has enhanced, in participants’ opinions, the quality of female assertiveness, but less so of being a care-taker.

To protect the family, “traditional” gender roles prevail in Somali immigrant families and many participants expressed a wish to maintain them in their children’s lives. Providing financially for the family is viewed as the husband’s exclusive obligation, while taking care of the house and the children, especially emotionally, is viewed as the woman’s first priority. For a husband to carry out his financial obligation and for a wife to take care of

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85 There was an apparent contradiction in accounts on the nature of women’s “traditional” roles in Somalia. Some participants said that women in Somalia stayed home, while others said that Somali women would spend most of the time working outside their homes. I explained these conflicting perspectives in that there is a difference between women’s “work,” especially in the nomadic and rural areas, and the current practice of women’s employment in the West. Somali women’s roles outside the house were not identical to those of men. Women take care of the sheep and goats, while men take care of the camels and travel to the city to bring or take commodities, according to F.34. In addition, the Somali woman’s work has not been enforced by capitalistic development, and it does not alienate her from her domestic roles within the home, nor oblige her to share the financial responsibility of the household. Most participants indicate that in Somalia the house is the woman’s domain with no financial obligations on her whatsoever.
the family are seen as being in agreement with Islamic principles. The notion and practice of wives’ economic independence, originally traced back to Islam, is enhanced by the mainstream perception of a woman’s autonomy.

However, and despite the clear gender division on domestic labor within the Somali family, this classification was more the ideal than a reality in most of the families. Influenced by the dominant attitudes in the new culture of the United States, women assuming regular paid jobs, women’s involvement in study programs, women’s separation from their extended family and becoming interested in the original teachings from Islamic sources, unfettered by Muslim cultural practices, most participants exhibit an attitude and behavior adjustment. As a result, most women express a demand for men’s involvement, though not necessarily equally, in household chores and most men express a willingness to do this. The old stigmatization of men’s involvement in household chores was widely rejected.

Most respondents showed flexibility regarding men’s involvement in housework, women’s participation in the labor market and the shared power of decision-making. Nevertheless, concerning the view that only men should be the financial providers, all participants expressed strict adherence to the original culture, which is identical to Islamic principles in this respect. The wife’s income is viewed as totally “her” income,

86 In the American mainstream, where the dominant attitude, mainly individualism, the demanding consumerist life style and the modern capitalist concepts of what valued work is, obligates women’s paid work. In this study, 16 out of the 19 interviewed women, and 8 wives out of the 19 men’s wives interviewed work outside their homes.
as several of the women and men emphasized. Wives’ participation in financial household responsibilities is considered a favor from the wife in the exceptional economic need her husband cannot altogether meet in the demanding new life.

Reconciliation between the insistence that men are the only providers for the family and the demand for their participation in household chores was not easy in participants’ accounts for several reasons. First, the husband’s income is sometimes insufficient to cover requirements of the new demanding life, thus, giving rise to the need for him to work two shifts, with no time left for helping wives. Second, the residual of old negative implications of men sharing domestic responsibilities remain, and hence most mother’s rejection of their sons participating equally in household chores when marrying. Third, the old interpretation of some Islamic teachings remain regarding the view that, basically, domestic labor is only the women’s responsibility, and thus, if men participate, they only do so in extraordinary circumstances.

6.2.2. Decision-Making Power

I discussed with participants issues of gender decision-making power on specific aspects within their families, such as financial authority, “arranged marriages,” wives’ outside home employment, children discipline and wives and daughters’ covering in public, if applied. Narratives mostly articulated concepts and practices that exemplify shared decision-making power; the common western portrayal of a Muslim Arab woman’s passivity and victimization was completely absent. For example, women manage the
household budget, have complete authority over their income, conduct important
marriage arrangements, have a fundamental say in children’s discipline, have a free
choice of covering and coordinate extensive socio-economic networks among their
“transnational” families in the diaspora.

Despite agreement that husbands must be the financial providers, even if wives have paid
job, the dominant explanation given to questions of who decides what within the family
was that is a joint matter between wife, husband and members of the extended family.
However, most indicated that the final say in major issues is, and should be, the
husband’s.

In respect of their children, the general trend on “arranged marriages” is to keep the
parental family’s roles while stressing the individuals’ right to initiate the marriage by
choosing the partner, or accepting or rejecting the parents’ proposal. A similar attitude
was expressed concerning covering for girls; parents maintain a guiding role in educating
about its importance in Islam while leaving the decision to the girl.

As noted in the literature review section, some studies conclude that immigrant wives in
the United States gain more power because they become income earners. Immigrant
women’s new role as income earners, and participation in household expenses are
associated with an increase in their share of domestic decision-making power. In this
study this link was not clear and many women disputed the new environment’s material
competitive definition of “power” within the family. Identical gender roles between men and women, such as joining the labor market or assuming leadership roles in the family were not viewed as the source of women’s contentment or self-fulfillment. A number of women thought they are less empowered when required to carry out male-identity responsibilities in the new society.

Many women’s accounts presented an indication that empowerment cannot be viewed as a monolithic concept and is, in fact, context specific. The idea that women’s self-fulfillment derives more from women being honored, spoiled or being able to demand and get material possessions, especially by dictating these on the marriage contract, calls into question the generalized western notion of women empowerment. Many quotes have important implications on redefining the dominant concepts of gender equality and empowerment that compel women to assume responsibility for the same aspects as men.

Balancing between the two indications of shared decision-making power, and that the final decision, especially on major issues, rests with the man presented a problem. Some, particularly men, managed the conflict by arguing that assuming decision-making is a burden more than a privilege. Others, particularly women, indicated that they, even if holding higher career position than their husbands, try to maintain the traditional “pride” of their husbands, and they voluntarily relinquish their new material power to maintain the husbands’ traditional leading and responsible position in the family. The apparent conflict between claims of sharing power and keeping husbands’ leadership
responsibilities is identified in many participants’ accounts of their attitudes and experiences in the new culture.

6.2.3. Individual vs. Group Relationships

The most desired attribute to retain from the original culture are the communal bonds. These include strong group or family mutual obligations and all that is generated, like collective responsibility towards children, hospitality and sharing, sending remittances and respecting and being compassionate to elders. Participants expressed a great appreciation for the communal identity and inter-dependence, which has lasted among family and tribe members even though spatially separated by migration. In particular, sending regular remittances by immigrants to relatives in Somalia or refugee camps is a crucial outcome of the strong communal relationships. Participants express a strong hope that their children will follow the features of group-commitment. Nevertheless, when the communal bond turns into prejudiced “tribalism” it becomes the most hated aspect of the Somali culture in participants’ accounts.

Many said they appreciated respect for privacy, respecting others’ time, self-reliance and independence in the American mainstream culture. They also express their appreciation for the importance of individual achievements, based on personal merits, and how the “American” family instills individualism, in the sense of respecting and evaluating each

87 “The support that each individual Somali whether in the USA, in Europe, in Arab countries is sending to their families, friends, and neighbors is maintaining life in Somalia. Even the Somalis who are refugees in Ethiopia and neighboring countries if they didn’t get that help, many of them would have died. The budget of the last Somali government is lower than the amount of monthly remittance that the country is receiving today from the people in the diaspora” (Participant, M.4).
individual as unique, in children from early ages. Moving to live in American is viewed as a great chance to get rid of tribal bigotry, or as M.9 predicted: “Children who are growing up here probably won’t have to worry about what their tribe is because it is not going to be useful for them.” Nevertheless, as he continued, “strong relations, that are unfortunately, not valued or cheered in this society will disappear also.”

Respondents indicate the wish to preserve the group and community-oriented behavior in the Somali culture and reject the self-centered trend in the American mainstream culture. However, within the attribute of strong relationships, participants criticized the potential prejudice of communal identity. Similarly, they extracted from the less attractive feature of individualism several positive aspects, like self-reliance, privacy and fairness in evaluating individuals based on personal merits. Accounts indicate declining selfish individualism while rejecting prejudiced tribalism. Assessing both cultures and legitimizing, adopting or abandoning aspects of each are largely derived from Islamic teachings.

Admiring both communal bonds and individualism was a problem in many of my conversations with participants. In particular, deciding whether to emphasize parent obedience or independent thinking in children seems unclear. Some stated that Islamic education, which acknowledges both parent obedience and individual accountability, will help in merging the two attributes when raising children.
6.2.4. **Ijtihad and Distinguishing Islam from Cultural Practices**

Muslims’ widespread migration to the West and interaction with new cultural paradigms have resulted in changing their understanding of many Islamic gender messages and thus challenge traditional solutions to problems (Roald 2001). I have offered in this study an analysis of Islamic gender and family principles chosen and presented by the participants.

There is no doubt that structural changes, mainly the economic need for women’s paid work, have played an important role in modifying gender roles in the Somali immigrant family. However, reformulating individuals’ old persuasions, in the light of reinterpretation of Islamic teachings under the new cultural traditions, has made these changes more acceptable and less troubling. Not only have Islamic gender principles affected participants’ negotiation between old and new cultures, but their reinterpretations of these principles have been influenced by interacting with the new surrounding’s social and cultural conditions. The tension between ideal original perspectives and new actual practices is expected to engender new interpretations of social issues in the Islamic texts (Roald 2001).

Practicing *ijtihad*, or reinterpretation of Islamic resources, considering the new environment, is a critical tool in Muslim immigrants’ integration into a dominantly non-Muslim society. Practicing *ijtihad* requires stripping old interpretations, affected by different cultural circumstances, from traditional sacredness by putting them in a cultural

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88 See chapter 2 for a further explanation of *ijtihad*. 

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context. Interestingly, participants in this study appreciate living in the United States, where they have been able to discover the distinction between cultural practices and Islamic tenets. This differentiation enables them to confidently distance themselves from some cultural gender traditions in their original culture, as they do when rejecting certain gender perspectives and practices in the wider American culture.

Distinguishing Islamic principles from distinct Somali cultural practices was a dominant tone in the narratives of participants, especially women of the *halaqa*. Moreover, most found that many of Islam’s gender and family principles are normally practiced in the American mainstream, hence the mediating role of Islamic teachings between the two cultures. Some traditions of the American mainstream, like equal gender opportunities in seeking education and pursuing careers, husbands’ participation in household chores and women’s autonomous economic rights are seen to be in agreement with Islamic ideals, and are, therefore, comfortably adopted by participants.

Citing Islam’s teachings that oblige men to be the only provider for the family, women and men in this study repeatedly justify wives’ entitlement to their husbands' participation in the household chores and share in decision-making power by arguing that the Prophet Mohammad used to help with domestic labor and consulted his wives on public issues. Participants cited Islamic gender texts to assert women’s rights; that they are equal humans to men, and that their identities as women and their roles within the family are influential and should be highly valued.
Being able to make this kind of differentiation, between cultural practices and Islamic principles, Somali participants in this study have been emancipated from abiding by either the unjust gender hierarchy of their original culture, or the American mainstream gender ideology that dictates identical roles for women and men. The former deprives women from practicing, voluntarily, if they have the luxury to choose, their full potential in the public sphere, while the latter ideology burdens women with onerous responsibilities and deprive them from choosing to stay home without discredit and disadvantage in a capitalist, individualist society. This unique stance is an important and significant indication in my study that the heterolocal selective pattern participants practice in their families does not identify with either the classical assimilation or the pluralist theories in immigration literature. Somali women’s understanding of gender beliefs in Islam has shaped this “third way” of integration between the “dissolving’ assimilation and the “isolating” pluralism theories. Reconciling between the two has had its inevitable problematic aspects and tensions that were mentioned earlier.

6.2.5. **Transnational/Heterolocal Integration**

I argue in this study that participant narratives of their perceptions and experiences in the new society exhibit clear indications of the transnational/heterolocal pattern of integration. In the American multicultural context, Somali immigrants seek, and simultaneously strive to engage in processes of adaptation, assimilation, reinterpretation or rejection of particular features of both cultures they live in. Respondents’ accounts
concerning gender identities, roles and relationships do not identify with “modern” western feminine features. Nor do these accounts support many of the “traditional” Somali cultural perspectives. Rather, certain aspects of both cultures are adopted, maintained, rejected or abandoned based on being women-empowering, family-friendly and rooted in Islamic teachings.

When asked what they like best, or hate most, about the American mainstream and the Somali culture, participants’ answers shared three common main themes, namely maintaining an Islamic identity, empowering women and ensuring the family’s well-being. To keep the three elements as harmonious as possible in their families, participants support the merger of aspects from both the original Somali and the American mainstream cultures. Looking at the selected attributes, one finds an interesting mixture of attitudes and behavior characterized by varying degrees of individualism/communalism, independence/interdependence, freedom/control, assertiveness/taking care of others and mundane hard work/spiritual perfectionism.

Accounts support maintaining

1. strictly confined sexual relationships to marriage (with an encouragement of “traditional” dating to take place before marriage),
2. modesty and limited gender interactions,
3. parental role in monitoring and guiding children’s sexual lives,
4. familial and tribal mutual linkages,
5. parent obedience and respect and compassion of elders, and
6. the qualities of giving and sharing, including remittances.

Participants articulated the desire to abandon:

1. gender separation in mosques and to a lesser degree in extended families which prevents nuclear families from spending time together in a mixed-gender settings,
2. unequal standards about regulating both genders’ sexual behavior,

Accounts expressed adopting, or at least admiring the traits observed in American mainstream culture, mainly:

1. individual achievements based on personal merit,
2. inculcating independent choices and opinions in children,
3. encouraging self-reliance,
4. equal educational opportunities for women,
5. husbands involvement in household chores,
6. wives’ autonomous economic entity,
7. privacy and punctuality or respecting others’ time,
8. shared domestic decision-making power and
9. investing in children’s education.

The respondents support all these attributes even though they may be of low importance in the practice of the original country. Aspects in blatant contradiction with Islam, such as free sex, materialism, consumerism, alcoholism and ultra-selfishness, are vigorously rejected.
In addition to integration in gender and family aspects, participants’ accounts indicate signs of transnational/heterolocal aspects in general integration. Most participants have a strong feeling of belonging in America; the ideal place where they have found safety and can make a living for their families, both in the United States and back in Somalia. They speak both English and Somali, many work in mainstream institutions, their children go to public schools, they engage in many civic activities, like voting and volunteering in non-profit organizations, and some married either white or African-Americans.

Most participants maintain strong ties to their homeland, have traveled, geographically and culturally, back and forth quite frequently and exhibit a strong commitment to creatively balance between the new and the original cultures. This “mixture” of ideas and initiatives among Muslims in the West is extended to their children who are expected to exhibit even more heterolocal combinations of attitudes and behavior (Ramadan 2002).

After analysis of the participants’ accounts, the main argument of this dissertation crystallizes. Briefly stated, Somali immigrants’ views and practices of the Islamic gender discourse have functioned as the mediating area of negotiation between their original and the larger society’s different cultures. This approach has allowed Somali immigrants to selectively adopt from both cultures what they consider most productive and beneficial to them and their families. This approach also allows Somali immigrants to legitimize the process of selective adoption or rejection by always referring to Islamic gender
principles. This hybrid selection has constituted distinctive heterolocal behavior for the Somali immigrant families.

6.2.6. **Two-Way Integration**

Can Muslims become part of a pluralistic American society “without sacrificing or losing their identity? Is the American legal system capable of allowing for particular Muslim religious and cultural differences within the Constitution’s broader universal claims? Do the secular and/or Judaeo-Christian values of American society make it possible?” (Akhtar 2007: Foreword). If Somali immigrants fulfill their roles of integration, what would the wider society’s role be for finalizing their belonging and inclusion? F.32’s assessment of her own position in her new society gives a general suggestion:

> *I work for a public institutions, I pay taxes, I follow the rules of the country, I socialize with non-Somali friends, I participate in elections and vote, I work with the candidates whom I support in their campaigns; I mobilize and organize the community for them. I do my part and responsibilities as an American citizen. And what I want to keep is my hijab, which I am proud of, and my identity as a Muslim woman.*

For Somali immigrant to have a genuine feeling of belonging within the mainstream, not only do they need to live in agreement with the political, social and legislative framework of the majority society, but must be accepted when they try to maintain certain cultural particularities, such as a dress code, management of space when it comes to men and women, concern about free sex, alcoholism and similar issues.
6.3. **Limitations and Implications for Future Research**

There are several limitations of this study. As expected in any study based on a “snowball” sampling procedure, the generalizability of the findings is confined to similar situations. Although the results of this study can be partly “transferred” to populations of Somali immigrants in the United States, the qualitative design of the study does not allow applying its results to all cultural and economic segments of immigrant communities. As discussed earlier in chapter 3, generalizability, in the traditional quantitative sense of the word, is not a target qualitative studies aim at or claim to. Instead, I argue that this study’s results have the quality of “transferability” to similar situations, where highly educated, middle class and immigrant Somalis are the “target population.”

Another inherent limitation of snow-ball sampling is that participants may have many common features, thus not representing the larger populations of the Somali community. I tried to overcome this limitation by multiplying the “starting points” from which the first participants were recruited, but the inherent nature of snow-ball sample commonality could not be completely avoided. For example, the vast majority of this study’s sample is composed of immigrants and a limited number of refugees. The majority of the “first wave” Somali immigrants in the United States are those who came for the purpose of seeking education. As a result, the sample ended up with high levels of education and very similar age and income categories (which is typical to first wave immigrants). Being highly educated, might affected the findings by increasing the rates of employed wives,
husbands’ involvement in house chores, shared decision-making power and women’s economic independence.

The results of this study have several implications for future research. Social and economic variations within the Somali community might be considered more deeply in studying the community’s integration. For example, within the Somali community there is a main division between immigrants and refugees. Within these two major segments, there are people from rural, Bedouin or urban areas, middle class and working class and highly educated and illiterate. All these variations could impact the integration / assimilation / isolation styles of Somali immigrants. For instance, immigrants often have higher rates of education than refugees, and thus more stable economic status. Therefore, they have relatively easier access to prestigious job opportunities and more interactions with the mainstream which might produce more attitudes of integration than isolation.

Another example, those who migrated from rural areas in Somalia often have a less knowledge of English language than their urban counterparts, and thus the trend among them to isolate within their “enclaves” is greater.

With the increasing numbers of Muslim immigrants to the West and given the important role Islam plays in Muslims’ everyday lives, the need for systematic studies of Islam and gender and family norms and practices in Muslim societies is urgent. This study therefore calls for greater investigation into these areas to account for Muslim communities’
patterns of integration which would facilitate a mutual understanding with the mainstream.

Given the wide variety of Muslim cultures, there is a need to study differing Muslim communities in the West and to identify similarities and differences among these communities. Studying these different areas would aid in reaching the practical goal of designing suitable and culturally-sensitive integration programs for Muslim minorities. Finally, as integration is a two-way process between minorities and the majority society, there is a need for studying the mainstream’s different states of exclusion and inclusion for Muslim minorities.
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APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE
APPENDIX A: QUESTIONNAIRE

A. Personal Background

1. How old are you? How old is your spouse?
2. Do you have children? Age and sex of each?
3. How many of your children were born in the U.S.?
4. What is your educational level? What is your spouse's?
5. What is your occupation? What is your spouse's?
6. Is it a full-time or a part-time job?
7. What is your income, and how much does it contribute to the total household income?
8. How many years have you been living in the U.S?
9. Do you own your home or pay rent for it?

B. Marriage & Family

10. Did you immigrate with your spouse, or did you marry in the U.S.?
11. How long have you been married? At what age did you marry?
12. Was your marriage arranged? If not, how did you meet your spouse?
13. (For wives) If working outside the home, does your husband help with the housework? (For husbands) If your wife is working outside the home, do you help with the housework?
14. (If wife doesn't have a paid job) why? If she is working in the U.S., did she have paid job in Somalia? What was her occupation there?
15. What kind of help? (cooking, cleaning, laundry, prepare kids for school, help kids doing their homework,…) 
16. Who usually takes care of your children when you/your wife are working?
17. Which spouse decides:
   a. Children's discipline
   b. How to dress (especially wives' and daughters' wearing of hijab)
   c. Whether or not the wife works outside the home.
   d. Financial issues (purchasing, saving, check book management…)

C. Residence & Neighborhoods

18. How did you decide where to live in Columbus? What made you choose the neighborhood where you reside?
19. If you don’t own your house in Columbus, why haven’t you thought of buying one so far?
20. Including yourself, how many people are currently living in your household?
21. How many of your relatives, or your spouse’s, live in the same or nearby community where you live?

D. Religiosity
22. Do you go to the mosque? How often?
23. Do your children go to the mosque? How often?
24. Do you/your wife (for husbands) wear a hijab (head scarf)? How do you feel its impact on the process of communicating/making relationships with non-Muslim Americans?
25. To what extent do you think avoiding the following items is necessary and possible for a Somali living in the U.S.:
   a. foods (mainly pork and alcohol),
   b. behavior (mainly pre- and extra-marriage sex), and
   c. bank interest/usury (riba)

E. Civil and Organizational Engagement
26. Are you affiliated with any organization or group (women, students, business, civil-rights or religious…etc.) in Columbus? What are they?
27. Can you describe your involvement in this/these organization/s?
28. What do you hope to accomplish through your involvement in this/these organization/s?
29. Have you ever participated in elections in the U.S.? What kind of elections? Why or why not?

F. External Signs of Integration
30. Are you currently enrolled in any English language classes?
31. How often do you wear Somali clothes?
32. How often do you wear “western” clothes?
33. What are the special occasions that are most important to you and your family to celebrate?
34. Does wife hold the husband’s last name?
35. How often do you cook/eat Somali food?
36. How often do you cook/eat “American” food?
37. How often do you buy from Somali stores?
38. How often do you buy from non-Somali stores?
39. What is the ethnic identity of people you socialize with most frequently, and how often do you see them?
40. How often do you and your spouse socialize with other Somali families? What kind of events do you regularly socialize with them?
41. How often do you and your spouse socialize with “American” (particularly, Anglo- and African-American) families?
42. How often do you use Somali language within your family? How often do you use it outside the family?
43. How often do you use English within family?
44. How often do you speak English outside of your home?
45. How often do you go to watch English movies?
46. Do your children go to the *duqsi*89? Why or why not? If yes, how often?
47. Do your children go to public or private school? Was it you or your spouse who made the decision about choosing the school?
48. How often do you attend your children's school meetings and volunteer to help with their classes.

G. Contacts with Somalia & Relatives

49. How do you contact your relatives either in Somalia or countries other than the U.S. (phone, internet, mail letters, video tapes, cassettes…)? How often?
50. How often do you send remittances to your relatives in Somalia?
51. How often and by which means (T.V. cable, internet…) do you follow news from Somalia?

H. Current vs. Pre-immigration Attitudes

52. State your opinion whether you agree or disagree with the following statements in regard to your children, and explain your choice:
   a. They should be married at the same age that I was married at.
   b. Their marriage should be arranged.
   c. They can get married to non-Somalis.
   d. They can get married to non-Muslims.
   e. They can date.
   f. Keeping house (cleaning, cooking, preparing kids for school) is the main responsibility for girls before and after marriage.
   g. Girls are best suited to nurture children emotionally and physically.
   h. Work outside the home is necessary for girls' sense of well being, so they should work even after getting married.
   i. Girls should wear *hijab* when outside the house.
   j. When boys get married, they should be the breadwinners of their families, and make major decisions.
   k. Boys should participate equally in the housework, especially if their wives work outside the home.
   l. Boys and girls should continue their schooling until the highest level possible.
   m. Disciplining kids’ behavior in regard to sexual relations should be the same for boys and girls (rules in that regard should be the same for both)
53. Were your opinions about the items in question 52 the same when you were in Somalia? Please, explain the change, if any.

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89 *Duqsi*, or *madrassa*, in Arabic, is a traditional educational institution where children from the Somali community go on weekends to learn Arabic and the *Qur’an*. 

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54. Do you feel you have more or less decision making power over these issues in your marriage today than when you were in Somalia? (Please explain)
55. Please, re-order the following qualities, according to their importance for a woman to have to be successful in her society, and why?
   a. Competitiveness.
   b. Assertiveness ("the quality of being able to express one's opinions and have them heard even when they might be different from the views of those around them")
   c. Self-sacrifice.
   d. Care-taking.
56. Did you think the same way when you were in Somalia? If no, how different?
57. To what extent do you believe that women and men should be separate during:
   a. Entertainment
   b. Study
   c. Work
   d. Religious activities
58. Rate the following activities according to which you would choose first, second, or third to do if you have free time:
   a. Passing on Somali cultural characteristics to children.
   b. Interacting socially with non-Somalis, particularly, Anglo- and African-Americans.
   c. Interacting socially with Somalis.
   d. Studying English.

I. General Attitudes of Integration

59. Can you summarize features/characteristics that you like most and intend to preserve in the Somali culture, and the things you dislike most and will abandon?
60. Can you summarize the features/characteristics that you like most and intend to adopt from the larger American culture, and the things that you dislike most and intend to stay away from?
61. In what ways do you think you have assimilated into American life, and in what ways do you think you maintain your Somali heritage?
62. How does your experience with integration differ/or agree with that of your spouse?
63. What family values do you want to preserve from Somalia? What family values do you find attractive in the American culture?
64. Advantages/disadvantages your children have growing up in the U.S.?
65. Where do you plan to live permanently? Why? Do you have different feelings about returning to Somalia than your spouse?

APPENDIX B

GLOSSARY OF FOREIGN TERM
Glossary of Foreign Terms

alakhirah: Day of Judgment; hereafter.
alasabiah aljahliah: Pre-Islamic tribal solidarity, usually used with a negative meaning.
albatn wa alfarj: Stomach and loins: A common saying in Islamic texts to refer to a human life that lacks spirituality and centers around fulfilling temptations that are animal-like needs, viz. eating and having sex.
Aljahiliyyah: Ignorance of pre-Islamic Arabia.
Aljumu’ah: The supreme Islamic act of worship performed by the Muslim congregation every Friday at noon; the day (Friday) on which such worship takes place.
Alqabilah: Tribalism.
Ayah: Verse from the Qur’an.
Cotche (Somali): Initial contact between couple before potential marriage.
duqsi (Somali): Informal school for children to recite and memorize the Qur’an.
hadith: Verbalized form of a tradition of the Prophet Muhammad (SAAS) constitutive of his sunnah.
halal: That which Allah (SWT) has made legitimate.
haram: That which Allah (SWT) has explicitly forbidden humans to do and for which He specified a penalty.
Hijab: The covering of a Muslim woman when in public.
Hikmah: Wisdom based on revelation of the will of Allah (SWT).
Ijtihad: Creative self-exertion to derive laws from the legitimate sources.
Iman: The conviction, or certainty, that Allah [God] is indeed the one and only God and that Muhammad is His last prophet.
insha’a Allah: God willing.
masha’a Allah: Express impression, or admiration, of something.

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1 The translations of most of the Islamic and Arabic terms are taken from al Faruqi, Isma’il R. (1986) Toward Islamic English. Virginia: International Institute of Islamic Thought.
**nasab:** History of familial linkages.

**Qabeelah:** Tribe.

**Qur’an:** Muslims believe this book is the final revelation of Allah’s will to the Prophet Muhammad, conveyed in Arabic and relayed to his companions; memorized verbatim and publicly and continuously recited by them and their descendants to the present time.

**Riba:** Interest or usury.

**salla Allah alaih wa sallam:** Peace be upon him (SAAS).

**shari’ah:** The general set of principles and moral obligations that structure Muslim lives.

**subhanahu wa ta’ala (Allah):** May He be glorified (SWT).

**Sunnah:** The path and example of the Prophet Muhammad (SAAS), consisting of all he said, did, approved of or condemned.

**Ummah:** The community, as identified by its ideology, law, religion and group consciousness, viz. ethic and mores, culture and art.

**Zina:** illegitimate practice of sex.